

Examining the Boston Massacre Through Primary Sources

Primary sources

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Grade Level	5th Grade	**Time Frame**	2-3 class period(s)
Subject	Social Studies	**Duration**	120 minutes
Course	U.S. History		

Essential Question

What role do perspective and propaganda play in the recounting of events like the Boston Massacre?

Summary

Students will use primary sources to explore and help them explain the Boston Massacre. They will compare two images depicting the event and draw conclusions about what happened based on what the artist chose to depict. Students will examine the roles of perspective and propaganda with regard to the images. They will then read primary source depositions from the ensuing Boston Massacre trial. Finally, students will read a researched account of the Boston Massacre and act out their own version to draw conclusions about what happened.

Snapshot

Engage

Students engage in an I Notice, I Wonder activity to analyze an image of the Boston Massacre.

Explore

Students compare and contrast two images depicting the Boston Massacre, prompting a discussion of how there can be different sides or perspectives to a historical event.

Explain

Students use an Inverted Pyramid to structure a discussion about varying perspectives of the Boston Massacre.

Extend

Students read a researched account about the Boston Massacre, then perform a short skit that demonstrates a perspective of the event.

Evaluate

Students complete an Exit Ticket that asks them to respond to one of three questions about the Boston Massacre.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies Practices (5th Grade))

5.3.1H: Boston Massacre

Attachments

- Depictions-of-the-Event-Examining-the-Boston-Massacre.docx
- Exit-Ticket-Examining-the-Boston-Massacre.docx
- I-Notice-I-Wonder-Examining-the-Boston-Massacre.docx
- Lesson-Slides-Examining-the-Boston-Massacre.pptx
- Primary-Source-Accounts-Examining-the-Boston-Massacre.docx
- Reading-Passage-Examining-the-Boston-Massacre.docx

Materials

- Lesson slides (attached)
- I Notice, I Wonder handout (attached, one per student)
- Exit Ticket (attached; one half-sheet per student)
- Depictions of the Event handout (attached; optional, one per student, printed single-sided)
- Boston Massacre Trial Depositions (attached; one per group)
- Boston Massacre Reading Passage (attached; one per student)

Engage

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to guide the instruction. Begin by organizing students into groups of two or three. Display **slide 3,** showing an image that depicts the Boston Massacre. (Or, pass out Page 1 of the attached **Depictions of the Event** handout if you prefer to provide students with a printed copy.) The title of the image, "The Bloody Massacre," has been cropped out. Don't share the title of the image or introduce the term "Boston Massacre" to students just yet.

Distribute the attached I Notice, I Wonder handout and ask students to examine the image closely, making observations ("I Notice") and generating questions and inferences ("I Wonder") about the image.



Image 1 - Boston Massacre as Portrayed by Paul Revere

Prompting Student Responses

You might suggest that students look at objects, people, actions, symbols, the setting, etc. Ask them to describe what seems to be happening and what evidence supports this idea. The latter might help students generate ideas for the “I Wonder" part of the chart.

After pairs or groups have completed the activity, have the class come together and invite students to share their interpretations of the image, including what they wrote on their I Notice, I Wonder handouts. As the class shares out, record the collected observations on a class T-chart.

Explore

Reveal to students that the image they just examined is from an engraving made by Paul Revere representing what became known as the Boston Massacre.

Display **slide 4,** which briefly describes several facts associated with the Boston Massacre, and read through the slide with the class.

- The Boston Massacre occurred March 5, 1770 when British soldiers killed five protesters outside the Customs House in Boston.
- The protest was against the British occupants who were sent to Boston to enforce taxation measures.
- The British soldiers fired into the crowd, killing three people instantly. Two more later died from their wounds, while several others were injured.

Ask students to consider these facts as they reexamine the image. After they have had time to reflect on the image again, ask the following questions:

- According to this image, which people appear to be the aggressors in the situation?
- Which people appear to be the victims?
- What evidence makes you think this?
- If this image were the only information you had to guide you in recounting the story of the Boston Massacre, what story would you tell?

Next, show **slide 5** (or, if you prefer, pass out the second image from the Depictions of the Event handout). Have students compare this image to the first one.



Image 2 - The Boston Massacre

As they compare the images, ask the following questions, pausing after each for student responses:

- What do you see in this image?
- According to this second image, which people appear to be the aggressors?
- Which people appear to be the victims?
- How does this representation of the Boston Massacre differ from that of the first image that we examined?
- If this were the only information you had to guide you in recounting the story of the Boston Massacre, what story would you tell?

Transition to **slide 6.** Pass out copies of the attached **Primary Source Accounts** handout, containing eyewitness depositions regarding the Boston Massacre. Inform students that, in the aftermath of the event, the British soldiers were granted a trial so that their actions could be fairly judged. The handout contains depositions, or sworn testimony, from people on both sides who witnessed the event.

Ask students to once again consider the depictions of the event as they read the trial depositions. As they do so, they should discuss the photos with their partners or groups to decide whose story the photos and accounts are sharing—the patriots' or the British soldiers'.

Teacher's Note: Reading The Depositions

Sources B and C are rather lengthy. Consider using the Jigsaw strategy to break the reading into chunks or combining students into larger groups for discussion.

After students have had time to read and consider the accounts, use the Partner Speaks strategy to structure a discussion. Have students share what their partner said with either their group or the whole class, if time allows.

Explain

Display **slide 7.** Explain that, after the Boston Massacre occurred on March 5, 1770, a very important question remained to be solved. Tell students that they will be looking at and considering a few discussion questions with their groups:

1. Were the British soldiers provoked to fire and, therefore, acting in self-defense? Or were the colonists murdered?
2. How could two such different images exist of the same event?
3. How do the two images illustrate propaganda?

Use the Inverted Pyramid strategy to structure the overall discussion. With this strategy, students first analyze the discussion questions in pairs, then they share their ideas in small groups, and finally they join in a whole-class discussion. Requiring students to repeat their thoughts each time their group expands gives them multiple opportunities to vet and refine their own thoughts. Repeatedly defending their ideas builds confidence, and they are also encouraged to learn from others and share others' thoughts.

Teacher's Note: Perspective And Propaganda

To support this discussion, ensure that the class is considering the difference in ***perspectives*** between the British and the colonists. Also, review the term propaganda. Make sure that students understand that propaganda is a type of message aimed at influencing peoples' opinions or behavior. Propaganda often provides only partial information or is deliberately misleading. If perspective and propaganda are not already on your word wall or T-chart, this is a great opportunity to discuss these vocabulary words and add them.

Extend

Divide students into groups and pass out copies of the attached **Reading Passage** handout. Tell students that they will be reading background information about the Boston Massacre, then preparing a short dramatic scene about the event. The reading passage provides a more in-depth account of the Boston Massacre, with information gathered from various cited sources. The passage is an example of a researched synopsis that seeks to convey the story without propaganda or bias, though doing so can be difficult.

Teacher's Note: Scaffolding Learning For Reading Levels

The Lexile range of the reading passage is 810–1000, or around a 4th- or 5th-grade level. Depending on the reading capability and chemistry of the class, you might choose to read the passage aloud as a whole group.

Display **slide 8.** Give groups 15–30 minutes to prepare their scenes. Scenes should be no longer than approximately 5 minutes.

Optional Extension

As an additional extension, assign a perspective from which each group dramatizes the scene. For example, from a Loyalist perspective, a Patriot perspective, or a neutral perspective. Be sure to review these terms with your students.

Invite each group to perform their scenes for the whole class. Class discussion between or after the performances should discuss the group's approach and compare and contrast the differences between each performance and how each group's perspective was alike and different.

Evaluate

Display **slide 9.** Distribute copies of the attached **Exit Ticket** and give students the opportunity to reflect on their learning using the Exit Ticket strategy**.** Have students choose one of three questions to answer.

1. What events occurred on March 5, 1770 that became known as the Boston Massacre?
2. What role did perspective and propaganda play in the recounting of the events of the Boston Massacre?
3. In what ways did the Boston Massacre lead to the outbreak of revolution in the colonies?

Have students hand in the completed Exit Ticket to you as an assessment for the lesson.

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Bell ringers and exit tickets. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f505d6f2
- K20 Center. (n.d.). I notice, I wonder. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f507d1a7
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Inverted pyramid. Strategies.https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f507a918
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). T-chart. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/816ff8a793dedf6ff5046224f8035a79
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- National Archives at College Park. (1770). The Boston Massacre [Image]. Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved May 28, 2020 from https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:%22The_Boston_Massacre%22,_03-05-1770_-_NARA_-_513326.jpg&oldid=342540992