

The Great Molasses Flood

1919 | Grade 4 · Explain with evidence

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

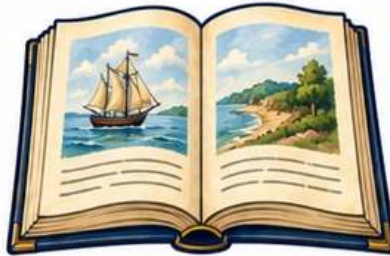
Words to know

damage — harm that makes something less safe or useful

responsibility — a duty to care for something or answer for an action

protect — keep someone or something from harm

Look closely



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

Read the story

A large storage tank broke in Boston's North End. Molasses rushed through nearby streets. Twenty-one people died. The disaster harmed workers and neighbors and raised questions about industrial safety.

The January 15 disaster involved engineering, business responsibility, and regulation. Its unusual substance should not turn human loss into a joke. Examine records of the tank and the people affected.

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: The Boston Police Strike

1919

Many Boston police officers stopped work during a labor dispute. Disorder followed. Governor Calvin Coolidge called in the State Guard. The event brought national attention to conflicts over work and public safety.

Investigate officers' working conditions alongside government responses. Coolidge's public statements reveal his position, not every participant's experience. A source's authority does not make it neutral.

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: A large storage tank broke in Boston’s North End. Molasses rushed through nearby streets. Twenty-one people died. The disaster harmed workers and neighbors and raised questions about industrial safety. The January 15 disaster involved engineering, business responsibility, and regulation. Its unusual substance should not turn human loss into a joke. Examine records of the tank and the people affected.

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.