

Revisiting Lexington Green

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During a social studies methods course in 1976, I was introduced to a collection of innovative curricular projects collectively referred to as the “new social studies.” Among them was a series of units developed by the Amherst Project Committee on the Study of History. Each unit presented conflicting evidence and multiple perspectives centered around a famous situation in American history. The goal was for students to experience the methods of historical inquiry as they reconstructed historical contexts and evaluated the consequences of decisions on the basis of these antithetical sources of information.

Quoting from one of the Amherst teacher’s manuals, these units were designed to provoke discussion about the following questions: “Why is it that different people see things differently? How can we ... reconstruct the past when people’s observations differ? What is the past, what is reality, and what is it to know? What are the implications of the answers we give these questions—or the difficulty we may have answering them—for the larger questions of how we identify and understand ourselves?”¹

By the time I entered my first teaching position in 1978, the “new social studies” was already on its way out. Although it emphasized deep understanding of a discipline and encouraged students and teachers to create meanings together, the educational establishment seemed obsessed with increasing scores on standardized tests that emphasized breadth of coverage and single right answers. Today, epistemological questions like those raised in the Amherst projects have emerged once again and lie at the center of discussions about educational reform. In fact, the authors may have been visionaries, foreshadowing the recent debate over “constructivism” and education. As a context for discussing the contemporary application of constructivist and other perspectives on teaching and learning in the social studies, I have resurrected one of the Amherst units: *What Happened on Lexington Green?: An Inquiry Into the Nature and Methods of History.*

A Case Study for Discussing Constructivism

The Amherst unit presented accounts of what transpired on the village green in Lexington, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1775. Conflicting views were offered by eyewitnesses (for example, members of the colonial militia and commanders of British troops) and by other contemporary accounts (including newspapers, diaries, “official” reports, and reminiscences long after the actual event). The unit also presented excerpts from the works of British and American historians—written at different times and with biographical information suggesting possible biasing factors—as well as excerpts from middle and high school textbooks.

Finally, the unit contained a section called *Every Man His Own Historian*, in which the very nature of evidence, reality, and “facts” was examined by comparing and contrasting views of historians with those of scientists, artists, and fiction writers. Rather than presenting lesson plans in the teacher’s manual, the authors discussed how “working through” the documents would bring students face-to-face with the messy world of historical interpretation, rather than present them with a body of pre-determined facts to be mastered.

Accounts of what happened on Lexington Green have also been the focus of an intriguing program of research, whose results raise important questions about constructivism and social education. In studies conducted by Samuel Wineburg, expert historians and high school students talked aloud as they interacted with eight documents describing the 1775 event.² Like the Amherst unit, these documents included eyewitness and contemporary accounts, a fictional rendition, and a textbook excerpt. The study revealed how historians regard information about the source of a text as being intimately connected to the motivations behind its production.

According to Wineburg, historians approached the documents like prosecuting attorneys, viewing

them as human creations constructed for social and rhetorical purposes, and engaging in a “mock dialogue” with each author. In short, historians “actively questioned sources, delving into their conscious and unconscious motives.” Students, on the other hand, approached the task like jurors, “patiently listening to testimony” and typically regarding sources as merely the last in a string of loosely connected propositions. Unlike historians, who rated textbooks as the least credible source of historical information, students were especially trustful of them since they only reported “straight information.” This suggests that students read history to acquire factual information already arbitrated by others, whereas historians try to “resurrect” history by sculpting images of authors and co-constructing narratives within historical contexts.

Wineburg’s research makes it clear that expert historians “participate actively in the fabrication of meaning.” That is, they construct knowledge. Why, then, are students so unlike historians in their approach to the discipline? Are middle and high school students capable of performing the functions of historians? Is it desirable to have them try to do so in school?

The activities that follow illustrate the differences between constructivist and non-constructivist methods of teaching about a historical event. To connect theory to learning in the social studies, I will present approaches that are consistent with each of the theoretical models discussed in the introductory article: teacher as transmitter (the behavioral approach), teacher as manager (the information processing approach), and the teacher as facilitator or collaborator (the constructivist approaches).

Degrees of Disagreement: Using the Transmission Approach

A lesson on Lexington Green using the transmission approach might begin with students taking notes on a lecture about the relations between British and colonial factions in the early 1770s. Students would then use this information to place events leading up to the confrontation at Lexington on a conceptual continuum (see Figure 1. Degrees of Disagreement). To accomplish this, students would practice important skills of classification in deciding whether a particular colonial action qualified as dissent, protest, civil disobedience, riot, insurrection, or revolution. This matching of events with conceptual categories is largely replicative, however, as it rewards students for matching pre-selected events with predetermined categories.

Examples of transmission teaching appear in many popular high school textbooks. For example, one textbook section on “Lexington and Concord” devotes six paragraphs to the winter and spring of 1774-1775, describing the formation of the minutemen, Paul Revere’s ride, and Pitcairn’s march through Lexington to Concord. A few sentences on the first shot fired at Lexington are typical of how such events are treated by school texts:

Pitcairn ordered the minutemen to disperse, and Parker gave the order to retreat. Then someone—no one knows who—fired a shot.³

On the one hand, this appears to be a sophisticated claim about the tentative nature of knowledge—namely, that experts simply don’t know everything. On the other hand, a closer view suggests the presence of a subtle but powerful subtext: On this point, the authors of the text apparently don’t have a clear answer (for whatever reason); but on most other claims, where no such concession is made, the truth has been determined and handed down by authorities. The acceptance of textbook as mere fact, with little intercession by teachers, often reinforces the belief that history is a fixed body of knowledge, that somebody owns this knowledge, and that learning is the act of receiving and remembering bits of knowledge that one person transmits to another.⁴

The same text includes a fancy insert titled “Lexington and Concord: Analyzing a Primary Source,” in which students read the eyewitness account of British Lieutenant-Colonel Smith and are asked to:

1. identify the nature of the document (e.g. “who wrote it; was he or she closely involved in the event?”);
2. decide how reliable the document is (e.g. “was the author British or American and how could that have affected what was reported?”); and
3. study the source to learn more about an historical event (e.g. distinguish between facts and opinions).

Finally, an accompanying worksheet touted by the publishers as “critical thinking” asks students to

mimic this exercise by analyzing a second document—this one an official account issued from the Provincial Congress at Watertown, Massachusetts, on April 26, 1775. The worksheet adds one question: “How does this description ... differ from the report of Lt.-Col. Smith ... in your text?” Assigning students to read and perform these exercises exemplifies the nature of classroom activity when teachers oscillate between the role of transmitter of information and the role of manager of an environment where information is to be processed during systematic thinking activities. Although it is not my intent to address the general deficiencies of history textbooks,⁵ it is clear that, even on the “critical thinking” worksheet, there is essentially a “keyed” answer with no explicit attempt to address the tentative nature of history or the constructive work of historians.

Making sure that students can recognize bias or separate facts from opinion are certainly noble objectives. However, whether information is presented as entries in a conceptual scheme (degrees of disagreement), as a neutral claim (“no one knows”), or as an occasion to rehearse a discrete skill (detecting bias), the main function of students is to observe, listen, and demonstrate mastery by reciting information or replicating procedures.

Reading for Levels of Meaning: Using the Manager Approach

An important role of the teacher as manager is to help students become aware of their prior conceptions, and then to provide them with increasingly expert methods for analyzing information. Figure 2 (Reading for Levels of Meaning) contains an excerpt from the U. S. history book used by Wineburg in the study described earlier in this article. It examines students’ understanding of different levels of meaning—literal, interpretive and evaluative—in the passage.

One of Wineburg’s discoveries was that most historians—but few students—paid attention to the textbook author’s rhetorical device of putting quotation marks around the word “rebels.” Students also failed to note how the author turned “embattled farmers” into “rebels” and then into patriots (without quotations) within the span of a few sentences. Labeling the encounter an “atrocious” also went unchallenged by students, whereas historians even questioned the use of connotative phrases like “standing their ground,” since neither American nor English primary accounts portrayed the confrontation in this way. Teachers can encourage depth of processing by directly asking students to consider levels of meaning contained in what they read, see, or hear.⁶

Review questions in textbooks usually ask students to transcribe what happened in a historical situation. The exercise in Figure 2 requires students to go beyond this to question the author’s meanings and intentions as they check the statements they consider “true” about the passage. For example, even at the “literal level,” referring to Lexington as a “new atrocity” (Item 2) forces students to ask what they know about other events taking place before 1775. At the “interpretive level,” Item 4 asks students to determine whether the author thinks the event was caused solely by the behavior of English troops, or whether colonial actions and attitudes helped bring it about.

Items 5 to 7 foster students’ conceptual development by requiring an examination of concepts such as treason and patriotism; an awareness of “perspective” is called for, since Paul Revere appears to have been a rebel from one point of view and a patriot from another. Even deeper thinking is promoted by “evaluative” statements that require students to consider whether any general principles can be abstracted from the text. For example, Items 9 and 10 raise the possibility that historians don’t just report facts; they think about evidence, decide on meanings, and even make value judgments (e.g., who was a rebel and who was a patriot).

Understanding levels of meaning in a historical document requires the activation of higher order cognitive processes, such as metacognition. Metacognition (literally “thinking about thinking”) refers to the process of monitoring one’s own thinking activities when engaging in an intellectual task (e.g., reading or problem solving). It is comparable to an executive intellectual function that helps people regulate which mental strategies they should use in different situations (e.g., when they get “stuck” on a word). Figure 2 represents a metacognitive strategy, since the objective is for students to acquire both the skill and the disposition to approach any historical text with a hierarchical set of questions in mind:

- Literal: What did the author actually say?
- Interpretative: What was his or her intent?
- Evaluative: Is an enduring principle implied by the narrative?⁷

Furthermore, answering these questions requires what Wineburg calls a “sourcing heuristic,” which means questioning the source of a document before reading the actual text, a strategy employed

frequently by historians but seldom by students. Students acquire a sense of ownership when they understand that history is more than just a matter of “knowing the facts.” Teachers who manage a thinking environment encourage both explicit interaction among students and teachers, and implicit interaction among students and sources of historical information.

Revisiting Lexington Green: A Model Lesson

In contrast to the above two activities, this lesson reflects a constructivist approach. It aims to help students experience the process of constructing historical meaning by using eight documents relating to events on Lexington Green on April 19, 1775.⁸ I have conducted this lesson in my classrooms using an 85-minute time block.⁹ The day before the lesson, the teacher designates a number of students to act as “lead historians” and convene a meeting of social scientists to review the evidence and render an interpretation of events “on a famous day in American history.” On the day of the lesson, students sit at tables in groups of eight to work together.

The lesson begins with a clip from the musical *1776*, in which the characters first glorify the early fighting in the Revolutionary War, and then face the war’s realities as one singer recalls friends who died at Lexington. Since my students have studied the American Revolution earlier in the semester, they are prepared to make surmises about what this scene is depicting. Noting costumes, language, and the content of the dialogue, they conclude that it is about events leading up to the Declaration of Independence. The teacher elicits prior knowledge about the conflict and asks students to think about the significance of determining who instigates a fight. Students compare conflicts between countries with conflicts between people—questioning, for example, whether the “aggressor” or the “respondent” in a fight is better able to rally the support of allies.

The teacher then turns the class over to the student leaders, who distribute the eight documents (Box on pages 16-17) along with maps of Lexington Green (Figure 3). Each student reads and makes notes about his or her respective document. The teacher circulates the room, lending assistance when questions are raised (e.g., “What is a deposition?”). When students have developed a handle on their roles, the lead historians ask members of each group to present their testimony to each other, acting in the first person.

Dialogue flows freely as students compare evidence, highlight common and conflicting information, and raise questions of one another. When I recently taught this lesson, one group became very animated as witnesses defended their “roles” and levied accusations at each other. Another group was much more systematic in scrutinizing the testimonials. After 20 minutes, the lead historians inform their groups that they have five more minutes to “decide” what happened on Lexington Green. One or more groups then present a brief picture (narrative or skit) of the events, inviting classmates to agree with them or to challenge their viewpoint.

Now students in each group are asked to drop their first person roles and direct their attention to a “Credibility of Witnesses” form (Figure 4). Lead historians engage their groups in evaluating which testimonials are more and less trustworthy by ranking each document on the continuum and indicating the criteria used to determine this rank. After 15 minutes, members of one group—using cards bearing document names—take their places in the front of the room, standing in order from least to most credible witness so as to represent a continuum.

Students from other groups confirm or deny this order of witnesses, offering reasons for how they ranked witnesses, and recommending that some witnesses move. The activity culminates in a discussion of witness credibility based on questions such as:

- What types of “witnesses” (evidence) are involved here?
- What criteria are useful in determining whether a witness is credible or biased?
- Why is it important to verify the accuracy of historical information?
- Is this class activity similar to the work of real historians?

Although high school students can recognize important differences between various forms of writing—for example, the difference between keeping a diary and writing for a public audience—students often need prompting in order to “engage the source.” Many students accept the excerpt from *April Morning* as just another account of the events at Lexington, without questioning the nature of historical fiction. Or, students may ignore language that provides clues to an author’s perspective,

such as the statement that “Pitcairn was a good man in a bad cause” made by the President of Yale College in 1775.

The lesson ends with a short writing exercise that students complete in class. They may be asked to draft a paragraph in response to the question: “Using what you have learned about the credibility of witnesses, what happened on Lexington Green?” Or, they may be asked to think about a recent fight in their school or in the news and to list a set of procedures for constructing a plausible account of what happened.

Finally, students perform a homework assignment involving three new documents about Lexington Green. Their job is to: (1) decide whether one document is more credible than the others, explain why, and describe what additional information about the document might increase confidence in its credibility; or (2) select one of the documents and hypothesize about who wrote it by identifying clues within the document and/or contrasting it with other documents about Lexington Green.

Overview

The teacher as facilitator and the teacher as manager resemble each other in the belief that meaning resides not solely in objects, texts, or events, but also in the interpretations given them by learners as they “organize and selectively evaluate information and make connective inferences.”¹⁰ However, these roles differ in emphasis. The teacher as manager (information processing theorist) might argue that constructive mental activity can occur when students receive information presented in a didactic fashion. The teacher as facilitator (cognitive constructivist) would more likely argue that instruction transmitted by lecture is “much less likely to produce the in-depth understandings that can be built up from activity and discussion that engages and challenges prior knowledge.”¹¹ The teacher as collaborator (social constructivist) would argue further that there is little to be gained in traditional methods of transmitting information. The problem with these methods is that, typically, they demonstrate the superiority of a teacher’s understanding while hiding the processes necessary for becoming “expert” from public view.¹²

When I taught the lesson on Lexington Green, I retained authority over the nature of classroom activity. However,

I never claimed to possess an answer to what actually happened on Lexington Green. Rather, I engaged in the process of constructing reality with the students. And, while the culminating exercise was completed individually, it is possible to imagine methods of assessment as collaborative as the lesson itself—a suggestion that challenges some of the most persistent and widely held beliefs in American education.¹³

Notes

1 Among the “new social studies” materials were *Man: A Course of Study* (anthropology), the *High School Geography Project*, as well as the Amherst history units. The questions here are from the teacher’s manual for *What Happened on Lexington Green: An Inquiry Into the Nature and Methods of History*, written by P. S. Bennett, (Menlo Park, CA: Addison Wesley, 1970). Other units in the Amherst Project included *Freedom and Authority in Puritan New England*, *Hiroshima: A Study in Science, Politics, and the Ethics of War*, and *The Rights of Americans: The Changing Balance of Liberty, Law, and Order*.

2 S. S. Wineburg, “On the Reading of Historical Texts: Notes on the Breach Between School and Academy,” *American Educational Research Journal*, 28, 3 (1991), 495-519. More extensive treatments of Wineburg’s program of research are available: “Historical Problem Solving: A Study of the Cognitive Processes Used in the Evaluation of Documentary and Pictorial Evidence,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 83, 1 (1991), 73-87; “The Cognitive Representation of Historical Texts,” in G. Leinhardt, I. L. Beck, and C. Stainton (Eds.), *Teaching and Learning in History*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1994.

3 J. W. Davidson and M. H. Lytle, *The United States: A History of the Republic*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984).

4 Fred M. Newmann suggests that social conditioning may be responsible for a “lower-order mindset about knowledge and inquiry” often witnessed among social studies students in school. See “Higher Order Thinking in the Teaching of Social Studies: Connections Between Theory and Practice.” In J. F. Voss, D. N. Perkins, and J. W. Segal (Eds.), *Informal Reasoning and Education*. (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1991).

5 An excellent essay by Peter Schrag, titled “The Emasculated Voice of the Textbook,” which appeared in the *Saturday Review* in 1967, is reprinted in the Amherst unit on Lexington Green (pg.

32-3). Also, the deficiencies of American History textbooks is given exhaustive treatment in a popular book by James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, (New York: Touchstone, 1995).

6 A more thorough review of literature pertaining to the three level study guide for content area reading—e.g. Bean & Ericson, in *Journal of Reading*, 1989 — can be found in a chapter by G. Scheurman, “Strategies for Critical Reading in History,” in A. Chapman, *Critical Reading Across the Curriculum* (Princeton, NJ: College Board, 1994).

7 I use the acronym L.I.E., reminding students that considering levels of meaning will increase the likelihood of discovering the truth and reduce the risk of falling prey to an interpreter’s historical “lie”. See my article on critical reading (footnote 8) for elaboration on this device.

8 I chose the eight documents selected by Wineburg for his research, so that I could compare the results of my teaching with his research. However, the majority of the documents were also reprinted in the Amherst unit on Lexington Green.

9 In some situations, the procedures described here would be too much for a single 85-minute block. For example, younger students may need more time to read and interpret their individual testimonies, a task that can be done as homework or completed in class the day before.

10 S. Greene, “The Problems of Learning to Think Like a Historian: Writing History in the Culture of the Classroom,” *Educational Psychologist* 29, 2 (1994), 90.

11 S. J. Derry, “Cognitive Schema Theory in the Constructivist Debate,” *Educational Psychologist*, 31, 2 (1996), 166.

12 K. J. Gergen, “Social Constructivism and the Educational Process” in L. P. Steffe and J. Gale, eds., *Constructivism in Education* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1995), 17-39.

13 Vygotsky (1978, see footnote 13) articulated a concept called zone of proximal development, defined as “the distance between a child’s independent problem-solving ability and his or her potential for success through collaboration with others.” See L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (translation edited by M. Cole et al., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). The implications of this concept are that students may be able to perform more complex intellectual activities when working together than they are able to perform when working independently.

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Accounts of the Events on Lexington Green.

Document 1

To the inhabitants of Great Britain: In Provincial Congress, Watertown April 26, 1775

Friends and fellow subjects: Hostilities are at length commenced in the Colony by the troops under command of General Gage; and it being of the greatest importance that an early, true, and authentic account of this inhuman proceeding should be known to you, the Congress of this Colony have transmitted the same, and from want of a session of the honorable Continental Congress, think it proper to address you on the alarming occasion.

By the clearest depositions relative to this transaction, it will appear that on the night preceding the nineteenth of April instant...the Town of Lexington...was alarmed, and a company of the inhabitants mustered on the occasion; that the Regular troops, on their way to Concord, marched into the said town of Lexington, and the said company, on their approach, began to disperse; that notwithstanding this, the regulars rushed on with great violence, and first began hostilities by firing on said Lexington Company, whereby they killed eight and wounded several others; that the Regulars continued their fire until those of said company, who were neither killed nor wounded, had made their escape.

These, brethren, are marks of ministerial vengeance against this colony, for refusing, with her sister colonies, a submission to slavery. But they have not yet detached us from our Royal Sovereign. We profess to be his loyal and dutiful subjects, and so hardly dealt with as we have been, are still ready, with our lives and fortunes, to defend his person, family, crown, and dignity. Nevertheless, to the persecution and tyranny of his cruel ministry we will not tamely submit; appealing to Heaven for the justice of our cause, we determine to die or be free.

Joseph Warren, *President pro tem of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, in a cover letter for 21 sworn depositions about the events at Lexington and Concord sent to Benjamin Franklin, the colonial representative in London*

Document 2

We NATHANIEL MULLIKEN, PHILIP RUSSELL, (followed by the names of thirty-two other men present on Lexington Green on April 19, 1775)...all of lawful age, and inhabitants of Lexington, in the County of Middlesex, ...do testify and declare, that on the nineteenth of April instant, about one or two o'clock in the morning, being informed that...a body of regulars were marching from Boston towards Concord, ...we were alarmed and having met at the place of our company's parade (Lexington Green), were dismissed by our Captain, John Parker, for the present, with orders to be ready to attend at the beat of the drum, we further testify and declare, that about five o'clock in the morning, hearing our drum beat, we proceeded towards the parade, and soon found that a large body of troops were marching towards us, some of our company were coming up to the parade, and others had reached it, at which time the company began to disperse, whilst our backs were turned on the troops, we were fired on by them, and a number of our men were instantly killed and wounded, not a gun was fired by any person in our company on the regulars to our knowledge before they fired on us, and they continued firing until we had made all our escape.

Lexington, April 25th, 1775. Nathaniel Mulliken, Philip Russell, (and the other 32 men), duly sworn to by 34 minutemen on April 25th before three justices of the peace

Document 3

Major Pitcairn screamed at us: "Lay down your arms, you lousy bastards! Disperse, you lousy peasant scum!"...At least, those were the words that I seem to remember. Others remembered differently; but the way he screamed, in his strange London accent, with the motion and excitement, with his horse rearing and kicking...with the drums beating again and the fixed bayonets glittering in the sunshine, it's a wonder that any of his words remain with us...We still stood in our two lines, our guns butt end on the ground or held loosely in our hands. Major Pitcairn spurred his horse and raced between the lines. Somewhere, away from us, a shot sounded. A redcoat soldier raised his musket, leveled it at Father, and fired. My father clutched at his breast, then crumpled to the ground like an empty sack...Then the whole British front burst into a roar of sound and flame and smoke.

Excerpt from the novel, April Morning, by Howard Fast (1961)

Document 4

19th. At 2 o'clock we began our march by wading through a very long ford up to our middles; after going a few miles we took three or four people who were going off to give intelligence; about five miles on this side of a town called Lexington, which lay in our road, we heard there were some hundreds of people collected together intending to oppose us and stop our going on; at 5 o'clock we arrived there, and saw a number of people, I believe between 200 and 300, formed in a common in the middle of the town; we still continued advancing, keeping prepared against an attack though without intending to attack them; but on our coming near them they fired one or two shots, upon which our men without any orders, rushed in upon them, fired and put them to flight; several of them were killed, we could not tell how many, because they were got behind walls and into the woods; We had a man of the 10th light Infantry wounded, nobody else hurt. We then formed on the Common, but with some difficulty, the men were so wild they could hear no orders; we waited a considerable time there, and at length proceeded on our way to Concord.

Entry for April 19th, 1775, from the diary of Lieutenant John Barker, an officer in the British army

Document 5

Lieutenant Nunn, of the Navy arrived this morning at Lord Dartmouth's and brought letters from General Gage, Lord Percy, and Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, containing the following particulars of what passed on the nineteenth of April last between a detachment of the King's Troops in the Province of Massachusetts-Bay and several parties of rebel provincials...Lieutenant-Colonel Smith finding, after he had advanced some miles on his march, that the country had been alarmed by the

firing of guns and ringing of bells, dispatched six companies of light-infantry, in order to secure two bridges on different roads beyond Concord, who, upon their arrival at Lexington, found a body of the country people under arms, on a green close to the road; and upon the King's Troops marching up to them, in order to inquire the reason of their being so assembled, they went off in great confusion, and several guns were fired upon the King's troops from behind a stone wall, and also from the meeting-house and other houses, by which one man was wounded, and Major Pitcairn's horse shot in two places. In consequence of this attack by the rebels, the troops returned the fire and killed several of them. After which the detachment marched on to Concord without any thing further happening.

Newspaper account from The London Gazette, June 10, 1775

Document 6

There is a certain sliding over and indeterminateness in describing the beginning of the firing. Major Pitcairn who was a good man in a bad cause, insisted upon it to the day of his death, that the colonists fired first...He does not say that he saw the colonists fire first. Had he said it, I would have believed him, being a man of integrity and honor. He expressly says he did not see who fired first; and yet believed the peasants began. His account is this-that riding up to them he ordered them to disperse; which they not doing instantly, he turned about to order his troops so to draw out as to surround and disarm them. As he turned he saw a gun in a peasant's hand from behind a wall, flash in the pan without going off; and instantly or very soon two or three guns went off by which he found his horse wounded and also a man near him wounded. These guns he did not see, but believing they could not come from his own people, doubted not and so asserted that they came from our people; and that thus they began the attack. The impetuosity of the King's Troops were such that a promiscuous, uncommanded but general fire took place, which Pitcairn could not prevent; though he struck his staff or sword downwards with all earnestness as a signal to forbear or cease firing. This account Major Pitcairn himself gave Mr. Brown of Providence who was seized with flour and carried to Boston a few days after the battle; and Gov. Sessions told it to me.

From the diary of Ezra Stiles, president of Yale College, entry for August 21, 1775

Document 7

In April 1775, General Gage, the military governor of Massachusetts, sent out a body of troops to take possession of military stores at Concord, a short distance from Boston. At Lexington, a handful of "embattled farmers," who had been tipped off by Paul Revere, barred the way. The "rebels" were ordered to disperse. They stood their ground. The English fired a volley of shots that killed eight patriots. It was not long before the swift-riding Paul Revere spread the news of this new atrocity to the neighboring colonies. The patriots of all New England, although still a handful, were now to fight the English.

Transcribed from The United States: Story of a Free People, by S. Steinberg, published Allyn & Bacon (1963).

Document 8

To the best of my recollection about 4 o'clock in the morning being the 19th of April the 5 front companies was ordered to load which we did...It was at Lexington when we saw one of their companies drawn up in regular order. Major Pitcairn of the Marines second in command called to them to disperse, but their not seeming willing he desired us to mind our space which we did when they gave us a fire then run off to get behind a wall. We had one man wounded of our Company in the leg, his name was Johnson, also Major Pitcairn's horse was shot in the flank; we returned their salute, and before we proceeded on our march from Lexington I believe we killed and wounded either 7 or 8 men.

Ensign Jeremy Lister, youngest of the British officers at Lexington, in a personal narrative written in 1782

