By the year 1733, there were thirteen English colonies along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean in North America.

Who made up the people of these colonies? The majority were farmers, and others were shopkeepers and traders. Slaves were common in the southern colonies. The colonists became known as English because England was a strong friend to the colonies. In fact, England was known as the "Mother Country". Some of the "English" colonists were really Dutch, Swedish, or German. The colonists were proud to be subjects of the King of England, even though he ruled them from over 3,000 miles away.

Why had the colonists left home? Some left to find freedom to worship any way they wanted. The king of England and most Englishmen belonged to the Church of England. People who tried to worship differently were put into prison or even hanged. Some left because they were poor and hungry. Their hope was to find jobs and food in America. Some even hoped to become rich. In England, if your parents were poor, chances were that you would be poor all of your life. But in America, if you worked hard, you had the opportunity to become one of the richest people in the land.

It was an adventure to be a farmer in the colonies. Indian attacks were something that colonists who made their homes on the frontier always had to be prepared for. The Pilgrims---the first English settlers---lived at peace with the Indians. However, some of the settlers that came later damaged the land and did not respect the Indians. The Indians decided to fight back as they joined the French in a war against the colonists. The colonist needed help! They called on England to send soldiers to help the settlers’ own troops protect the colonies against the Indians. The French and Indian War began in 1754 and lasted almost ten years. George Washington---who would later become the first president of the United States---fought in the French and Indian War. In 1763, a peace treaty called The Treaty of Paris was signed. England and the colonies were victorious! The colonial soldiers put up their muskets and hoped they would never have to fight again.

Even though the French and Indian War was over, the British were still afraid of losing their colonies. What if the Indians attacked again? What if another country tried to invade? England decided to keep an army in America to protect the colonies. Ten thousand soldiers stayed in the colonies. They were easy to spot walking the streets in their red jackets.
Can you imagine how they earned the nickname of “redcoats”? Think about how much food ten thousand soldiers could eat? Think about how many shoes they would need—that’s twenty thousand feet! Think about the clothes that would be required for ten thousand men! So, who would pay for all of the items that the soldiers needed? The British decided that the members of the colonies would pay. The Quartering Act was passed in Britain that said the colonies had to provide quarters—places to live—for the ten thousand British soldiers stationed in America. The Quartering Act also said that each redcoat would have to be furnished with candles, fuel, salt, and bedding. Then the British decided to enforce the Navigation Acts that were passed in the 1600s. The Navigation Acts said that the colonists had to buy almost everything they needed from Britain—even if a product could be purchased cheaper from another country! And they even had to sell almost everything they produced to Britain—even if another country would pay them more money! Does that seem fair? The colonists didn’t think so, either. So they paid people—called smugglers—to bring products illegally into the colonies. When the British realized what the colonists were doing, this made them angry because they were losing money on those products. The British sent warships to patrol the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Smugglers that were caught were fined and put into prison. This made the colonists angry. And to top it all off, Britain passed the Sugar Act. This made it extremely expensive for the colonists to bring one of their favorite products into America—molasses. One day, a British customs officer took control of a ship carrying an illegal cargo of molasses. He left some of his men in charge of the ship and went for help. When he returned, the molasses, the ship’s sails, anchors, and ropes were gone! He was told that forty armed men with black face paint had come and carried everything off. These three acts—The Quartering Act, The Navigation Act, and The Sugar Act seemed to the colonists like sneaky ways to make Britain richer—at the expense of the colonists!

The Stamp Act of 1765 put the colonists at their breaking point! Britain had passed a new tax. Every piece of paper—newspaper, marriage license, will, diploma, and land deed—had to have a British stamp on it to be seen as legal. And guess who had to pay for the stamps? You guessed it—the colonists! People were furious! Riots, demonstrations, and violent speeches against the British began. Many of the colonists felt that the Stamp Act was the death of their liberty and freedom. Now, the Americans were fine with paying taxes to their local government, but it wasn’t fair to pay taxes to
Britain that was over 3,000 miles away. Besides, the colonists had no one to represent them in the British Parliament and make their choice known. The Stamp Act was taxation without representation! And that could not be allowed! Groups of angry men formed The Sons of Liberty. Who were the Sons of Liberty? They were groups of men opposed to Britain’s treatment of the colonies. Some were poor, uneducated workers. Others were wealthy merchants, lawyers, and teachers. Not all of them believed in violence, but they would threaten it to scare the stamp tax collector. They would tear down the houses of stamp collectors and other British officials. They were always ready for a fight if needed! Of course, not many stamps were purchased by the colonists. They even came up with their own stamp with a drawing of a skull and crossbones on it. This was to show that they believed that the Stamp Act was the death of liberty. Britain finally gave in and repealed the Stamp Act. The colonists rejoiced at the wonderful news! They believed that King George was on their side and understood that they wanted to be treated fairly.

The colonists had celebrated too soon! In 1767, the Townshend Acts---high taxes on tea, cloth, and other British goods---were passed by Parliament. This made the Americans angry. They decided to boycott---not buy---anything from Britain. The finest cloth and needles were made in England. American women held spinning bees to make their own rough, coarse cloth. The cloth they made wasn’t very attractive and colorful, but the colonists wore it proudly. Tea wasn’t served any more in the homes of the colonists. Instead, they drank coffee smuggled in from the West Indies. And the Sons of Liberty vowed a terrible punishment against any colonist that used goods from the British---tar and feathers! It was awfully painful and embarrassing. The Sons of Liberty would strip the offender, pour hot tar over him, and then empty a feather pillow over his head. Imagine how silly this looked! The screaming man was carried out of town and dumped in a ditch. Being tared and feathered was terrible torture. The Sons of Liberty only had to send a cold ball of tar and feathers to someone in order to scare him. Usually, this was enough to make him change his ways and leave town immediately. The Liberty, an American ship owned by merchant John Hancock, the richest man in Boston at the time and also a supporter of the Sons of Liberty, was seized by British custom agents on the charge of smuggling. News of this spread quickly. Men raced to the docks in defense of the ship, a fight began, and the British custom agents were beaten. As you can guess, when news of this reached England, Parliament promised to send troops into Boston to
get the Americans under control. In 1768, a fleet of British warships docked at Boston Harbor carrying seven hundred redcoats that marched ashore and pitched their tents in the center of Boston.

The redcoats were an impressive sight as they marched into Boston in their brightly polished boots, tall hats, and shining muskets. But it wasn’t comfortable to be a British soldier. Their red wool jackets were heavy, hot, and itchy. Their white pants were so tight that they had to be put on wet. As they dried, they became even tighter and pinched terribly. The uniform wasn’t the only discomfort a redcoat endured. He had to carry all his belongings---his musket, musket balls, bayonet, knapsack stuffed with food, blankets, and camping gear---into battle with him. Think about having to carry an extra fifty pounds around everywhere you went! Each morning, a redcoat had to pass inspection. He didn’t have to take a bath, but he was required to shave. His boots, buckles, and buttons had to be clean and polished. His hair had to be braided into a long ponytail, powdered with white flour, and the end dipped in animal grease. He smelled awful! Being a soldier was a tough life. Redcoats were paid only about 8 pence---2 cents---a day. To earn extra money, some hired themselves out to farmers and storekeepers in their free hours. If they didn’t keep their uniforms clean, they would be whipped with a cat-o’-nine-tails---a rope made of nine knotted ropes or leather pieces fastened to a handle. A soldier who tried to escape would probably be killed when he was found. Often, he would have to stand next to his coffin while the firing squad took aim at him. As you can imagine, the redcoats were not welcome in Boston by the colonists. They would be yelled at in the streets, “Lobsterbacks! Bloodybacks! Go home! Lobsters for sale! Lousy rascal!”

The redcoats began to hate Boston and everyone in it. The townspeople hated them right back. On the dark, snowy night of March 5, 1770, the situation exploded! A soldier was standing guard in front of the Customs house. A young boy came along and began to shout insults at him. The soldier became angry and hit the boy with his musket. The boy ran away crying but returned with several of his friends. They threw snowballs filled with bits of ice and broken oyster shells at the redcoat and screamed insults at him. A crowd began to gather at the Customs House as the bell rang out. Men ran through the streets calling, “Town-born, turn out!” This cry was usually raised to call townspeople to help fight a fire. In fact, some people thought there was a fire and rushed out of their houses carrying buckets of
water. Others were ready to fight. They grabbed fence posts and rocks and hurried to the Customs House. The terrified guard shouted for help. Captain Thomas Preston came to his aid with seven redcoats. They loaded their muskets, lowered their bayonets, and faced the unruly crowd. “Go back home,” yelled Captain Preston. “The guard was only doing his job.” But this only made the crowd angrier. They continued to scream insults at the soldiers and came even closer. Someone hit Preston’s arm with a club and others began to throw rocks. All of the sudden, a shot rang out. Then another. A man in the crowd of colonists fell to the ground dead. Preston ran among his men, pushed up their guns, and ordered them to stop firing. But when the smoke cleared and the crowd pushed back, three colonists were dead and two more were dying. Boston would remember this terrible night as “The Boston Massacre.”

After the Boston Massacre, the British government had taken back the Townshend Acts---except for the tax on tea. Tea was the only British product that Americans still refused to purchase. Their boycott had driven the British East India Company---which imported the tea---to the verge of bankruptcy. So the British Prime Minister, Lord North, had granted to the British East India Company the exclusiveness to send tea to the colonists. If that was all the tea the Americans were offered, Lord North thought that they would give up and purchase British tea. So on December 16, 1773, the citizens of Boston decided to turn on the three British ships carrying 90,000 pounds of tea that were docked in the Boston Harbor. After a meeting, a group of colonists disguised themselves as Indians. They painted their faces with coal and dust paint, stuck feathers in their hats, and marched two by two to the waters at Boston Harbor. At the harbor, they divided into three groups and boarded the three tea ships. The sailors on board gave over their keys to the storage areas without a fight, and the “Indians” got right to work. They lifted the huge boxes of tea on deck, cracked each one open, and threw all of the loose tea overboard. Then they quietly went back home. The next morning, piles of tea could be seen floating on the waves. Men went out in small boats and beat the piles of tea down with paddles to make it unable to be used. Boston would remember this triumphant night as the “Boston Tea Party.” A song about it was sung throughout the colonies: “Rally, Mohawks! Bring out your axes, and tell King George we’ll pay no taxes on his foreign tea.”
And what do you think King George thought of the actions of the colonists at the Boston Tea Party? “Blows must decide!” King George shouted. He was ready to go make things even more unbearable for the colonies. Parliament passed new laws designed to govern the colonies in an even stricter manner than before. The laws were so cruel and harsh that the colonists angrily called them the “Intolerable Acts.” And to punish Boston even more, King George sent British warships on June 1, 1774, to close down Boston Harbor. Church bells rang all day, buildings were covered in black, and people mourned. Most of the colonists that lived in Boston made their living from the sea—they were sailors, fisherman, merchants, and traders. Boats brought food and supplies into the city.

Would Boston starve? Would the colonies be able to survive the “Intolerable Acts?” Would King George make good on his promise that “blows must decide?” Would the colonies be facing a war for their freedom from England? Would the colonists be successful in their efforts for freedom? Or would their lack of cooperation lead to more problems for America?

Who would be the heroes for the colonies in their fight for independence?