Outraged Colonists Destroy Tea in Boston and the Chesapeake Bay

In an effort to raise money for England by taxing the thirteen colonies, Parliament passed the Townsend Duties of 1767. The Townsend Duties placed taxes on several important items in Maryland’s economy including paper, paint, lead, glass and tea. To help enforce these taxes, King George III and the British Royal Navy purchased a fleet of ships to patrol the Atlantic coast and make sure that colonial merchants weren’t smuggling goods to avoid paying the new fees. For four years, the schooner Sultana was part of this small fleet.

Reaction to the Townsend Duties in the thirteen colonies was so negative that on March 5, 1770, Parliament decided to repeal (or cancel) the new taxes. However, they decided that the tax on tea would still be enforced. In response to this decision, many colonists refused to purchase tea that came to America from England. Instead they smuggled in tea from other countries or made their own tea from local spices. Soon merchants in England began to lose money, especially the East India Company, which had 18 million pounds of unsold tea in their warehouses! In order to keep this company from going bankrupt, Parliament passed the Tea Act of 1773. This act allowed the East India Company to ship their tea directly to the colonies and sell it at bargain prices. This angered many colonists because they feared that colonial merchants would be driven out of business.

On December 16, 1773, a group of angry rebels calling themselves the “Sons of Liberty” protested the Tea Act by boarding three ships in Boston Harbor loaded with tea that had recently arrived from England. Disguised as Mohawk Indians, the men dumped over 10,000 pounds of tea into the ocean. This event today is known as the Boston Tea Party. Shortly after this incident, King George III reacted by ordering the closing of the
port of Boston. When this news reached other colonial ports, the people reacted with shock and outrage.

While Boston’s was by far the most famous “tea party” that occurred in the colonies, it was only the first of many demonstrations against the Tea Act that took place all along the Atlantic Coast. In fact, two “tea parties” actually took place here in the Chesapeake Bay! The first occurred in Chester Town, Maryland (known today as Chestertown). When news of the closing of the port of Boston reached Chester Town in the spring of 1774, town leaders called a public meeting to discuss what actions should be taken. In a written agreement called the “Chestertown Resolves” they decided that it was unlawful to buy, sell, or drink tea shipped from England. Shortly after these resolves were printed, a ship called the Geddes arrived in Chester Town with a shipment of British tea. On May 23, 1774, a small group of men boarded the ship in broad daylight and threw its cargo into the Chester River. Today, this event is celebrated every Memorial Day Weekend at the Chestertown Tea Party Festival, which features a full-scale reenactment of the dumping of tea into the harbor (see photo at right).

In October 1774, another tea party occurred just outside of Annapolis, Maryland. There, a ship called the Peggy Stewart arrived in Annapolis with tea from England. When the ship’s owner, Anthony Stewart, willingly paid the tea tax, an angry mob gathered and demanded that he destroy his cargo. After first offering to destroy his tea, the mob eventually forced Stewart burn his entire ship!

The events in Boston, Chester Town and Annapolis marked a turning point in relations between England and the thirteen colonies. After these “tea parties”, it was clear that the colonists were not going to accept “taxation without representation” in any form, and that they were willing to openly defy British authority to get their point across. It was also clear that it was going to be very difficult to resolve the differences between England and the colonies without bloodshed. Less than one year after the Chester Town and Annapolis tea parties took place, war would break out between these two sides. This war was known as the American Revolution (also called the Revolutionary War), and it changed the course of American history forever!
The Boston, Annapolis, and Chestertown Tea Parties

NAME: ____________________________________________ DATE: ____________

DIRECTIONS: Use information from the reading to answer each of the following questions in a complete sentence.

1. What did Parliament do to save the East India Company? Why did this anger and frighten many of the colonists?

2. What happened in Boston on December 6, 1773?

3. Describe what happened at the “tea parties” in Chester Town and Annapolis.