

The Hutchinson Affair Reading Comprehension

Name: _____

An Abridgement of What Are Called English Liberties

Thirteen letters from an anonymous source were dropped into Benjamin Franklin's lap in December 1772. When he opened them, he found a series of communications between Massachusetts governor Thomas Hutchinson, his lieutenant governor Andrew Oliver, and authorities from the English government. At the time, the American colonies were under rule from the British, but tensions were rising. Hutchinson's letters recommended that the English send more troops to Massachusetts to keep the colonists quiet, and endorsed harsh punishments for the colony. In the most significant line of the letters, Hutchinson stated that he didn't think the colonists could have all of the rights that they might have had in England, and said that an "abridgement of what are called English liberties" was necessary.

Letters are Leaked

Franklin knew that if the letters got out to the public, the resulting anger and shock would be severe. He showed the letters to Samuel Adams. Later, Speaker of the Massachusetts House Thomas Cushing asked Franklin if the letters could be presented before the House. Franklin agreed, but said they could only be shown to other people - not copied or published. However, Samuel Adams deeply disliked Hutchinson, and began hinting at the contents of the letters in assemblies and to the public. He leaked certain parts of the letters to increase public interest, angering Hutchinson. Finally, in June 1773, the letters were published in the Boston Gazette.

Anger in the Colonies

As Franklin had predicted, the public response was intense. The people were furious at Hutchinson, particularly for his statement that the colonists should lose some of their freedoms. They took it as a sign that the British were determined to keep the colonists from being free, and that revolution might be necessary. Within days, the Massachusetts General Court passed a resolution that removed both Hutchinson and Oliver from office.

Merry Christmas!

In England, government officials were angry at what had happened. They demanded to know who had originally leaked the letters. How had they slipped out of Hutchinson's hands? People pointed fingers, desperate to catch the culprit, leading to a sword duel between two men in early December 1773. With lives on the line, Franklin revealed his part in the Hutchinson affair by publishing a letter on Christmas Day. He said that he had received the letters and that he had passed them to other people, but not from whom he had gotten them. Franklin himself was called before the Privy Council - a group of advisors to the King, and was accused of thievery and dishonor.

Still a Mystery Today

The original leaker of the Hutchinson Letters remains a mystery to this day. Some historians think it might have been former Massachusetts governor Thomas Pownall, who had similar political views to Franklin and whose brother John was a colonial secretary with access to colonial administration buildings. But until new evidence arises, a true answer might never be reached.

- 1. Whose involvement in the Hutchinson Affair has never been explicitly confirmed?**
 - a. Samuel Adams
 - b. Benjamin Franklin
 - c. John Pownall
 - d. Andrew Oliver

- 2. Hutchinson wrote that an abridgement of the colonists' English liberties, or freedoms, was necessary. Which of the following is the best synonym for abridgement in context?**
 - a. Decrease
 - b. Emphasis
 - c. Elongation
 - d. Battle

- 3. Infer why Benjamin Franklin did not want the Hutchinson letters to be copied or published, based on evidence from the article.**
 - a. Franklin was a friend of Hutchinson's and wanted to protect him.
 - b. Franklin did not want a dangerous public uproar if the letters were published.
 - c. Franklin had also written letters to the English government and did not want them to be leaked.
 - d. Franklin wanted to be the only one with the power to distribute the letters.

- 4. Which of the following events happened first?**
 - a. Andrew Oliver is removed from office.
 - b. Samuel Adams begins teasing the public with snippets of the letters.
 - c. Benjamin Franklin lets Thomas Cushing show the letters to the Massachusetts House.
 - d. Two men sword duel over the original leaker of the letters.

- 5. On December 16, 1773, the Boston Tea Party occurred, during which angry colonists threw boxes of British tea into the Boston Harbor. Infer the relationship between the Hutchinson letters and the Boston Tea Party.**
 - a. The Hutchinson letters had no influence on the Tea Party since they occurred in different states.
 - b. Tensions in Massachusetts continued to rise after the Hutchinson letters, leading to the Tea Party.
 - c. The Hutchinson letters calmed things down in Massachusetts, making the Tea Party less severe than it would have been.
 - d. Thomas Hutchinson was a key figure in the rebellion and led the efforts at the Boston Tea Party.

- 6. Which of the following best describes Benjamin Franklin's role in the Hutchinson Affair?**
 - a. Cautionary and deliberate
 - b. Selfish and thoughtless
 - c. Reckless and wild
 - d. Fearful and careless

- 7. Which of the following documents might shed light on who leaked the Hutchinson letters?**
 - a. A letter from Thomas Pownall to his wife in June 1771
 - b. A copy of one of the Hutchinson letters in John Pownall's room
 - c. A newspaper clipping from the Boston Gazette in June 1773
 - d. A photo of Thomas and John Pownall together in 1772