



PROFILES IN COURAGE

Teacher's Guide

JOHN ADAMS

CREDITS:

Starring David McCallum, Andrew Prine, Torin Thatcher, Gene Lyons, Phyllis Love, and Russell Collins. Written by Walter Bernstein. Directed by Robert Stevens. Produced by Gordon Oliver and Robert Saudek Associates. Inspired by John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning book. **50 minutes.** Guide prepared for Social Studies School Service by Robert D. Barnes, 1983.

OBJECTIVES:

- To understand the background and development of American legal traditions.
- To discover why John Adams undertook the defense of the British soldiers.
- To explore actions and attitudes of the American Revolutionary period.
- To understand the meaning of moral courage.

BACKGROUND:

History books agree that when British troops fired into a Boston crowd on the night of March 5, 1770, it was not without provocation. But at the time, American patriots viewed the "Boston Massacre" as the responsibility of King George III and his troops. A series of British acts beginning in the 1660s that arbitrarily taxed Americans and restricted their trade angered colonists, but it was the stationing of troops in America, especially in Boston, that was most precipitous. Monitoring the British in and around Boston were the Sons of Liberty, a militant and sometimes violent organization of colonists. One of their members was a young attorney, John Adams.

SYNOPSIS:

We see John Adams face ridicule and risk his future by accepting the call to defend the British soldiers accused of murder at the Boston Massacre.

Sentiment in Boston is so charged that even British lawyers are afraid to take the case. Adams

is convinced that violence against British law is not the way to respond to intolerable British actions. So the defense of the soldiers is doubly important to Adams. It will establish that the colonists are willing to play by the rules, and more important, it will guarantee a fair trial to the accused.

Deny the "enemy" a fair trial, says Adams, and "our cause is blackened beyond repair."

Adams and his associate, Josiah Quincy, present an active, convincing defense. The jury acquits most of the soldiers on trial for murder, and two of the men are convicted on lesser charges, and receive largely "symbolic" punishments: the branding of a thumb with a hot iron.

In his final summation before the jury retires to deliberate a verdict, Adams quotes the Marquess di Beccaria:

"If I can be but the instrument of preserving one life, his blessing or tears of transport shall be sufficient consolation to me, for the contempt of all mankind."

VOCABULARY:

The following words and phrases appear in the program. Teachers may wish to check for student understanding:

prologue	Achilles heel
Boston Massacre	condone
grievance	tumult
Sons of Liberty	concise
militant	provocation
Sam Adams	deposition
contraband	Tory
paying duty	hypocrisy
palpable	perjury
patronage	incitement to riot
lucrative	Crispus Attucks
cynical	malice aforethought
cozened	feloniously
candor	cudgel

benefit of clergy execute his own
revenge

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Imagine yourself a British soldier stationed in Boston in 1770. How would you feel? Explain. What comparisons could you make between the British soldier and an American police officer on a ghetto or barrio beat in a large city? Give examples.
2. Was there any direct provocation on the part of the British that might help explain the events of the evening of March 5, 1770? How did Adams view this "provocation"?
3. In 1770 what were the rights enjoyed by Englishmen that were denied to the colonists?
4. Why did Adams reject the post of Advocate General to the Admiralty, offered by Jonathan Sewall on behalf of Governor Hutchinson? Why was the offer made? Could there be several explanations? Explain.
5. Adams decided not to pursue testimony that would involve the Sons of Liberty in the trial of the soldiers. This action frustrated Quincy and provoked an outburst from at least one defendant. Can you explain Adam's action? Did it compromise the case for the defense?
6. Why was the testimony of Dr. Jeffries so effective? Was the testimony believable? Explain.

ACTIVITY:

Using the chalkboard and suggestions from members of the class, develop a list of events, organizations, and British acts or laws in the colonies during the period 1763 to 1775. You should be able to develop a list of 15 items or more. Divide the class evenly between students willing to represent the British view and students representing the view of the American colonists. Each student should pick one of the topics listed on the board making sure that another student, representing the opposing view has also picked the topic. Conduct research that enables you to develop several arguments supporting your position. Be sure to develop at least one rebuttal to a point that you can expect your

"opponent" to make. Allow pairs of students 5–10 minutes to "debate" before their classmates.

FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION:

1. Imagine yourself an attorney charged with defending a murderer you are convinced is guilty. How could you justify defending this person? Conduct an interview with an attorney. Discuss this issue to gain knowledge of and insight into the functions of attorneys and their responsibilities to those they defend.
2. Ben Franklin warned the British that if they sent "redcoats" to America they would not find a revolution, they would create one. What did he mean? Do research that will acquaint you with the experiences of "armies of occupation." You might wish to study the German occupation of Poland, Denmark, or the Netherlands during WWII, or more recently, the Russian occupation of Afghanistan.
3. In his summation to the jury, John Adams characterized the actions of the soldiers as being the "lawful" reaction to an "unlawful assembly." Read the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. What does it say about assembly? Talk to school authorities or local police to find out what they would consider an "unlawful assembly" and how they might respond.