

A telephone carries speech

1876 | Grade 8 · Analyze & connect

Words to know

invent — create a new tool, process, or idea

message — information sent to someone

cooperate — work together

Look closely



Portrait of Alexander Graham Bell.

Read the story

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.

A scientific or engineering milestone is part of a longer process. A patent, experiment, public demonstration, and widely used product are different events. Investigate the work of teams as well as famous individuals. Ask what the evidence demonstrates, who could benefit, and what limitations remained. A later success does not mean people could predict it at the time.

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: Boston Symphony Orchestra begins

1881

The Boston Symphony Orchestra gave its first concert in 1881. Musicians worked together to make a large sound. Concerts became part of the city's cultural life. An orchestra includes many kinds of skilled work.

Henry Lee Higginson helped establish the orchestra. Institutions grow through performers, staff, supporters, and audiences. Ask whose music gets performed and who can participate as listeners or musicians.

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: 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.

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: Unknown photographer · [CC0](#)

[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.