Some parents want to participate in the evening debate. We have designed a few roles you may want to adopt in order to present various points of view. Again we wish to stimulate the students’ expression rather than presenting a play or dominating the discussion with our knowledge. Please feel free to embellish these suggested roles within the 1774 framework.

Revolutionary War Biographies

Bio #1

Your father was killed in the French and Indian War in 1762. Funds for your education had to go to keep the family alive. An older brother eventually indentured you to cover family debts and save the farm in Weymouth for himself. You learned the trade of a cooper (barrel maker) along with making deliveries to the harbor’s ships.

The Boston Massacre four years ago left you with a musket wound in the thigh and your best friend dead. The owner of the cooper business is a strong loyalist so you had no opportunity to express your own feelings about the incident. You finished your indenture two months ago and have a small savings from creating boxes from wood scraps. Now you are working as a cooper and also making furniture in a shop you hope to purchase from the aging owner. You are becoming a “man to be trusted” at the Liberty Tree gatherings. You particularly hate to see raw lumber shipped from the harbor since it could be used to encourage American manufacturing.

A friend enticed you to come on this voyage before settling into your profession and marrying. Your fiancé is not pleased with your plans to go to sea. She thinks that times have become very unstable. She supports the patriot cause, sometimes more adamantly than you. There are rumors of the formation of a Massachusetts militia for fighting the British. Your fiancé wants you to join.

Sailing is less of a lark than you expected. Still the trip may yield some productive contacts for the cooperage business as well as some associates for the patriot cause.
Bio #2

You are the neighbor and fellow Harvard alumnus of James Otis, originator of the phrase “No taxation without representation”. You knew him when he was an ardent loyalist and Attorney General for the admiralty court. Both of you have read John Locke and frequently discuss the ‘Natural Rights’ of man. Neither you nor Otis supports the Writs of Assistance which allow the admiralty court to search homes and businesses for smuggled goods. Otis left his position of Attorney General over the writs. The destructive search of your warehouses led to your radicalization and alienation from the British government.

Rum manufacturing has made your family one of the wealthiest in Boston. Your son, also educated at Harvard, was the physician who attended James Otis after he was beaten by loyalists in 1769. Your conversations with Otis are becoming less frequent as his lucid periods became shorter. You took over most of his duties for the Committees of Correspondence.

The night of the Boston Tea Party you were at your wife’s side. She passed away just after the new year. This trip as a common sailor is a way to get away from the house full of memories and to better understand the motivations of uneducated men. Life at sea is testing your convictions that government should serve all men in their pursuit of life, liberty, and property.

Bio #3

You are a tutor from Scotland with several students from prominent families of the Lexington/Concord area. You walk a fine line of encouraging the students to explore ideas of enlightenment, government that preserves ‘natural rights’, and the flaws of mercantilism while trying to appease the loyalists who are half your livelihood.

You are not welcome at Munroe Tavern where the loyalist fathers of your students congregate. Your accent and different religious convictions combined with an ‘education above your station’ make you suspect without even considering your opposing political and philosophical beliefs. So instead you raise a glass at Buckman’s tavern were the class strata varies and the rhetoric runs toward the patriot cause.
Your wife and daughters are clever and adamant about home weaving and purchasing American wares so as not to feed the coffers of England. They have encouraged you to take this break from teaching for several reasons. Your youngest son is considering the life of a sailor. You began a book of poems inspired by the sea when emigrating from Scotland and they hope you will complete the work. And they fear that your time as a tutor may be limited as political unrest and intolerance grows.

Bio #4

You are a former stamp act administrator. Nine years ago, you were chased out of Grafton for attempting to enforce the edicts. People who had been members of the same church threatened to tar and feather you and burned your effigy. You view the patriots as a lawless mob being manipulated by a few rich and dishonest men.

You have managed your money well and have dealt in only British currency or coin all your life. Your print shop in Boston serves Governor Hutchinson and the Massachusetts royal government agencies. You are prominent in the local church. The only criticism you have of England is the Quebec Act allowing French Canadian British subjects to practice Catholicism.

Your only living relative is a brother who has sailed the triangle trade merchant ships all his life. You have not heard from him since he sailed for the Caribbean three years ago. Rumors abound as to his whereabouts and activities. You signed on as a sailor to locate him.

Bio #5

You are a recently liberated indentured servant with skills in millinery and tailoring trades. You sold yourself into a three year indenture in order to immigrate with your family to America. At the last minute, your wife needed to stay behind in England to nurse her ailing father. Your young sons also remained in England and are becoming young men without your guidance.

Life in the colonies was not what you expected. The Americans have no respect for King and country. They are ungrateful for all the protection provided by the British soldiers. Rum consumption
contributes to many violent disputes. Repairs to hats and clothing exceed demands for new goods. You long for the more refined living you made in Liverpool. Neighbors mistrust you since you support the British interests and even church brings no solace.

You want to get home to England as soon as possible. You hope to acquire the sailing skills on this voyage to pass yourself off as an Ordinary Seaman and work your way back to Liverpool.

Bio #6

You are a wealthy Rhode Island merchant whose trade involves selling imports from England. You own three slaves. While you have friends and connections in Virginia, you think that colony’s interest in the revolution is to avoid paying debts incurred through difficulties in growing tobacco. As an honest and frugal business man you do not trust the rhetoric of these men.

Though you are basically honest, you did take advantage of the period of ‘salutary neglect’ when England did not enforce the Molasses Act or tariffs on non-British goods. However, unlike many of your peers, you acquiesce gracefully to the Sugar Act of 1764. This is based on gratitude that the British Navy has greatly curtailed piracy in the shipping lanes for your goods. You also had some personal experience with French privateers.

Your younger brother is an officer in the Rhode Island militia and fought in the French and Indian War. He is still hoping to become an officer in the regular British Army. You encourage his aspirations but recognize that colonists have a separate place in British social hierarchy. Still this trip to the Caribbean is an attempt to call in a favor from the British Colonel stationed in St. Lucia and get your brother a commission.