The Cocoanut Grove fire

1942 | 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

protect — keep someone or something from harm

damage — harm that makes something less safe or useful

change — become different

Look closely

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

Read the story

A terrible fire struck the Cocoanut Grove nightclub in Boston. Four hundred ninety-two people died. The disaster led to changes in fire safety and advances in caring for burn injuries.

Investigators examined exits, materials, and crowd conditions. Disaster history can explain why safety rules change. Students should follow current school plans; this reading does not replace emergency guidance.

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: Jackie Robinson's Boston tryout

1945

Jackie Robinson tried out for the Boston Red Sox in 1945, but the team did not sign him. In 1947 he broke modern Major League Baseball's color barrier with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

The Boston tryout occurred two years before his Dodgers debut. Racism shaped baseball opportunities. The Red Sox did not integrate their major-league team until Pumpsie Green joined in 1959.

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: A terrible fire struck the Cocoanut Grove nightclub in Boston. Four hundred ninety-two people died. The disaster led to changes in fire safety and advances in caring for burn injuries. Investigators examined exits, materials, and crowd conditions. Disaster history can explain why safety rules change. Students should follow current school plans; this reading does not replace emergency guidance.

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.