

The 54th Massachusetts

1863 | Grade 4 · Explain with evidence

Words to know

service — work done to help others

equality — having equal rights or standing

courage — acting even when something is difficult or frightening

Look closely



Veterans at the 1897 dedication of the 54th Regiment memorial

Read the story

The 54th Massachusetts was an early Black regiment raised in the North during the Civil War. Soldiers fought for the Union while facing unequal treatment. Their service challenged racist claims about Black courage.

Its enlisted men were Black; its officers were white. The regiment's assault on Fort Wagner took place in South Carolina. Soldiers also protested unequal pay, linking military service with demands for rights.

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: A telephone carries speech

1876

Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Watson worked in Boston on carrying speech by wire. In March 1876, Watson heard Bell's spoken request through an experimental telephone. Communication was changing.

Telephone development involved many inventors and disputed claims. Bell's successful experiment was a milestone rather than the work of one person alone. Ask how an invention spread and who could afford access.

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: The 54th Massachusetts was an early Black regiment raised in the North during the Civil War. Soldiers fought for the Union while facing unequal treatment. Their service challenged racist claims about Black courage. Its enlisted men were Black; its officers were white. The regiment's assault on Fort Wagner took place in South Carolina. Soldiers also protested unequal pay, linking military service with demands for rights.

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: [Massachusetts Historical Society / National Park Service](#)

[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.