

The Boston Massacre

March 5, 1770 | Grade 8 · Analyze & connect

Teacher note: this topic includes loss, violence, discrimination, or criminal allegations. Preview and choose a suitable reading together. No reenactment of harm is needed.

Words to know

account — a description of what happened

evidence — information that helps support or question a claim

persuade — try to convince someone

Look closely



A hand-colored 1770 print shows British soldiers in a row firing at Bostonians, with people falling in the foreground.

Read the story

British soldiers fired during a tense clash in Boston. Five people died, including Crispus Attucks. Pictures and stories spread. Different accounts did not describe every detail in the same way.

John Adams helped defend the soldiers at trial. Paul Revere's engraving promoted the Patriot cause. Its arrangement of people and labels makes it evidence of persuasion, not a neutral photograph.

A timeline helps put events in order, but order alone does not establish a cause. People acted with the knowledge and choices available to them at the time. Records can reveal some experiences while overlooking others. Compare a contemporary source with a later interpretation. Explain the source's purpose, the detail it contributes, and a question it cannot answer on its own.

Think, talk, and show evidence

1. Write an objective summary. Separate the event from the writer's interpretation of its importance.
2. Explain a cause, consequence, or continuity supported by the text. Identify a connection that would need more evidence.
3. Open the research source. Identify its creator or institution and purpose. Is it a contemporary source, a later account, or both?
4. Evaluate the image's date and purpose. Explain one useful detail and one limitation without treating an illustration as eyewitness evidence.

Follow-up reading: The Boston Tea Party

December 16, 1773

Protesters boarded ships and dumped 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor. They opposed British tea policy and taxation. This was a protest, not a party with cups and cakes. Britain answered with restrictions.

The Tea Act connected taxation with East India Company trade. Some participants disguised themselves as Native people; that does not mean a Native nation organized the action. The protest escalated conflict.

Write a paragraph comparing these events. Use evidence from both passages, distinguish chronology from causation, and identify a perspective missing from the readings.

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.8.1: cite evidence; RI.8.2: objective summary; RI.8.6: analyze purpose and viewpoint; RH.6–8.1–2: evidence and summary in history; W.8.2: explanatory writing.

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

Answer guidance

Factual anchor: British soldiers fired during a tense clash in Boston. Five people died, including Crispus Attucks. Pictures and stories spread. Different accounts did not describe every detail in the same way. John Adams helped defend the soldiers at trial. Paul Revere’s engraving promoted the Patriot cause. Its arrangement of people and labels makes it evidence of persuasion, not a neutral photograph.

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: Paul Revere Jr., after Henry Pelham. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910. Public domain.

[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.