

James Otis challenges searches

1761 | Grade 4 · Explain with evidence

Words to know

search — look for something

power — the ability to make something happen

limit — a boundary on what is allowed or possible

Look closely



Modern topic illustration created for Massachusetts History Explorers. It is not a historical artifact.

Read the story

James Otis spoke in a Boston court against broad search papers called writs of assistance. Officials used them to search for goods. Otis argued that government power needed limits. He did not win the case.

The argument influenced debates about colonial rights. John Adams remembered it later as important. A later memory is different from a record made on the day of an event.

Think, talk, and show evidence

1. State the main idea. Support it with two details from the reading.
2. Explain a change or challenge described in the text. Which words support your answer?
3. Use one vocabulary word in a new sentence about this event.
4. What can the image and caption help explain? What can they not tell you?

Follow-up reading: Otis writes about colonial rights

1764

James Otis wrote about colonists' rights. He questioned taxes made without their consent. People disagreed about Parliament's power. These arguments helped build the road to revolution. A slogan is shorter than a full argument.

Otis published *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*. Do not confidently credit him with inventing every later taxation slogan. His pamphlet belonged to a larger debate about representation.

Compare the two readings. Explain one similarity or difference using a detail from each. Their order does not prove that one caused the other.

Teacher guide & source trail

Original classroom adaptation. Suggested reading levels are instructional choices, not standardized readability certifications. Use professional judgment and learner feedback.

ELA practice: RI.4.1: refer to details; RI.4.2: main idea and summary; RI.4.3: explain events; RI.4.7: interpret visual information; W.4.2 and SL.4.1: explain and discuss.

These tasks support selected skills in the [Massachusetts 2017 ELA framework](#); they do not establish mastery of an entire standard.

Answer guidance

Factual anchor: James Otis spoke in a Boston court against broad search papers called writs of assistance. Officials used them to search for goods. Otis argued that government power needed limits. He did not win the case. The argument influenced debates about colonial rights. John Adams remembered it later as important. A later memory is different from a record made on the day of an event.

Accept accurate main ideas and explanations supported by the text. Vocabulary meanings are in the opening word bank. For picture questions, use the caption and credit below; distinguish what is visible from what is inferred. For comparison, accept a specific connection supported by both readings. Do not require personal accounts of trauma.

Continue the inquiry

[Research source for this event ↗](#)

[Research source for follow-up ↗](#)

[Event page, accessible HTML reading, and vocabulary game ↗](#)

Image: Original site illustration.

[Image source and rights record ↗](#)

The PDF contains selectable English text and embedded fonts. For adjustable text and browser reading tools, use the event's [HTML page](#). External sources may need adult guidance.