The Boston Massacre
Primary Source Case Study

Pre- AP U.S. History
Highland East Junior High School
The Account of The Boston Massacre

Here is the complete text of the account of the Boston Massacre as reported in the Boston Gazette and Country Journal on Monday, March 12, 1770.

A few minutes after nine o’clock four youths, named Edward Archbald, William Merchant, Francis Archbald, and John Leech, jun., came down Cornhill together, and separating at Doctor Loring’s corner, the two former were passing the narrow alley leading Mr. Murray’s barrack in which was a soldier brandishing a broad sword of an uncommon size against the walls, out of which he struck fire plentifully. A person of mean countenance, armed with a large cudgel bore him company. Edward Archbald admonished Mr. Merchant to take care of the sword, on which the soldier turned round and struck Archbald on the arm, then pushed at Merchant and pierced through his clothes inside the arm close to the armpit and grazed the skin. Merchant then struck the soldier with a short stick he had; and the other person ran to the barrack and brought with him two soldiers, one armed with a pair of tongs, the other with a shovel. He with the tongs pursued Archbald back through the alley, collared and laid him over the head with the tongs. The noise brought people together; and John Hicks, a young lad, coming up, knocked the soldier down but let him get up again; and more lads gathering, drove them back to the barrack where the boys stood some time as it were to keep them in. In less than a minute ten or twelve of them came out with drawn cutlasses, clubs, and bayonets and set upon the unarmed boys and young folk who stood them a little while but, finding the inequality of their equipment, dispersed.

On hearing the noise, one Samuel Atwood came up to see what was the matter; and entering the alley from dock square, heard the latter part of the combat; and when the boys had dispersed he met the ten or twelve soldiers aforesaid rushing down the alley towards the square and asked them if they intended to murder people? They answered Yes, by G-d, root and branch! With that one of them struck Mr. Atwood with a club which was repeated by another; and being unarmed, he turned to go off and received a wound on the left shoulder which reached the bone and gave him much pain. Retreating a few steps, Mr. Atwood met two officers and said, gentlemen, what is the matter? They answered, you’ll see by and by. Immediately after, those heroes appeared in the square, asking where were the boogers? where were the cowards? But notwithstanding their fierceness to naked men, one of them advanced towards a youth who had a split of a raw stave in his hand and said, damn them, here is one of them. But the young man seeing a person near him with a drawn sword and good cane ready to support him, held up his stave in defiance; and they quietly passed by him up the little alley by Mr. Silsby’s to King Street where they attacked single and unarmed persons till they raised much clamour, and then turned down Cornhill Street, insulting all they met in like manner and pursuing some to their very doors. Thirty or forty persons, mostly lads, being by this means gathered in King Street, Capt. Preston with a party of men with charged bayonets, came from the main guard to the commissioner’s house, the soldiers pushing their bayonets, crying, make way! They took place by the custom house and, continuing to push to drive the people off pricked some in several places, on which they were clamorous and, it is said, threw snow balls. On this, the Captain commanded them to fire; and more snow balls coming, he again said, damn you, fire, be the consequence what it will! One soldier then fired, and a townsman with a cudgel struck him over the hands with such force that he dropped his firelock; and, rushing forward, aimed a blow at the Captain’s head which grazed his hat and fell pretty heavy upon his arm. However, the soldiers continued the fire successively till seven or eight or, as some say, eleven guns were discharged.

By this fatal manoeuvre three men were laid dead on the spot and two more struggling for life; but what showed a degree of cruelty unknown to British troops, at least since the house of Hanover has directed their operation, was an attempt to fire upon or push with their bayonets the persons who undertook to remove the slain and wounded!
Mr. Benjamin Leigh, now undertaker in the Delph manufactory, came up and after some conversation with Capt. Preston relative to his conduct in this affair, advised him to draw off his men, with which he complied. The dead are Mr. Samuel Gray, killed on the spot, the ball entering his head and beating off a large portion of his skull.

A mulatto man named Crispus Attucks, who was born in Framingham, but lately belonged to New-Providence and was here in order to go for North Carolina, also killed instantly, two balls entering his breast, one of them in special goring the right lobe of the lungs and a great part of the liver most horribly.

Mr. James Caldwell, mate of Capt. Morton’s vessel, in like manner killed by two balls entering his back.

Mr. Samuel Maverick, a promising youth of seventeen years of age, son of the widow Maverick, and an apprentice to Mr. Greenwood, ivory-turner, mortally wounded; a ball went through his belly and was cut out at his back. He died the next morning.

A lad named Christopher Monk, about seventeen years of age, an apprentice to Mr. Walker, shipwright, wounded; a ball entered his back about four inches above the left kidney near the spine and was cut out of the breast on the same side. Apprehended he will die.

A lad named John Clark, about seventeen years of age, whose parents live at Medford, and an apprentice to Capt. Samuel Howard of this town, wounded; a ball entered just above his groin and came out at his hip on the opposite side. Apprehended he will die.

Mr. Edward Payne of this town, merchant, standing at his entry door received a ball in his arm which shattered some of the bones.

Mr. John Green, tailor, coming up Leverett’s Lane, received a ball just under his hip and lodged in the under part of his thigh, which was extracted.

Mr. Robert Patterson, a seafaring man, who was the person that had his trousers shot through in Richardson’s affair, wounded; a ball went through his right arm, and he suffered a great loss of blood.

Mr. Patrick Carr, about thirty years of age, who worked with Mr. Field, leather breeches-maker in Queen Street, wounded; a ball entered near his hip and went out at his side.

A lad named David Parker, an apprentice to Mr. Eddy, the wheelwright, wounded; a ball entered his thigh.

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Boston Massacre
A Behind-the-Scenes Look At Paul Revere’s Most Famous Engraving

When Paul Revere first began selling his color prints of “The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in King Street” in Boston, he was doing what any like-minded patriot with his talents in 1770 would have done. Only, Paul Revere did it faster and more expeditiously than anyone else, including two other artist-engravers who also issued prints of the Massacre that year.

Twenty-one days before — on the night of March 5, 1770 — five men had been shot to death in Boston town by British soldiers. Precipitating the event known as the Boston Massacre was a mob of men and boys taunting a sentry standing guard at the city’s customs house. When other British soldiers came to the sentry’s support, a free-for-all ensued and shots were fired into the crowd.

Four died on the spot and a fifth died after four days. Six others were wounded.

Paul Revere’s color print of the Boston Massacre

The presence of British troops in Boston had long been a sore point among Boston’s radical politicians. Paul Revere wasted no time in capitalizing on the Massacre to highlight British tyranny and stir up anti-British sentiment among his fellow colonists. As you will see, Revere’s historic engraving is long on political propaganda and short on accuracy or aesthetics.

Notice how the British Grenadiers are shown standing in a straight line shooting their rifles in a regular volley, whereas when the disturbance actually erupted both sides were belligerent and riotous.

Notice also that Revere’s engraving shows a blue sky. Only a wisp of a moon suggests that the riot occurred after nine o’clock on a cold winter night.

Notice too the absence of snow and ice on the street, while Crispus Attucks — a black man lying on the ground closest to the British soldiers — is shown to be white. As an aside, it should be noted that as a result of his death in the Boston Massacre, Crispus Attucks would emerge as the most famous of all the black men to fight in the cause of the Revolution, and become its first martyr.

Documentation has come to light over the years indicating that Revere copied engraver Henry Pelham’s drawings of the Massacre, produced his own engraving, and three weeks after the occurrence was advertising his prints for sale in Boston’s newspapers. By the time Pelham’s prints hit the street, Revere’s print had flooded the market. A third engraving was executed by Jonathan Mulliken, who also issued prints depicting the event. Except for a number of minor differences, all three prints appear alike.

In his rush to produce his engraving Revere employed the talents of Christian Remick to colorize the print. Remick’s choice of colors is simple yet effective. Notice the use of red for the British uniforms and the blood. The other colors — blue, green, brown and black — all contribute to make this print what is arguably the most famous in America.

Few historians would deny that the “Boston Massacre” proved to be a milestone in America’s road to independence. By popularizing the tragic event, Paul Revere’s print became “the first powerful influence in forming an outspoken anti-British public opinion,” one which the revolutionary leaders had almost lost hope of achieving.
Unhappy Boston! see thy sons deplore,
Thy hallowed Walks besmeared with guilless Gore,
While Faithless P—n and his savage Band,
With murder's Tommau stretch their bloody hand.
Like fierce Barbarians grinning o'er their prey.
Approve the crime, and enjoy the day.

If blood runs drops from Breech from Anguish writhes,
If Speechless Sobs, lab 'rung for a Tongue,
Or if a weeping World can caught appease
The plaintive Howls of Victims such as these.
The patriot's copious Tears for each are shed.
A glorious tribute which embalms the dead.

But know, every Nemesis the awful goal.
Where Justice strikes the Murderer of his soul.
Should venal C——to the Randel of the land.
Schnitt the renounced villain from her hand.

Killed. Six wounded; two of them (Christe Monk & John Clark) Mortally.
From Captain Preston’s Account

...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 to be 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 some time 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 snowballs 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 quarrels 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 scarcely 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 drums 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 picket 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 a hundred.
Boston Massacre Trial Depositions

Deposition of Theodore Bliss

At home. I heard the Bells for fire. Went out. Came to the Town House. The People told me there was going to be a Rumpus with the Soldiers. Went to the Custom house. Saw Capt. Preston there with the Soldiers. Asked him if they were loaded. He said yes. If with Ball. He said nothing. I saw the People throw Snow Balls at the Soldiers and saw a Stick about 3 feet long strike a Soldier upon the right. He sallied and then fired. A little time a second. Then the other s l fast after one another.

One or two Snow balls hit the Soldier, the stick struck, before firing. I know not whether he sallied on account of the Stick or step’d back to make ready. I did not hear any Order given by the Capt. to fire. I stood so near him I think I must have heard him if he had given an order to fire before the first firing. I never knew Capt. Preston before. I can’t say whether he had a Surtout on, he was dressed in red. I know him to be the Man I took to be the Officer.

The Man that fired first stood next to the Exchange lane. I saw none of the People press upon the Soldiers before the first Gun fired. I did after. I aimed a blow at him myself but did not strike him. I am sure the Captain stood before the Men when the first Gun was fired. I had no apprehension the Capt. did give order to fire when the first Gun was fired. I thought, after the first Gun, the Capt. did order the Men to fire but do not certainly know. I heard the word fire several times but know not whether it came from the Captain, the Soldiers or People. Two of the People struck at the Soldiers after the first Gun. I dont know if they hit ‘em. There were about 100 people in the Street. The muzzles of the Guns were behind him. After the first Gun the Captain went quite to the left and I to the right.

Deposition of Benjamin Burdick

When I came into King Street about 9 o’Clock I saw the Soldiers round the Centinel. I asked one if he was loaded and he said yes. I asked him if he would fire, he said yes by the Eternal God and pushd his Bayonet at me. After the firing the Captain came before the Soldiers and put up their Guns with his arm and said stop firing, dont fire no more or dont fire again.

I heard the word fire and took it and am certain that it came from behind the Soldiers. I saw a man passing busily behind who I took to be an Officer. The firing was a little time after. I saw some persons fall. Before the firing I saw a stick thrown at the Soldiers. The word fire I took to be a word of Command. I had in my hand a highland broad Sword which I brought from home. Upon my coming out I was told it was a wrangle between the Soldiers and people, upon that I went back and got my Sword.

I never used to go out with a weapon. I had not my Sword drawn till after the Soldier pushed his Bayonet at me. I should have cut his head off if he had stepd out of his Rank to attack me again. At the first firing the People were chiefly in Royal Exchange lane, there being about 50 in the Street. After the firing I went up to the Soldiers and told them I wanted to see some faces that I might swear to them another day. The Centinel in a melancholy tone said perhaps Sir you may.


**Deposition of Robert Goddard**

-The Soldiers came up to the Centinel and the Officer told them to place themselves and they formed a half moon. The Captain told the Boys to go home least there should be murder done. They were throwing Snow balls. Did not go off but threw more Snow balls. The Capt. was behind the Soldiers. The Captain told them to fire. One Gun went off.

A Sailor or Townsman struck the Captain. He thereupon said damn your bloods fire think I’ll be treated in this manner. This Man that struck the Captain came from among the People who were seven feet off and were round on one wing. I saw no person speak to him. I was so near I should have seen it. After the Capt. said Damn your bloods fire they all fired one after another about 7 or 8 in all, and then the officer bid Prime and load again. He stood behind all the time. Mr. Lee went up to the officer and called the officer by name Capt. Preston.

I saw him coming down from the Guard behind the Party. I went to Gaol the next day being sworn for the Grand Jury to see the Captain. Then said pointing to him that’s the person who gave the word to fire. He said if you swear that you will ruin me everlastingly. I was so near the officer when he gave the word fire that I could touch him. His face was towards me. He stood in the middle behind the Men. I looked him in the face. He then stood within the circle. When he told ‘em to fire he turned about to me. I lookd him in the face

**Other Boston Massacre Trial Depositions**

**Edward Gerrish**

I heard a noise about 8 o’clock and went down to Royal Exchange Lane. Saw some Persons with Sticks coming up Quaker Lane. I said Ito the sentry] Capt. Goldsmith owed my fellow Apprentice. He said he was a Gentlemen and would pay every body. I said there was none in the Regiment. He asked for me. I went to him, was not ashamed of my face.... The Sentinel left his Post and Struck me. I cried. My fellow Apprentice and a young man came up to the Sentinel and called him Bloody back. He called to the Main Guard.... There was not a dozen people when the Sentinel called the Guard.

**Thomas Marshall**

The People kept gathering. I saw no uneasiness with the Centinel. A Party then came down from the Guard LHouse] I thought to relieve him. I heard one Gun. Thought it was to alarm the Barracks. A little space after another, and then several. I stood within 30 feet of the Centinel and must have seen any disturbance.... Between the firing the first and second Gun there was time enough for an Officer to step forward and to give the word Recover if he was so minded.
Ebenezer Hinkley

Just after 9 o’clock heard the Cry of Fire. I saw the party come out of the Guard House. A Capt. cried out of the Window “fire upon ‘em damn ‘em.” I followed ‘em down before the Custom House door. Capt. Preston was out and commanded ‘em. They drew up and charged their Bayonets. Montgomery7 pushed at the people advancing. In 2 or 3 minutes a Boy threw a small stick over hand and hit Montgomery on Breast. Then I heard the word fire in 1/4 minute he fired. I saw some pieces of Snow as big as Egg thrown. 3 or 4 thrown at the same time of pushing on the other End of the file, before 1st gun fired. The body of People about a Rod8 off. People said Damn ‘em they durst not fire don’t be afraid. No threats.... I was a Rod from Capt. Preston. Kid not hear him give Order to firej 1/2 minute from 1st Gun to 2d. same to 3Vd. The others quicker. I saw no people striking the Guns or Bayonets nor pelting ‘em. I saw Preston between people and Soldiers. I did not see him when 1st firing.

Peter Cunningham

Upon the cry of fire and Bells ringing went into King Street, heard the Capt. say Turn out the Guard. Saw the Centinel standing on the steps of the Custom house, pushing his Bayonet at the People who were about 30 or 40. Captain came and ordered the Men to prime and load.’) He came before ‘em about 4 or 5 minutes after and put up their Guns with his Arm. They then fired and were priming and loading again. I am pretty positive the Capt. bid ‘em Prime and load. I stood about 4 feet off him. Heard no Order given to fire. The Person who gave Orders to Prime and load stood with his back to me, I did not see his face only when he put up their Guns. I stood about 10 or 11 feet from the Soldiers, the Captain about the midway between.

Alexander Cruikshanks

As the Clock struck 9 I saw two Boys abusing the Centinel. They said you Centinel, damned rascally Scoundrel Lobster” Son of a Bitch and desired him to turn out. He told them it was his ground and he would maintain it and would run any through who molested or attempted to drive him off. There was abqut a dozen standing at a little distance. They took no part. He called out Guard several times and 7 or 8 Soldiers with Swords Bayonets and one with a large Tongs in his hand came. I saw the two Boys going to the Men who stood near the Centinel. They returned with a new Edition of fresh Oaths, threw Snow Balls at him and he then called Guard several times as before.

John Cole

I saw the officer after the firing and spoke to the Soldiers and told ‘em it was a Cowardly action to kill men at the end of their Bayonets. They were pushing at the People who seemed to be trying to come into the Street. The Captain came up and stamped and said Damn their bloods fire again and let ‘em take the consequence. I was within four feet of him. He had no sartout but a red Coat with a Rose on his shoulder. The people were quarrelling at the head of Royal Exchange lane.l2 The Soldiers were pushing and striking with the Guns. I saw the People’s Arms moving but no Sticks.

Henry Knox

I saw the Captain coming down with his party. I took Preston by the Coat, told him for Gods sake take care of your Men for if they fire your life must be answerable. In some agitation he replied I am sensible of it. A Corporal was leading them. The Captain stopd with me and the Party proceeded to the Centinel the People crying stand by. The Soldiers with their Bayonets charged pushing through the People in order to make way make way damn your Bloods. The Captain then left me and went to the Party. I heard the Centinel say damn their bloods if they touch me I will fire. In about 3 minutes after this the party came up. I did not see any thing thrown at the Centinel. I stood at the foot of the Town house when the Guns were fired. I heard the People cry damn your bloods fire on. To the best of my recollection the Corporal had a Sartout on. I had none.
**Daniel Calef**
I was present at the firing. I heard one of the Guns rattle. I turned about and looked and heard the officer who stood on the right in a line with the Soldiers give the word fire twice. I looked the Officer in the face when he gave the word and saw his mouth. He had on a red Coat, yellow Jacket and Silver laced hat, no trimming on his Coat.’5 The Prisoner is the Officer I mean. I saw his face plain, the moon shone on it. I am sure of the man though I have not seen him since before yesterday when he came into Court with others. I knew him instantly. I ran upon the word fire being given about 30 feet off. The officer had no Surtout on.

**Diman Morton**
Between 9 and 10 I heard in my house the cry of fire but soon understood there was no fire but the Soldiers were fighting with the Inhabitants. I went to King Street. Saw the Centinel over the Gutter, his Bayonet breast high. He retired to the steps loaded. The Boys dared him to fire. Soon after a Party came down, drew up. The Captain ordered them to load. I went across the Street. Heard one Gun and soon after the other Guns. The Captain when he ordered them to load stood in the front before the Soldiers so that the Guns reached beyond him. The Captain had a Surtout on. I knew him well. The Surtout was not red. I think cloth colour. I stood on the opposite corner of Exchange lane when I heard the Captain order the Men to load. I came by my knowledge of the Captain partly by seeing him lead the Fortification Guard

**Isaac Pierce**
The Lieut. Governor asked Capt. Preston didn’t you know you had no power to fire upon the Inhabitants or any number of People collected together unless you had a Civil Officer to give order. The Captain replied I was obliged to, to save my Sentry.

**Joseph Belknap**
The Lieut. Governor said to Preston Don’t you know you can do nothing without a Magistrate. He answered I did it to save my Men.

**Edward Hill**
After all the firing Captain Preston put up the Gun of a Soldier who was going to fire and said fire no more you have done mischief enough.

**Matthew Murray**
I heard no order given. I stood within two yards of the Captain. He was in front talking with a Person, I don’t know who. I was looking at the Captain when the Gun was fired.

**Andrew, a Negro servant to Oliver Wendell**
I jump’d back and heard a voice cry fire and immediately the first Gun fired. It seemed to come from the left wing from the second or third man on the left. The Officer was standing before me with his face towards the People. I am certain the voice came from beyond him. The Officer stood before the Soldiers at a sort of a corner. I turned round and saw a Grenadier who stood on the Captain’s right swing his Gun and fire. I took it to be Kil-leroy. I look’d a little to the right and saw a Man drop. The Molatto was killed by the first Gun by the Grenadier on the Captains Right. I was so frightened, after, I did not know where I was....

**Daniel Cornwall**
Capt. Preston was within 2 yards of me before the Men nearest to the right facing the Street. I was looking at him. Did not hear any order. He faced me. I think I should have heard him. I directly heard a voice say Damn you why do you fire. Don’t fire. I thought it was the Captain’s then. I now believe it.
William Sawyer
The people kept huzzaing. Damn ‘em. Daring ‘em to fire. Threw Snow balls. I think they hit ‘em. As soon as the Snow balls were thrown and a club a Soldier fired. I heard the Club strike upon the Gun and the corner man next the lane said fire and immediately fired. This was the first Gun. As soon as he had fired he said Damn you fire. I am so sure that I thought it was he that spoke. That next Gun fired and so they fired through pretty quick.

Jane Whitehouse
A Man came behind the Soldiers walked backwards and forward, encouraging them to fire. The Captain stood on the left about three yards. The man touched one of the Soldiers upon the back and said fire, by God I’ll stand by you. He was dressed in dark colored clothes.... He did not look like an Officer. The man fired directly on the word and clap on the Shoulder. I am positive the man was not the Captain.... I am sure he gave no orders.... I saw one man take a chunk of wood from under his Coat throw it at a Soldier and knocked him. He fell on his face. His firelock’7 was out of his hand.... This was before any firing.

Newton Prince, a Negro, a member of the South Church
Heard the Bell ring. Ran out. Came to the Chapel. Was told there was no fire but something better, there was going to be a fight. Some had buckets and bags and some Clubs. I went to the west end of the Town House where [there] were a number of people. I saw some Soldiers coming out of the Guard house with their Guns and running down one after another to the Custom house. Some of the people said let’s attack the Main Guard, or the Centinel who is gone to King street. Some said for Gods sake don’t lets touch the main Guard. I went down. Saw the Soldiers planted by the Custom house two deep. The People were calling them Lobsters, daring ‘em to fire 1, saying damn you why don’t you fire. I saw Capt. Preston out from behind 1 the Soldiers. In the front at the right. He spoke to some people. The Capt. I stood between the Soldiers and the Gutter about two yards from the Gutter. a I saw two or three strike with sticks on the Guns. I was going off to the west A, of the Soldiers and heard the Guns fire and saw the dead carried off. Soon 1 after the Guard Drums beat to arms. The People whilst striking on the Guns 1 cried fire, damn you fire. I have heard no Orders given to fire, only the people in general cried fire.

James Woodall
I saw one Soldier knocked down. His Gun fell from him. I saw a great many sticks and pieces of sticks and Ice thrown at the Soldiers. The Soldier who was knocked down took up his Gun and fired directly. Soon after the first Gun I saw a Gentleman behind the Soldiers in velvet of blue or black plush trimmed with gold. He put his hand toward their backs. Whether he touched them I know not and said by God I’ll stand by you whilst I have a drop of blood and then said fire and two went off and the rest to 7 or 8.... The Captain, after, seemed shocked and looked upon the Soldiers. I am very certain he did not give the word fire.

Cross Examination of Captain James Gifford
Q. Did you ever know an officer order men to fire with their bayonets charged? 
A. No, Officers never give order to fire from charged bayonet. They would all have fired together, or most of them.

Thomas Handaside Peck
I was at home when the Guns were fired. I heard ‘em distinct. I went up to the main guard and addressed myself to the Captain and said to him What have you done? He said, Sir it was none of my doings, the Soldiers fired of their own accord, I was in the Street and might have been shot. His character is good as a Gentleman and Soldier. I think it exceeds any of the Corps.
Hardly a Massacre - British View

Although hardly a massacre this event was a milestone on the road to American independence, being the first powerful influence in forming an outspoken Anti British public opinion.

On Monday March 5, 1770, after a weekend of minor clashes, the conflicts between Boston Garrison Soldiers and colonialists came to a head. Insults exchanged between a British soldier and a local merchant ended with a butt-stroke of a musket. This lead to a small riot, and the Boston Garrison responded with a small squad of soldiers under the command of Captain Thomas Preston. The colonial mob taunted and menaced the squad, but it wasn’t until Private Hugh Montgomery was struck by a thrown club that any action occurred. When Montgomery returned to his feet he took aim into the crowd and fired, his compatriots joined him, under no command of Preston. Three colonialists were killed and two mortally wounded.

The real significance of this event was that it gave rebellious leaders propaganda against the British. Sam Adams has been accused of actually instigating the whole event for just this purpose. Popular legend has made these colonials who died heroes and martyrs, they were neither. It is widely accepted now that those who died were no more than the unlucky members of an angry crowd. The British were tried for their acts, defended by John Adams, and were acquitted.

After this event, and the propaganda that followed it, the British Troops had to evacuate Boston to the Castle William.
Facts about the Boston Massacre that you may not have known

* It all started from a wig! The Massacre started when young wigmaker’s apprentice named Edward Gerrish called out to a British officer on duty, Captain Lieutenant John Goldfinch, that he had not paid his master’s bill.

* Another fatal incident occurred just few days before the Boston Massacre. Christopher Seider was shot dead on February 22, 1770 in a fight between the mob and the British loyalists that started from throwing rocks at the shop of a Loyalist merchant.

* After the Massacre many believed that Captain Preston was the one who gave the order to fire on the crowd. The famous gravure by Paul Revere even shows him raising his hand in command. But the subsequent trial decided that Preston could not have told the soldiers to fire, as he was standing in front of the guns, between his men and the crowd of protesters.

* One of the most unusual outcomes of the Boston Massacre trial was the defense of the two British regulars. The defense was called the ‘benefit of the clergy’ and reduced the change from murder to manslaughter by simply proving that the accused … were simply literate enough to read from the Bible. However the two privates were punished by branding ‘M’ on their thumbs. This was done to prevent from using the same defense in the future.

* It is not certain that Paul Revere was present during the fatal accident, even though his engraved depiction of the event was used as the evidence in the B.M. trial to establish the locations of the bodies.

* By other accounts Revere’s gravure was a copy of an earlier painting made by a Boston artist by the name of Henry Pelham.

* Originally twelve British soldiers and Capt. Preston were arrested, but only eight soldiers were finally tried in November 1770. The other four soldiers were suspected in shooting into the crowd from the window of the Customs House, but this has never been proven.

* John Adams wasn’t the only defense counsel. Another member of the team, Josiah Quincy, Jr, conducted questioning of some witnesses. Yet another counselor, Robert Auchmuty, carried out parts of the summation for the jury.

* During the B.M. trials, under British law, the defendants weren’t allowed to speak as witnesses on their own behalf. This was because they had an interest in the case
It took only few hours for the tragic events to unfold on the evening in March of 1770, starting confrontation between the British regulars and ending with the death of the five colonists. But it took several years to get to the situation. The Boston Massacre is best understood in the context of several other key historic events.

June 29, 1767 – the British Parliament Passes the Townshend Acts

The heavy presence of British troops in Boston that lead to the fatal shooting was the direct results of the Townshend Acts passed by British Parliament to impose additional taxes on common products imported into the Colonies. These products among others included paper, glass and tea.

October 1, 1768 - British Troops Start Arriving to Boston

On October 1, 1768 a group of British regulars arrived in Boston, MA to maintain order. The civilians reacted to the redcoats like they were invaders by taunting them through name calling, spitting, and fighting. The people of Boston had gained control of the reigns of power and prevented the soldiers from carrying out their duties. During the next eighteen months tension mounted between the two sides.

March 5, 1770 - The Boston Massacre Occurs

On March 5, 1770 the Twenty-Ninth Regiment came to the relief of the Eighth on duty at the Customs House on King (now State) Street. The soldiers, led by Captain Thomas Preston, were met by a large and taunting crowd of civilians. Captain Preston was unable to disperse the crowd and as they chanted “Fire and be damned” he ordered his troops “Don’t Fire!” With all the commotion the soldiers probably did not hear his orders and they opened fire on the crowd killing three men instantly and another two who died later.

October 24-30, 1770 - The Trial of Captain Preston

Seven months later, in October of 1770, Captain Preston was tried for murder in a Boston courtroom. He was defended by John Adams and Robert Auchmuty and assisted by Josiah Quincy Jr. Captain Preston was acquitted by a Boston jury. It was never satisfactory explained why the radicals Adams and Quincy represented Preston, and later the soldiers, although some surviving documents suggest that the jury in Preston’s case was “packed.” When the soldiers case came to trial soon after they were defended by Adams, Quincy, and Sampson Salter Blowers. The jurors in their case came from outside of Boston and they won acquittals a month after the trial began.

November 27 - Dec 14, 1770 - the Trial of the British Soldiers

The eight British soldiers accused of murder were tried separately from their officer Captain Preston. But just like the Preston’s trial the proceedings were delayed by 8 months after the incident to allow emotions to cool down. As a result of the trial, six soldiers were acquitted on the grounds of self-defense, but two were found guilty of murder because of the overpowering proof that they fired into the crowd.
The Boston Massacre: Questions For Discussion and Writing

1. What was the impact of the newspaper article concerning the Boston Massacre?
   a. Is the newspaper article fair or biased? Explain.

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   b. How convincing is the newspaper article? Explain

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   c. What was the most powerful part of the newspaper article?

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2. Carefully study Paul Revere’s cartoon of the Boston Massacre. Based on the facts that came out in the three trials, what errors can you find?

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3. Should the Revere engraving have been evidence in court? Explain.
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4. Why do you think John Adams decided to defend Capt. Preston and the eight British soldiers?
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5. Whose deposition was the most credible and persuasive? Explain?
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6. Who do you believe was most responsible for the Boston Massacre? Why?
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7. Modern criminal defense attorneys are often asked to defend people charged with horrible crimes. Do you think they should? Explain.
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8. How was the Boston Massacre used to rally the colonists against British rule?

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9. In a group of 4-5 imagine you were a member of the jury, and had to deliberate over the guilt or innocence of the soldiers and then vote on these possible verdicts:

A unanimous verdict is required for this case to be decided.

_______a. all innocent of both murder and manslaughter
_______b. one or more guilty of murder; others innocent
_______c. one of more guilty of manslaughter; others innocent
_______d. one or more guilty of murder; one or more guilty of manslaughter; others innocent

Each jury should then report and defend its verdict. Give reasons for your decision:
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