

The Boston Massacre: Paul Revere and Captain Thomas Preston, 1770



The Boston Massacre: Paul Revere and Captain Thomas Preston, 1770

BY SANDRA TRENHOLM (created in 2015, revised in 2024)

Sandra Trenholm is the director and curator of the Gilder Lehrman Collection.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: Three 45-minute class periods

UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on visual and textual primary source materials. These skills will enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate documents and other resources of historical significance.

In this three-lesson unit, students will learn about the Boston Massacre and analyze Paul Revere’s depiction of the event in the engraving *The Bloody Massacre in King-Street*. They will also have the opportunity to “read like a detective” and compare the engraving with a description of the event by someone who was actually present, British officer Captain Thomas Preston.

Students will be able to

- Identify important elements in an image
- Evaluate a written description of an event
- Draw inferences from primary source documents
- Form an opinion about the accuracy and effectiveness of documents, citing specifics in oral and written responses
- Explain the significance of a historical event (e.g., the Boston Massacre)

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did American revolutionaries like Paul Revere explain why patriots opposed the British?
- According to Preston, what actions by Bostonians made him fear for his life?
- How do the details in Captain Thomas Preston’s account compare with the details in Paul Revere’s engraving?
- How should historians decide what is true when weighing evidence that disagrees?

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7: Integrate visual information (e.g., charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.1: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content. a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

MATERIALS

- Source 1: Paul Revere's engraving *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street Boston on March 5th 1770 by a Party of the 29th Reg.*, Boston, 1770, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01868
- Analyzing an Image activity sheet
- Teacher's Resource: A Guide to Paul Revere's *The Bloody Massacre*, 1770 from "Paul Revere's engraving of the Boston Massacre, 1770," Spotlight on a Primary Source, History Resources, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/paul-reveres-engraving-boston-massacre-1770
- Source 2: Transcript of the poem from Paul Revere's engraving *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street* (Boston, 1770), The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01868
- Summary Organizer 1: "The Bloody Massacre"
- Magnifying glass (optional)
- Overhead projector, Smartboard, or similar device
- Source 3: An excerpt from Captain Thomas Preston's Deposition, March 12, 1770, "Case of Capt. Thomas Preston of the 29th Regiment," in *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts 7: Transactions, 1900–1902* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1905), 7–10.
- Summary Organizers 2–6: Capt. Thomas Preston's Deposition
- Massacre or Tragic Mishap? activity sheet

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Origins and Invention of the “Boston Massacre”

by Denver Brunsman, The George Washington University

On the night of March 5, 1770, a confrontation between British soldiers and a Boston crowd resulted in the deaths of five American colonists. The Boston Massacre, as American patriots called the event, grew out of long-running tensions between the British government and its American colonies, particularly Massachusetts. In turn, the deadly encounter deepened the imperial crisis that would explode into the American Revolutionary War five years later.

In October 1768, the first of more than two thousand British soldiers began to occupy Boston. They came at the request of the Massachusetts colonial governor and customs officials in response to a series of escalating protests. Massachusetts took the lead among the American colonies in resisting British economic regulations and the Townshend Duties, taxes on certain imports that the colonists could buy only from Britain, including tea, paper, glass, lead, and painter’s colors.

The troops arrived to restore calm, and for a short time the measure worked. By late 1769, however, the British occupation bore out Benjamin Franklin’s prediction from several years earlier about what would happen if soldiers were sent into the colonies: “They will not find a rebellion; they may indeed make one.” The Sons of Liberty regularly clashed with the troops, who often competed with colonists for part-time work when they were not on duty.

On March 5, 1770, a lone British sentry guarded the hated customs house on King Street that held the imperial government’s revenue. A crowd hurled snowballs and rocks, prompting the soldier to call for help. Eight soldiers, commanded by Captain Thomas Preston, rushed to his aid. The crowd’s violence escalated until one soldier discharged his musket, possibly by accident, which led other soldiers to fire their weapons. Crispus Attucks, a maritime worker of African and American Indian descent, was likely the first person killed.

A propaganda war followed the tragedy as both patriots and loyalists published their versions of the event. The patriots triumphed in large part due to an engraving by Paul Revere. Based on an earlier engraving by the artist Henry Pelham, Revere’s depiction of the events on King Street as a “Bloody Massacre” helped to cement the image of bloodthirsty British soldiers firing maliciously into an innocent Boston crowd.

The radical patriot lawyers John Adams and Josiah Quincy Jr., who believed that every accused person deserved a fair trial, defended the soldiers brilliantly. Captain Preston’s trial ran from October 24 to October 30 at the Queen Street Courthouse. The central issue concerned whether or not Preston gave the order to fire on the civilians. Preston denied that he gave an order to fire and was supported by three defense witnesses, while four witnesses for the prosecution swore that he had given the order. The massacre label stood even after a Boston jury later acquitted Captain Preston and four of the soldiers of all charges. The court convicted two other soldiers of manslaughter, a relatively minor offense at the time, and they were branded on the thumb and released.

Although the Boston Massacre did not directly cause the American Revolution, it signified the first blood shed during the imperial crisis and the futility of British military coercion. Having lost the media battle over the violent encounter on King Street, the British government never fully regained the trust of its American colonists.

Denver Brunsman is an associate professor of history at The George Washington University. He is the author of the award-winning book The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World (2013), and coauthor of a leading US history textbook, Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People (2016; 2020).

LESSON 1

“THE BLOODY MASSACRE”

BY SANDRA TRENHOLM (created in 2015, revised in 2024)

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and gain a clear understanding of the content of Paul Revere’s print *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street*. They will analyze the visual components of the image as well as the verse at the bottom, draw logical inferences, and demonstrate these skills by writing a succinct summary of the events as depicted in the document.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- How did American revolutionaries like Paul Revere explain why patriots opposed the British?

MATERIALS

- Source 1: Paul Revere’s engraving *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street Boston on March 5th 1770 by a Party of the 29th Reg.*, Boston, 1770, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01868
- Analyzing an Image
- Teacher’s Resource: A Guide to Paul Revere’s *The Bloody Massacre*, 1770 from “Paul Revere’s engraving of the Boston Massacre, 1770,” Spotlight on a Primary Source, History Resources, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/paul-reveres-engraving-boston-massacre-1770
- Source 2: Transcript of the poem from Paul Revere’s engraving *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street* (Boston, 1770), The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01868
- Summary Organizer 1: “The Bloody Massacre”
- Magnifying glass (optional)
- Overhead projector, Smartboard, or similar device

PROCEDURE

1. Divide the class into critical-thinking groups of three to five students who will work together throughout Lessons 1 and 2. Give careful consideration to how students are grouped to ensure participation by all individuals.

Sandra Trenholm is the director and curator of the Gilder Lehrman Collection.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on visual and textual primary source materials. In this three-lesson unit, students will learn about the Boston Massacre and analyze both Paul Revere’s depiction of the event in the engraving *The Bloody Massacre in King-Street* and a description of the event by someone who was actually present, British officer Captain Thomas Preston.

2. You may share a brief explanation of the events of March 5, 1770, with the students. For example,

On the night of March 5, 1770, American colonists and British soldiers in Boston engaged in a violent confrontation. The soldiers fired on the crowd and killed five of the Bostonians. This event became known as the “Boston Massacre,” a rallying point for colonists against the presence of British troops throughout the colonies and against the Townshend Acts, which the British soldiers had been deployed to enforce. Paul Revere’s well-known engraving is but one version of the event.

Do not reveal additional information at this point since you want the students to use the documents to decipher the events.

2. Tell students they will “read like a detective” in order to analyze documents for clues as to what really happened on March 5, 1770. Explain that art is often used to shape viewers’ opinions about events or people. That purpose makes the art propaganda. Often the evidence in prints such as *The Bloody Massacre* requires a careful “reading” of the image to decipher the message. (A magnifying glass aids in the exploration of the image and may make the exercise more exciting for students, but is not necessary to complete the activity.)
3. Distribute Paul Revere’s engraving *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street* and the Analyzing an Image activity sheets. If possible, display the image so the entire class can see it. Ask the students to study the image for five minutes, discuss the image in their groups, and record their findings on their Analyzing an Image activity sheets.
4. As a class, discuss the elements in the image. Use the list in the Teacher’s Resource: A Guide to Paul Revere’s *The Bloody Massacre*, 1770, to help point out hidden elements that students may have overlooked. Throughout the discussion ask students, Why do you think Paul Revere included that in the print?
5. The following questions can help students explore the document and spark discussion:
 - What do you think is happening in this engraving?
 - What do you see that shapes your opinion or strikes you as interesting?
 - Examine the faces of the people in the image. How would you describe the British soldiers? How would you describe the colonists?
 - How many signs can you read in the print? What do they say? Where are they located?
 - Are there any unexpected figures in the print? Why do you think they are there?
 - According to this engraving, who is at fault in this violent encounter? How do you know?
6. Distribute the transcript of the poem appearing below the image on Revere’s print.
7. “Share read” the poem with the students. Have the students follow along silently while you begin reading aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading after the first verse. Continue to read along with the students, still serving as the model. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
8. Distribute Summary Organizer 1 with the text of the poem. Display the activity so the whole class can follow along with the process.
9. Explain that the first step is to select keywords from the text. These words are usually nouns or verbs. Don’t pick “connector” words (*are, is, the, and, so, etc.*). The number of keywords depends on the length of the text. In this relatively short poem, about ten keywords will be appropriate. Since the students must know the meaning of the words they choose, you will have opportunities to teach them how to use context clues, word analysis,

and dictionary skills. They can write down any words they cannot figure out on the back of their organizer for discussion at the end of the class.

10. Students will circle their selected words or write them in the Keywords section of the organizer.
11. Survey the class to find out what the most popular choices are. You can record them and have the class vote on the final choice, based on your guidance. The keywords for this text might include *unhappy*, *savage*, *bloody*, *fierce*, *enjoy*, *rage*, *sorrow*, *victims*, *Justice*, *villain*, and *Judge*. Now, no matter which words the students had previously selected, have them write the agreed-upon words in the Keywords section of the organizer.
12. Explain to the class that they will use the keywords to write one or two sentences that summarize the meaning of the poem. This should involve the students in discussion and negotiation. Record the final result in the Keyword Summary section of the organizer. For example, "People of Boston were unhappy that savage and fierce soldiers enjoyed causing bloody harm. This resulted in rage and sorrow for the victims who needed Justice."
13. Explain that the students will now restate the summary in their own words, not having to use the words in the poem. Again, this is a discussion and negotiation process. Record the restatement in the In Your Own Words section of the organizer.
14. To conclude the lesson and check for understanding, students will write a one- to two-paragraph response to the following prompt: Write a brief newspaper article describing the events of March 5, 1770, using evidence from Paul Revere's engraving and the accompanying poem. They may write their response on the bottom portion of the Analyzing an Image activity sheet.

LESSON 2

CAPTAIN THOMAS PRESTON'S DEPOSITION

BY SANDRA TRENHOLM (created in 2015, revised in 2024)

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and gain a clear understanding of the deposition of Captain Thomas Preston, who was the officer in charge of the British troops involved in the “Boston Massacre.” They will analyze the text, draw logical inferences, and write a succinct summary of the events related in the document.

Sandra Trenholm is the director and curator of the Gilder Lehrman Collection.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on visual and textual primary source materials. In this three-lesson unit, students will learn about the Boston Massacre and analyze both Paul Revere's depiction of the event in the engraving *The Bloody Massacre in King-Street* and a description of the event by someone who was actually present, British officer Captain Thomas Preston.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- According to Preston, what actions by Bostonians made him fear for his life?

MATERIALS

- Source 3: An excerpt from Captain Thomas Preston's Deposition, March 12, 1770, “Case of Capt. Thomas Preston of the 29th Regiment,” in *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts 7: Transactions, 1900–1902* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1905), 7–10.
- Summary Organizers 2–6: Capt. Thomas Preston's Deposition

PROCEDURE

- Students will return to their critical-thinking groups. Tell them that they will “read like a detective” to discover more about the events of March 5, 1770. You may share that Captain Thomas Preston was the officer in charge of the British soldiers and that he was put on trial after the events of March 5, 1770, but do not reveal additional information at this point since you want the students to use the documents to decipher the events.
- Vocabulary:** In this lesson students will encounter vocabulary they do not know. It would be overwhelming to give the definition for every unknown word when trying to create more independent learners. Because the students are working in groups, they can reason out the meanings of words in context. If the students are truly stuck, have them write down the words that are puzzling them and at the conclusion of the lesson, open those words up to a whole-class discussion. If the word is critical to the passage you can provide the meaning, but only as a last resort.
- Distribute the excerpt from Captain Thomas Preston's Deposition, March 12, 1770. Share read the text with the students as described in Lesson 1.
- Distribute copies of Summary Organizers 2–6. Model the process for Summary Organizer 2. Lead the groups in identifying ten keywords from the first paragraph of Preston's deposition as described in Lesson 1. Following discussion and negotiation, the agreed-upon keywords are placed in the Keyword section in the organizer. Lead the class through writing a keyword summary and restatement for the first paragraph.
- The groups will then continue with Summary Organizers 3–6, negotiating within the group to choose keywords, write a brief keyword summary, and restate the summary in their own words.

6. To conclude the lesson and check for understanding, students will write a one-to two-paragraph response to the following prompt: Write a brief newspaper article describing the events of March 5, 1770, using evidence from Captain Preston's deposition. This can be done in class or as a homework assignment.

LESSON 3

MASSACRE OR TRAGIC MISHAP?

BY SANDRA TRENHOLM (created in 2015, revised in 2024)

OVERVIEW

In this lesson the students will write a response to a prompt based on the evidence from the Revere engraving and accompanying poem and the deposition of Captain Preston. They must cite evidence from the primary sources to make their case.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do the details in Captain Thomas Preston's account compare with the details in Paul Revere's engraving?
- How should historians decide what is true when weighing evidence that disagrees?

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period

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MATERIALS

- Sources 1–3
- Completed Summary Organizers 1–6
- Newspaper article formative assessments from Lessons 1 and 2
- Massacre or Tragic Mishap? activity sheet

PROCEDURE

1. Students may complete the summative assessment activity individually or working with a partner. They will need access to the primary sources and completed activity sheets and formative assessments from Lessons 1 and 2.
2. The students will respond to the following prompt, calling on them to pull together what they have learned in the previous two lessons and evaluating the reliability of these two sources.

Prompt

You have studied two different accounts of what has become known as the Boston Massacre. Use the engraving, poem, and deposition as primary source evidence to compare Preston's account to Revere's and present your arguments.

John Adams was hired to defend Captain Thomas Preston in court when he was charged with murder. Prepare a legal brief for Adams so that he can defend his client, and anticipate what the other side will argue. This brief should consist of three paragraphs:

- a. What are the points of fact common to these accounts?

- b. What are the main points of fact on which there is disagreement?
 - c. What other types of primary sources would help you know what happened? What types of evidence might your opponents present in court?
3. You may choose to share the Historical Background information with the students as part of a class discussion of their analyses of the case.

Source 1: *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street by Paul Revere*

The BLOODY MASSACRE perpetrated in King-Street BOSTON on March 5th 1770 by a party of the 29th REG^t



Unhappy Boston! see thy Sons deplore,
Thy hallow'd Walks beset with guiltless Gore!
While faithless P—n and his savage Bards
With murderous Rancour stretch their blood-thirsty hands
Like fierce Barbarians grinning o'er their Prey
Approve the Carnage, and enjoy the Day

If scalding drops from Rage from Anguish Wring
If Speechless Sorrows lab'ring for a Tongue
If a weeping World can ought appease
If plaintive Ghosts of Victims such as these
If the Patriot's copious Tears for each are shed
A glorious Tribute which embalms the Dead

But know, Ere summons to that awful Genl.
Where JUSTICE strips the Murderer of his Soul,
Should venal C—ts the scandal of the Land,
Snatch the relentless Villain from her Hand,
Keen Execrations on this Plate infer'd
Shall reach a JUDGE who never can be brib'd.

*The unhappy Sufferers were Messrs SAM^l GRAY SAM^l MAVERICK, JAM^s CALDWELL, CRISPUS ATTUCKS & PAT^r CARR
Killed Six wounded two of them (CHRIST^l MONK & JOHN CLARK) Mortally*

(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01868)

NAME	PERIOD	DATE
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Analyzing an Image

Title _____

Creator _____

What do you see happening?

Writing Assignment:

Teacher's Resource: A Guide to Paul Revere's *The Bloody Massacre*, 1770

Here are a few of the elements Paul Revere used in his print to shape public opinion:

- The British are lined up and an officer is giving an order to fire, implying that the British soldiers are the aggressors.
- The colonists are shown reacting to the British when in fact they had attacked the soldiers.
- British faces are sharp and angular in contrast to the Americans' softer, more innocent features. This makes the British look more menacing.
- The British soldiers look like they are enjoying the violence, particularly the soldier at the far end.
- The colonists, who were mostly laborers, are dressed as gentlemen. Elevating their status could affect the way people perceived them.
- The only two signs in the image that you can read are "Butcher's Hall" and "Customs House," both hanging directly over the British soldiers.
- There is a distressed woman in the rear of the crowd. This played on eighteenth-century notions of chivalry.
- There appears to be a sniper in the window beneath the "Butcher's Hall" sign.
- Dogs tend to symbolize loyalty and fidelity. The dog in the print is not bothered by the mayhem behind him and is staring out at the viewer.
- The sky is illustrated in a way that seems to cast light on the British "atrocities."
- An injured or deceased Crispus Attucks is visible in the lower left-hand corner. In many other existing copies of this print, the figure in that location is not depicted as African American.
- The weather conditions depicted do not match the testimony presented at the soldiers' trial (no snow).
- The soldiers' stance indicates an aggressive, military posture.

Source 2: Transcript of the Poem from Paul Revere's Print *The Bloody Massacre*

Unhappy Boston! see thy Sons deplore,
Thy hallow'd Walks besmear'd with guiltless gore
While faithless P____n and his savage Bands
With murd'rous Rancour stretch their bloody Hands
Like fierce Barbarians grinning o'er their Prey
Approve the Carnage and enjoy the Day.

If scalding drops from Rage from Anguish Wrung
If Speechless Sorrows lab'ring for a Tongue
Or if a weeping World can ought appease
The plaintive Ghosts of Victims such as these:
The Patriot's copious Tears for each are shed.
A glorious Tribute which embalms the Dead.

But know, Fate summons to that awful Goal
Where Justice strips the Murd'rer of his Soul,
Should venal C____ts the scandal of the Land,
Snatch the relentless Villain from her Hand.
Keen Execrations on this Plate inscrib'd
Shall reach a Judge who never can be brib'd.

The unhappy Sufferers were Mesr's Sam'l Gray, Sam'l Maverick, James Caldwell, Crispus Attucks,
& Patk. Carr Killed Six wounded; two of them (Christ'r Monk & John Clark) Mortally.

Source: Paul Revere, *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street Boston on March 5th 1770 by a Party of the 29th Reg.*, Boston, 1770 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01868)

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Summary Organizer 1: "The Bloody Massacre"

Original Text

Unhappy Boston! see thy Sons deplore,
Thy hallow'd Walks besmear'd with guiltless gore
While faithless P____n and his savage Bands
With murd'rous Rancour stretch their bloody Hands
Like fierce Barbarians grinning o'er their Prey
Approve the Carnage and enjoy the Day.

If scalding drops from Rage from Anguish Wrung
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Keywords (8–10)

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

Source 3: An Excerpt from Captain Thomas Preston's Deposition, March 12, 1770

... On Monday Night about Eight o'clock two Soldiers were attacked and beat. But the Party of the Towns-People, in order to carry Matters to the utmost Length, broke into two Meeting-Houses, and rang the Alarm Bells, which I supposed was for Fire as usual, but was soon undeceived. About Nine some of the Guard came to and informed me, the Town-Inhabitants were assembling to attack the Troops, and that the Bells were ringing as the Signal for that Purpose, and not for Fire, and the Beacon intended to be fired to bring in the distant People of the Country. This, as I was Captain of the Day, occasioned my repairing immediately to the Main-Guard. In my Way there I saw the People in great Commotion, and heard them use the most cruel and horrid Threats against the Troops. In a few Minutes after I reached the Guard, about an hundred People passed it, and went towards the Custom-House, where the King's Money is lodged. They immediately surrounded the Sentinel posted there, and with Clubs and other Weapons threatened to execute their Vengeance on him. I was soon informed by a Townsman, their Intention was to carry off the Soldier from his Post, and probably murder him. On which I desired him to return for further Intelligence; and he soon came back and assured me he heard the Mob declare they would murder him.

This I feared might be a Prelude to their plundering the King's Chest. I immediately sent a non-commissioned Officer and twelve Men to protect both the Sentinel and the King's-Money, and very soon followed myself, to prevent (if possible) all Disorder; fearing lest the Officer and Soldiery by the Insults and Provocations of the Rioters, should be thrown off their Guard and commit some rash Act. They soon rushed through the People, and, by charging their Bayonets in half Circle, kept them at a little Distance. Nay, so far was I from intending the Death of any Person, that I suffered the Troops to go to the Spot where the unhappy Affair took Place, without any Loading in their Pieces, nor did I ever give Orders for loading them. This remiss Conduct in me perhaps merits Censure; yet it is Evidence, resulting from the Nature of Things, which is the best and surest that can be offered, that my Intention was not to act offensively, but the contrary Part, and that not without Compulsion. The Mob still increased, and were more outrageous, striking their Clubs or Bludgeons one against another, and calling out, "come on you Rascals, you bloody Backs, you Lobster Scoundrels; fire if you dare, G-d damn you, fire and be damn'd; we know you dare not;" and much more such Language was used.

At this Time I was between the Soldiers and the Mob, parleying with, and endeavouring all in my Power to persuade them to retire peaceably; but to no Purpose. They advanced to the Points of the Bayonets, struck some of them, and even the Muzzles of the Pieces, and seemed to be endeavouring to close with the Soldiers. On which some well-behaved Persons asked me if the Guns were charged; I replied, yes. They then asked me if I intended to order the Men to fire. I answered no, by no Means, observing to them, that I was advanced before the Muzzles of the Men's Pieces, and must fall a Sacrifice if they fired; that the Soldiers were upon the Half cock and charged Bayonets, and my giving the Word fire, under those Circumstances, would prove me no Officer. While I was thus speaking, one of the Soldiers, having received a severe Blow with a Stick, stepped a little on one Side, and instantly fired, on which turning to and asking him why he fired without Orders, I was struck with a Club on my Arm, which for sometime deprived me of the Use of it; which Blow, had it been placed on my Head, most probably would have destroyed me. On this a general Attack was made on the Men by a great Number of heavy Clubs, and Snow-Balls being thrown at them, by which all our Lives were in imminent Danger; some Persons at the same Time from behind calling out, "Damn your Bloods, why don't you fire?" Instantly three or four of the Soldiers fired, one after another, and directly after three more in the same Confusion and Hurry.

The Mob then ran away, except three unhappy Men who instantly expired, in which Number was Mr. Gray, at whose Rope-Walk the prior Quarrel took Place; one more is since dead, three others are dangerously, and four slightly wounded. The Whole of this melancholy Affair was transacted in almost 20 Minutes. On my asking the Soldiers why they fired without Orders, they said they heard the Word "Fire," and supposed it came from me. This might be the Case, as many of the Mob called out "Fire, fire," but I assured the Men that I gave no

such Order, that my Words were, “Don’t fire, stop your Firing.” In short, it was scarce possible for the Soldiers to know who said fire, or don’t fire, or stop your Firing. On the People’s assembling again to take away the dead Bodies, the Soldiers, supposing them coming to attack them, were making ready to fire again, which I prevented by striking up their Firelocks with my Hand.

Immediately after a Townsman came and told me, that 4 or 5000 People were assembled in the next Street, and had sworn to take my Life with every Man’s with me; on which I judged it unsafe to remain there any longer, and therefore sent the Party and Sentry to the Main-Guard, where the Street is narrow and short, there telling them off into Street Firings, divided and planted them at each End of the Street to secure their Rear, momentarily expecting an Attack, as there was a constant Cry of the Inhabitants, “To Arms, to Arms, — turn out with your Guns,” and the Town Drums beating to Arms. I ordered my Drum to beat to Arms, and being soon after joined by the different Companies of the 29th Regiment, I formed them as the Guard into Street Firings. The 14th Regiment also got under Arms, but remained at their Barracks. I immediately sent a Sergeant with a Party to Colonel Dalrymple, the Commanding Officer, to acquaint him with every Particular. Several Officers going to join their Regiment were knocked down by the Mob, one very much wounded, and his Sword taken from him. The Lieutenant Governor and Colonel Carr soon after met at the Head of the 29th Regiment, and agreed that the Regiment should retire to their Barracks, and the People to their Houses; but I kept the Piquet to strengthen the Guard. It was with great Difficulty that the Lieutenant-Governor prevailed on the People to be quiet and retire: At last they all went off excepting about an Hundred.

Source: “Case of Capt. Thomas Preston of the 29th Regiment,” in *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts 7: Transactions, 1900–1902* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1905), 7–10.

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Summary Organizer 2: Captain Thomas Preston's Deposition

Original Text

... On Monday Night about Eight o'clock two Soldiers were attacked and beat. But the Party of the Towns-
People, in order to carry Matters to the utmost Length, broke into two Meeting-Houses, and rang the Alarm
Bells, which I supposed was for Fire as usual, but was soon undeceived. About Nine some of the Guard came
to and informed me, the Town-Inhabitants were assembling to attack the Troops, and that the Bells were
ringing as the Signal for that Purpose, and not for Fire, and the Beacon intended to be fired to bring in
the distant People of the Country. This, as I was Captain of the Day, occasioned my repairing immediately
to the Main-Guard. In my Way there I saw the People in great Commotion, and heard them use the most
cruel and horrid Threats against the Troops. In a few Minutes after I reached the Guard, about an hundred
People passed it, and went towards the Custom-House, where the King's Money is lodged. They immediately
surrounded the Sentinel posted there, and with Clubs and other Weapons threatened to execute their
Vengeance on him. I was soon informed by a Townsman, their Intention was to carry off the Soldier from his
Post, and probably murder him. On which I desired him to return for further Intelligence; and he soon came
back and assured me he heard the Mob declare they would murder him.

Keywords (8–10)

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Summary Organizer 3: Captain Thomas Preston's Deposition

Original Text

This I feared might be a Prelude to their plundering the King's Chest. I immediately sent a non-commis-
sioned Officer and twelve Men to protect both the Sentinel and the King's-Money, and very soon followed my-
self, to prevent (if possible) all Disorder; fearing lest the Officer and Soldiery by the Insults and Provocations
of the Rioters, should be thrown off their Guard and commit some rash Act. They soon rushed through the
People, and, by charging their Bayonets in half Circle, kept them at a little Distance. Nay, so far was I from
intending the Death of any Person, that I suffered the Troops to go to the Spot where the unhappy Affair took
Place, without any Loading in their Pieces, nor did I ever give Orders for loading them. This remiss Conduct
in me perhaps merits Censure; yet it is Evidence, resulting from the Nature of Things, which is the best and
surest that can be offered, that my Intention was not to act offensively, but the contrary Part, and that not
without Compulsion. The Mob still increased, and were more outrageous, striking their Clubs or Bludgeons
one against another, and calling out, "come on you Rascals, you bloody Backs, you Lobster Scoundrels; fire
if you dare, G-d damn you, fire and be damn'd; we know you dare not;" and much more such Language was
used.

Keywords (6–8)

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME _____

PERIOD _____

DATE _____

Summary Organizer 4: Captain Thomas Preston's Deposition

Original Text

At this Time I was between the Soldiers and the Mob, parleying with, and endeavouring all in my Power to persuade them to retire peaceably; but to no Purpose. They advanced to the Points of the Bayonets, struck some of them, and even the Muzzles of the Pieces, and seemed to be endeavouring to close with the Soldiers. On which some well-behaved Persons asked me if the Guns were charged; I replied, yes. They then asked me if I intended to order the Men to fire. I answered no, by no Means, observing to them, that I was advanced before the Muzzles of the Men's Pieces, and must fall a Sacrifice if they fired; that the Soldiers were upon the Half cock and charged Bayonets, and my giving the Word fire, under those Circumstances, would prove me no Officer. While I was thus speaking, one of the Soldiers, having received a severe Blow with a Stick, stept a little on one Side, and instantly fired, on which turning to and asking him why he fired without Orders, I was struck with a Club on my Arm, which for sometime deprived me of the Use of it; which Blow, had it been placed on my Head, most probably would have destroyed me. On this a general Attack was made on the Men by a great Number of heavy Clubs, and Snow-Balls being thrown at them, by which all our Lives were in imminent Danger; some Persons at the same Time from behind calling out, "Damn your Bloods, why don't you fire?" Instantly three or four of the Soldiers fired, one after another, and directly after three more in the same Confusion and Hurry.

Keywords (8–10)

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Summary Organizer 5: Captain Thomas Preston's Deposition

Original Text

The Mob then ran away, except three unhappy Men who instantly expired, in which Number was Mr. Gray, at whose Rope-Walk the prior Quarrel took Place; one more is since dead, three others are dangerously, and four slightly wounded. The Whole of this melancholy Affair was transacted in almost 20 Minutes. On my asking the Soldiers why they fired without Orders, they said they heard the Word "Fire," and supposed it came from me. This might be the Case, as many of the Mob called out "Fire, fire," but I assured the Men that I gave no such Order, that my Words were, "Don't fire, stop your Firing." In short, it was scarce possible for the Soldiers to know who said fire, or don't fire, or stop your Firing. On the People's assembling again to take away the dead Bodies, the Soldiers, supposing them coming to attack them, were making ready to fire again, which I prevented by striking up their Firelocks with my Hand.

Keywords (6–8)

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME _____ PERIOD _____ DATE _____

Summary Organizer 6: Captain Thomas Preston's Deposition

Original Text

Immediately after a Townsman came and told me, that 4 or 5000 People were assembled in the next Street, and had sworn to take my Life with every Man's with me; on which I judged it unsafe to remain there any longer, and therefore sent the Party and Sentry to the Main-Guard, where the Street is narrow and short, there telling them off into Street Firings, divided and planted them at each End of the Street to secure their Rear, momentarily expecting an Attack, as there was a constant Cry of the Inhabitants, "To Arms, to Arms, —turn out with your Guns," and the Town Drums beating to Arms. I ordered my Drum to beat to Arms, and being soon after joined by the different Companies of the 29th Regiment, I formed them as the Guard into Street Firings. The 14th Regiment also got under Arms, but remained at their Barracks. I immediately sent a Sergeant with a Party to Colonel Dalrymple, the Commanding Officer, to acquaint him with every Particular. Several Officers going to join their Regiment were knocked down by the Mob, one very much wounded, and his Sword taken from him. The Lieutenant Governor and Colonel Carr soon after met at the Head of the 29th Regiment, and agreed that the Regiment should retire to their Barracks, and the People to their Houses; but I kept the Piquet to strengthen the Guard. It was with great Difficulty that the Lieutenant-Governor prevailed on the People to be quiet and retire: At last they all went off excepting about an Hundred.

Keywords (6–8)

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

DATE _____

Massacre or Tragic Mishap?

You have studied two different accounts of what has become known as the Boston Massacre. Use the engraving, poem, and deposition as primary source evidence to compare Preston's account to Revere's and present your arguments.

John Adams was hired to defend Captain Thomas Preston in court when he was charged with murder. Prepare a legal brief for Adams so that he can defend his client, and anticipate what the other side will argue. This brief should consist of three paragraphs:

1. What are the points of fact common to these accounts?
2. What are the main points of fact on which there is disagreement?
3. What other types of primary sources would help you know what happened? What types of evidence might your opponents present in court?

[illegible]

(Continue on another sheet of paper, if necessary.)