



Boston National Historical Park, Boston, MA

Mapping the Battle

Exploring the Role of Geography
in the Battle of Bunker Hill

www.nps.gov/bost



A 30-minute lesson for 5th graders
either before or after visiting and
climbing the Bunker Hill Monument



Introduction

Mapping the Battle explores the role that geography and topography played in the battle of Bunker Hill. This program encourages and develops students' ability to analyze maps and primary source documents, work in small groups to solve problems, and create their own declarations of defeat about one of the key moments of the American Revolution.

Background Information

“Don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes!” This legendary order has come to symbolize the conviction and determination of the ill-equipped American colonists facing powerful British forces during the famous battle fought on this site on June 17, 1775. The battle is popularly known as “The Battle of Bunker Hill,” although most of the fighting actually took place on Breed’s Hill. Today, a 221-foot granite obelisk marks the site of the first major battle of the American Revolution.

KEY POINTS

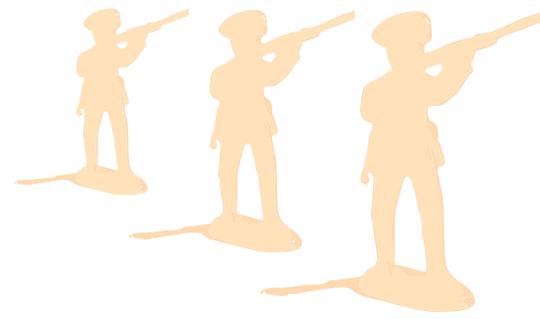
- June 13, 1775: the colonial forces learned that the British planned to send troops to occupy the hills surrounding the city
- **Colonial Response:**
 - 1,200 troops occupied Bunker and Breed’s Hills in Charlestown
 - Constructed an earthen redoubt or temporary fortification on Breed’s Hill
 - Built lightly fortified lines across most of the Charlestown Peninsula
- **Colonial Leaders:** Colonel William Prescott, Colonel John Stark, General Israel Putnam
 - Had experience fighting alongside the British in the French and Indian War
 - Led an inexperienced colonial army
- **British Response:** June 17, 1775 – 2,200 ground forces mounted an attack against the colonial forces
 - Colonists repelled two major assaults and inflicted great casualties on the British troops
 - British captured Breed’s Hill on the third assault when the defenders in the redoubt ran out of ammunition
- **British prevailed**
 - Colonial forces retreated to Cambridge over Bunker Hill
 - British Casualties: 1,034 killed or wounded
 - Colonial Casualties: 400-600 killed or wounded
 - Major-General Dr. Joseph Warren, a newly-elected, popular patriot leader was killed during the third and final assault

For more information on the battle, please visit the following websites:

<http://www.nps.gov/bost/historyculture/bhm.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/42bunker/42bunker.htm>

<http://www.masshist.org/revolution/bunkerhill.php>



MA State History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks

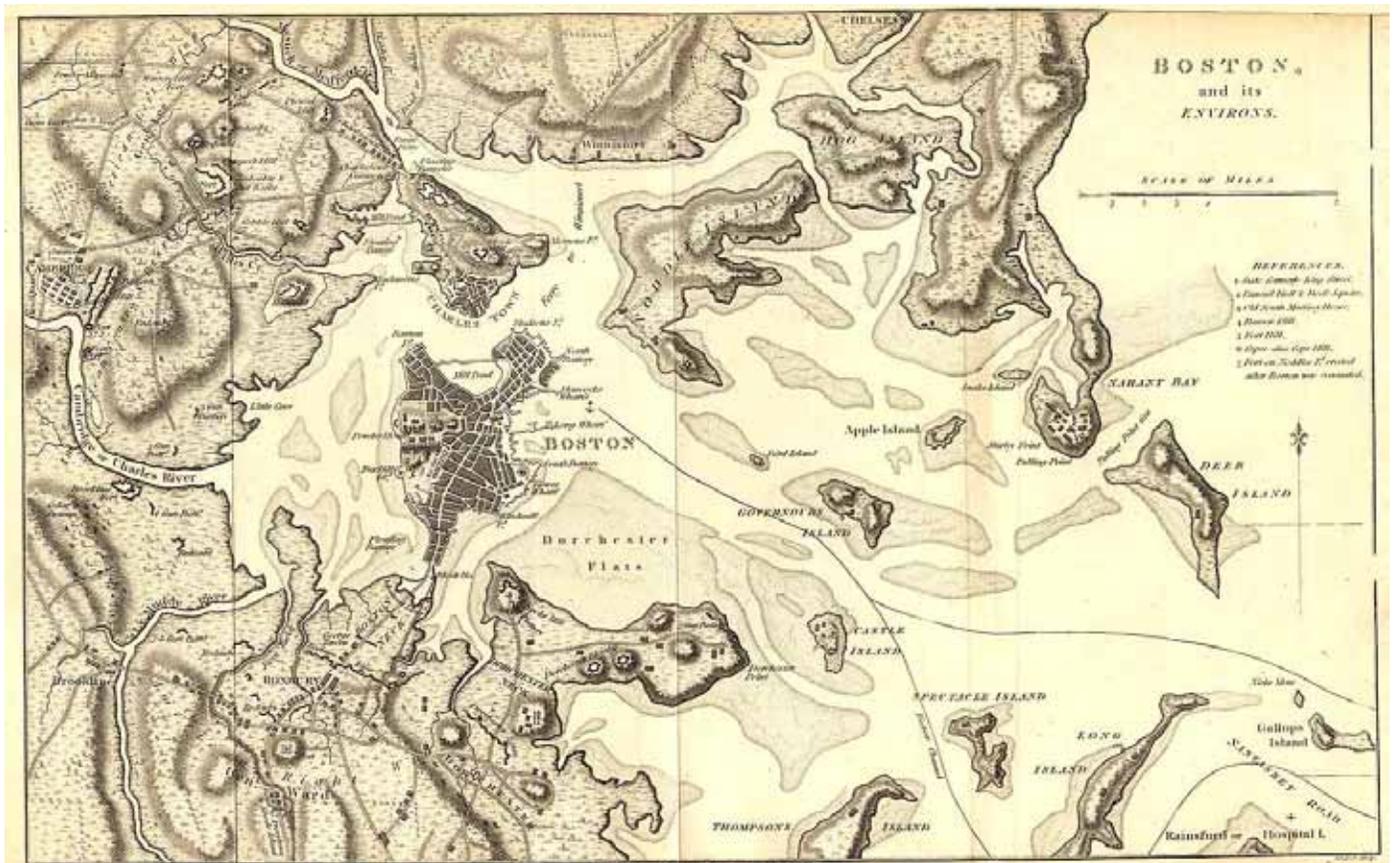
- Observe and identify details in cartoons, photographs, charts, and graphs relating to an historical narrative.
- Compare maps of the modern world with historical maps of the world.
- Describe the major battles of the Revolution and explain the factors leading to American victory and British defeat.



Common Core Standards

- Compare and contrast the overall structure of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.

PHOTOS: (Top) Bunker Hill Museum. (Bottom) Historical map courtesy of Library of Congress.





Pre-Visit Lesson

OBJECTIVE

At the conclusion of the lesson students will be able to:

- Label islands and peninsulas on a map of Boston
- Draw a compass rose on a map with all four directions
- Correctly identify Boston, Cambridge, and Charlestown; Boston Harbor, Charles River, Mystic River, Long Wharf and Breed's Hill on a map

ACTIVITY

- ▶ Introduce the vocabulary words: island, peninsula, harbor, river, compass rose.
- ▶ Ask students share their observations of the maps – compare/contrast the two (one historic, one contemporary) of Boston – what are the similarities, differences?
- ▶ Have students complete the map worksheet on page 4. (Note to teachers: enlarge the map on page 2 to check students' work. The map on page 2 shows locations that you will want students to look up online, or from old maps, or in books.) Compare the historic map with the contemporary map to see what has changed over time.

(SEE WORKSHEET 1)



PHOTOS: (Top) Working in small groups encourages students to consider multiple points of view. (Bottom) Historical map courtesy of Library of Congress.

Name _____



1. Draw and label a compass rose on each map, complete with the four directions.
2. Label the following on each map:
 - Boston, Cambridge, Charlestown
 - Boston Harbor, Charles River, Mystic River
 - Long Wharf, Breeds Hill
3. Color the islands green and the peninsulas red.



4. How is an island different from a peninsula?
5. How is a river different from a harbor?
6. What similarities can you find between the two maps? What differences?

MAPS: (Top) Historical map courtesy of Library of Congress.
(Bottom) Contemporary map courtesy of Google Earth.

Bunker Hill Museum Lesson



ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

Geography can impact the outcome of battles.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

In what ways did the geography in and around Boston impact the outcome of the Battle of Bunker Hill?

INTRODUCTION

Geography played an important part in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In this 30-minute program, students use a large floor map to learn about the geography of Boston, Charlestown, and Cambridge in 1775. The large map provides students with a bird's eye view of this area. Students identify strategies and troop movements that impacted the outcome of the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775. In this activity, students will think strategically about the geography of Boston and Charlestown and how this impacted tactical decisions before and during the battle.

Students compare the 1775 map to Boston today to learn how landfill projects reshaped colonial Boston into a thriving city.

LEARNERS

This lesson is anchored in 5th grade social science-history. The purpose of the grade 5 curriculum is to give students their first concentrated study of the formative years of U.S. history.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES

Understand Charlestown's geography and how it related to America's struggle for freedom.

By the end of the program, learners will be able to:

- "Read" a large floor map of Boston and Charlestown at the time of the Battle of Bunker Hill and compare it to modern-day maps.
- Identify the location and names of land masses that made up Boston in 1775.
- Relate the events of the Battle of Bunker Hill with Boston's geographic influence on its outcome.

This lesson implicitly teaches critical thinking, creative problem-solving, observation and inferences.



PROCESS

This lesson is taught at Boston National Historical Park in two parts.

- **Part One** is a 20-minute activity using a large floor map and toy soldiers, led by Park Ranger
- **Part Two** is a 10-minute (teacher-led) group activity in exhibition gallery on the 3rd floor of the Bunker Hill Museum

PART ONE (20 MINUTES)

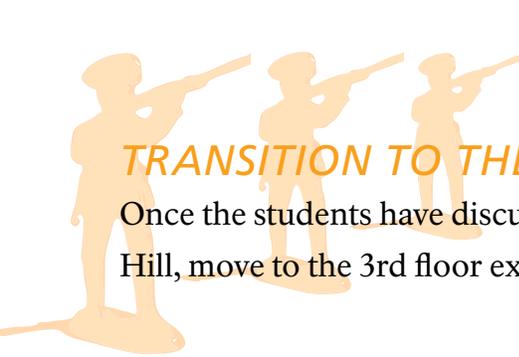
- ▶ Have students sit on the floor around a large floor map (10'x10')
- ▶ Lead a discussion using the topics and questions below. (This is a guided discussion, so it is important that the students take the lead here and become fully engaged. *Spend approximately four minutes per topic*, making sure that one or more students have a chance to think about and respond to each question/topic).

At the beginning of the lesson, toy soldiers (in both red and blue), toy cannons, and labels for each of the land masses will be stationed around the perimeter of the map. As each of the topics is discussed with the learners, they will be asked to move and manipulate these items onto the map itself.

- ▶ What kind of map are we looking at? (Identify the type of map, locate the compass, and compare to modern-day maps.)
- ▶ How has Boston changed over time? (The ranger and students locate major landmarks.)
- ▶ Identify land masses (Charlestown, Boston, Cambridge, etc.)
- ▶ Explain their impact on the Battle of Bunker Hill (island v. peninsula)
- ▶ Introduce (or review) the logistics surrounding the Battle of Bunker Hill (e.g., Where did the British come from? The Patriots?)

By moving their toy Patriot or British soldiers throughout the map, mimicking troop movements in 1775, placing labels on major landmarks, etc., students will be full participants in the discussion and act as “guides” for the ranger.





TRANSITION TO THE EXHIBITION GALLERY:

Once the students have discussed the geography of Boston and its impact on the Battle of Bunker Hill, move to the 3rd floor exhibition gallery to explore major players involved in the battle.

PART TWO (10 MINUTES)

The ranger provides the teacher/chaperone with a haversack containing materials for group activity. The teacher/chaperone leads students to the 3rd floor exhibition gallery.

Directions for using the Activity Cards (seven minute activity):

Divide the students into four groups and give each group one Activity Card containing questions about the exhibits. Students walk around the gallery with their card to guide their exploration and focus their attention on people and places.



PHOTOS: (Above) Students explore the exhibitions at the Bunker Hill Museum using Activity Cards.

- ▶ **Group 1:** focuses on William Prescott
- ▶ **Group 2:** examines the diorama
- ▶ **Group 3:** investigates William Howe
- ▶ **Group 4:** explores the cyclorama

Closing Questions (three minutes):

Gather students under cyclorama to share what they discussed in their individual groups.

- ▶ What person or place did your group discuss?
- ▶ What did find most interesting?
- ▶ What did you figure out about the Battle of Bunker Hill from your person or place?

(Note to the teacher/chaperon: Please gather activity materials and drop off to a ranger at the front desk.)



VARIATION

If the class is not especially verbal during this discussion, consider asking a question and directing each student to turn to someone sitting next to them to answer the question. After talking to one another, a student might volunteer to share their answer with the rest of the class.

RESOURCES NEEDED

This lesson requires the following materials:

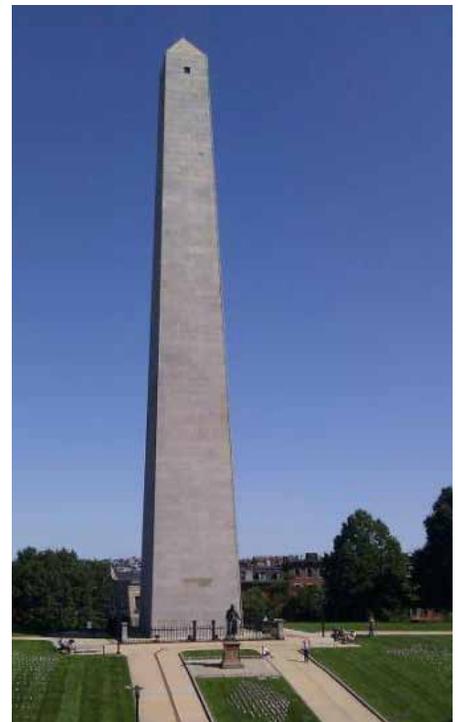
- **For Part One:** Floor map and toy soldiers placed around the perimeter of the map in front of the students. Students can sit on the floor around the map.
- **For Part Two:** One set of Activity Cards (four different people or places are available for students to work in teams to guide their exploration.)

The classroom teacher and chaperones are partners who contribute the effectiveness and success of this lesson by leading the last 10 minutes of the lesson using prepared materials for students who work in four groups. The class will leave the Museum and visit or climb Bunker Hill Monument after this lesson. Alternatively, your class might be climbing the Monument first and then participating in the activities described here. Your group reservation will indicate where your class will begin.



CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

In both parts of this lesson, students should be able to move from describing to analyzing and forming conclusions about the geography and the people associated with the Battle of Bunker Hill, a turning point in the American Revolution.



Post-Visit Lesson

MA State History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks



PHOTO: (Top) Statue of Colonel William Prescott, one of the heroes at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

PAINTING: Page 10 and Page 11 (detail), "Bunker Hill, 1775." Painting by Don Troiani, www.historicalprints.com.

- Describe the major battles of the Revolution and explain the factors leading to American victory and British defeat.
- Bunker Hill (1775)

Common Core Standards

- Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
- Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do primary sources from multiple points of view give us a richer understanding of an historic event?

OBJECTIVE

At the conclusion of the lesson students will be able to:

- Read a primary source for comprehension and summarize main ideas.

OR

- Write a persuasive editorial about the battle from a particular point of view.



ACTIVITY

A. "DEFEAT TWEET"

- ▶ Select one or more of the primary sources of the Battle of Bunker Hill. Have students read for comprehension, summarize the main ideas, determine the point of view (American colonist or British soldier) and then create a 140 character (or less) "tweet" communicating the main ideas of the document's perspective on the battle.

B. EDITORIAL

- ▶ Write an editorial about the battle for a British or colonial newspaper using one of the following as the title which will direct their point of view to one side or the other.
 - "A Hill Too Dearly Bought"
 - "Losses Greater Than We Can Bear"
 - "The Decisive Day Has Come"

(SEE WORKSHEET **2** – "DEFEAT TWEET" GRID AND PRIMARY SOURCE QUOTES)



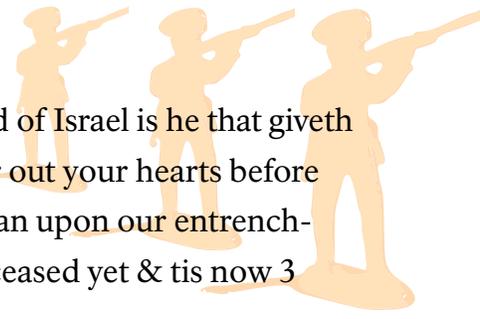


PRIMARY SOURCE QUOTES

1. “I was now left with perhaps 150 Men in the Fort, the Enemy advanced and fired very hotly on the Fort and meeting with a Warm Reception there was a very smart firing on both sides. after a considerable Time finding our Ammunition was almost spent I commanded a cessation till the Enemy advanced within 30 yards when we gave them such a hot fire, that they were obliged to retire nearly 150 yards before they could Rally and come again to the Attack. Our Ammunition being nearly exhausted could keep up only a scattering Fire. The Enemy being numerous surrounded out little Fort began to mount our Lines and enter the Fort with their Bayonets, we was obliged to retreat through them while they kept up as hot a fire as it was possible for them to make. We having very few Bayonets could make no resistance. We kept the fort about one hour and twenty Minutes after the Attack with small Arms. This is nearly the State of Facts tho’ imperfect & too general which if any ways satisfactory to you.”¹ (*William Prescott*)

2. “And now ensued one of the greatest scenes of war that can be conceived: if we look to the height, Howe’s corps ascending the hill in the face of entrenchments, and in a very disadvantageous ground, was much engaged; and to the left the enemy pouring in fresh troops by thousands, over the land; and in the arm of the sea our ships and floating batteries cannonading them: strait before us a large and a noble town in one great blaze; the church steeples, being of timber, were great pyramids of fire above the rest; behind us the church steeples and heights of our own camp covered with spectators of the rest of our army which was not engaged; the hills round the country covered with spectators; the enemy all anxious suspense; the roar of cannon, mortars, and musketry; the crush of churches, ships upon the stocks, and whole streets falling together in ruin, to fill the ear; the storm of the redoubts, with the objects above described, to fill the eye; and the reflection that perhaps a defeat was a final loss to the British empire in America, to fill the mind; made the whole a picture and a complication of horror and importance beyond any thing that ever came to my lot to be witness to.”² (*General Burgoyne*)





3. “The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong — but the God of Israel is he that giveth strength & power unto his people. Trust in him at all times ye people pour out your hearts before him. God is a refuge for us. — Charlestown is laid in ashes. The Battle began upon our entrenchments upon Bunkers Hill, a Saturday morning about 3 o’clock & has not ceased yet & tis now 3 o’clock Sabbath afternoon.

Tis expected they will come out over the Neck to night, & a dreadful Battle must ensue Almighty God cover the heads of our Country men, & be a shield to our Dear Friends. How many have fallen we know not-the constant roar of the cannon is so distressing that we cannot Eat Drink or Sleep — may we be supported and sustained in the dreadful conflict. I shall tarry here till tis thought unsafe by my Friends, & then I have secured myself a retreat at your Brothers who has kindly offered me part of his house. I cannot compose myself to write any further at present — I will add more as I hear further.”³ (*Abigail Adams*)

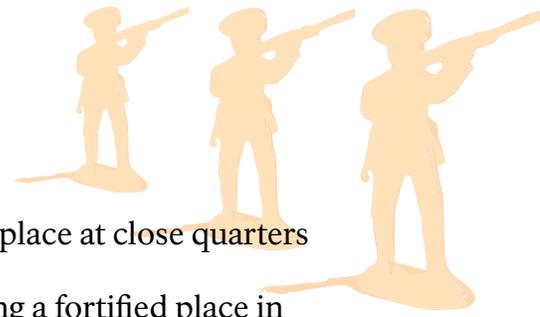
4. “Our People and The Kings Troops Began a warm engagement about three a Clock this afternoon this was a melancholy Day not only a great number of our Brave friends fell But a great Deal of Substance was Consumed by fire for our Enemies Set fire to the Town of Charlestown which Consumed almost Every house in that town: But it is Said that we excelled in the Battle 29 Commissioned officers and 220 non-Commissioned officers and 752 Privates So great was the Fall of our Enemy. How are the mighty Fallen.”⁴ (*Nathaniel Ober*)

5. “On Friday night, the 17th Instant, fifteen hundred of the Provincials went to Bunker’s-Hill, in order to entrench there, and continued entrenching till Saturday ten o’clock, when 2000 Regulars marched out of Boston, landed in Charlestown, and plundering it of all its valuable effects, set fire to it in ten different places at once; then dividing their army, part of it marched up in the front of the Provincial entrenchment, and began to attack the Provincials at long shot; the other part of their army marched round the town of Charlestown, under cover of the smoke occasioned by the fire of the town. The Provincial sentries discovered the Regulars marching upon their left wing. Upon notice of this given by the sentry to the Connecticut forces posted upon that wing, Captain Nolton, of Ashford, with 400 of paid forces, immediately repaired to, and pulled up a post and rail-fence, and carried the posts and rails to another fence, put them together for a breast work. Captain Nolton gave orders to the men not to fire until the enemy were got within fifteen rods, and then not till the word was given. At the words being given, the enemy fell surprisingly; it was thought by spectators who stood at a distance, that our men did great execution.”⁵ (*broadside*⁶)

1.-5. From the Massachusetts Historical Society - <http://www.masshist.org/bh/>

6. A piece of paper printed for distribution or posting – often contains advertisements or new-related information

VOCABULARY



Assault – the culmination of a military attack, in which fighting takes place at close quarters

Besiege – prolonged and persistent effort of surrounding and attacking a fortified place in such a way as to isolate it from help and supplies, for the purpose of lessening the resistance of the defenders and thereby making capture possible

Compass rose – a circle or decorative device printed on a map or chart showing the points of the compass measured from true north

Harbor – a part of a body of water along the shore deep enough for anchoring a ship, often has docks or wharves

Hill – a natural elevation of the earth’s surface, smaller than a mountain.

Island – a mass of land that is surrounded by water and is smaller than a continent

Militia – an group of citizens volunteering for military service, in this case refers to the colonial American institution of local militias that defend their communities

Peninsula – an area of land almost completely surrounded by water except for a narrow piece connecting it with the mainland.

Redoubt – an isolated work forming a complete enclosure of any form, used to defend a prominent point

Regulars – a professional soldier, in this case refers to British “Regular Army” soldiers

River – a natural stream of water of fairly large size flowing in a definite course

Wharf – a structure built on the shore of or projecting into a harbor, stream, etc., so that boats/ ships may be tied up alongside to load or unload.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Englar, Mary. *The Battle of Bunker Hill*. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, 2007.

Hudak, Heather. *Mapping*. New York: Weigl Publishers, 2008. p.10-11 landforms, bodies of water. p. 20-21 compass, cardinal directions.



Boston National Historical Park, Boston, MA

RESERVATIONS

Email BOST_RSVP@nps.gov or call (617) 242-5689, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Spaces fill quickly, so please reserve as far in advance as possible.

Boston National Historical Park
Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston, MA 02129
www.nps.gov/bost



PHOTO: (Left) **Bunker Hill Monument.** This granite obelisk was erected between 1827 and 1843 to commemorate the first major battle of the American Revolution.