

Chappaquiddick and public accountability

1969 | 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

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

record — information kept so people can use it later

accountability — being expected to explain and take responsibility for actions

Look closely



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

Read the story

Mary Jo Kopechne died after a car driven by Senator Edward Kennedy went into water on Chappaquiddick. The event raised serious questions about actions, reporting, and responsibility.

Kennedy's delayed report and later legal proceedings became part of the public record. Keep Kopechne's life visible, rather than reducing the event to its effect on a politician's career.

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: Massachusetts challenges the Vietnam War

1970

Massachusetts tried to bring a court challenge connected to the Vietnam War and the power to send its residents to fight. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the proposed case.

This was not a Massachusetts court decision declaring the war unconstitutional. *Massachusetts v. Laird* illustrates the difference between a legal argument, a court accepting a case, and a ruling on its merits.

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: Mary Jo Kopechne died after a car driven by Senator Edward Kennedy went into water on Chappaquiddick. The event raised serious questions about actions, reporting, and responsibility. Kennedy's delayed report and later legal proceedings became part of the public record. Keep Kopechne's life visible, rather than reducing the event to its effect on a politician's career.

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.