



Labels and History: Riot v. Massacre

Inquiry Design Model (IDM) Blueprint™

Oklahoma History Center Museum Learning and Education Department

Compelling Question

How do words define understanding?

Standards and Practices

OKH.5.2 Examine multiple points of view regarding the evolution of race relations in Oklahoma, including:

F. the role labels play in understanding historic events, for example, “riot” versus “massacre.”

Practice 4. Read Critically and Interpret Informational Sources

Students will engage in critical, active reading of grade-level appropriate primary and secondary sources related to key social studies concepts, including frequent analysis and interpretation of informational sources.

Staging the Question

Show students the official logo of the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission.



Explain to students that what was formerly known as the Tulsa Race Riot was changed in 2018 to the Tulsa Race Massacre.

Ask students about their understanding of the meanings of each word.

Look up the definitions of each word and keep them visible during the inquiry.

Discuss the historical context surrounding each word.

Supporting Question 1

What did the press call similar events?

Formative Performance Task

This is not a close reading of the texts. Students need to survey the language used to describe these events. They need to understand that the word “riot” was the most frequently used word to describe the violent conflicts between mobs of white attacking African American communities in the early twentieth century.

Students will examine articles from several papers to determine what words the press used to describe events that were similar and occurred before the Tulsa Race Massacre. Students will create a class list.

Featured Sources

- [The Prescott Daily News. \(Prescott, Ark.\), October 10, 1919.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90050307/1919-10-10/ed-1/seq-1/) *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90050307/1919-10-10/ed-1/seq-1/
- [Phoenix Tribune. \(Phoenix, Ariz.\), August 9, 1919.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn96060881/1919-08-09/ed-1/seq-2/) *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn96060881/1919-08-09/ed-1/seq-2/
- [The Little River News. \(Ashdown, Ark.\), October 4, 1919.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90050316/1919-10-04/ed-1/seq-1/) *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90050316/1919-10-04/ed-1/seq-1/
- [Cayton's Weekly. \(Seattle, Wash.\), July 26, 1919.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87093353/1919-07-26/ed-1/seq-1/) *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87093353/1919-07-26/ed-1/seq-1/
- [The Kansas City Sun. \(Kansas City, Mo.\), August 2, 1919.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90061556/1919-08-02/ed-1/seq-1/) *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90061556/1919-08-02/ed-1/seq-1/
- [New York Tribune. \(New York \[N.Y.\]\), October 1, 1919.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1919-10-01/ed-1/seq-4/) *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1919-10-01/ed-1/seq-4/
- [The Daily Alaska Citizen. \(Fairbanks, Alaska\), July 23, 1919.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn96060003/1919-07-23/ed-1/seq-1/) *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn96060003/1919-07-23/ed-1/seq-1/
- [The Knoxville Independent. \(Knoxville, Tenn.\), August 16, 1919.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042907/1919-08-16/ed-1/seq-4/) *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042907/1919-08-16/ed-1/seq-4/

Supporting Question 2

How did the press describe the event when it happened?

Formative Performance Task

Students need to understand that this event was framed, by both white and black press, as a race riot.

Students will examine articles from several papers to determine what words the press used to describe the Tulsa Race Massacre. The class will develop a list of words.

Featured Sources

- [The Morning Tulsa Daily World. \(Tulsa, Okla.\), June 1, 1921.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042345/1921-06-01/ed-1/seq-1/) Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042345/1921-06-01/ed-1/seq-1/
- [Evening Public Ledger. \(Philadelphia \[Pa.\]\), June 1, 1921.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045211/1921-06-01/ed-1/seq-1/) Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045211/1921-06-01/ed-1/seq-1/
- [The Evening Herald. \(Klamath Falls, Or.\), June 1, 1921.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99063812/1921-06-01/ed-1/seq-1/) Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99063812/1921-06-01/ed-1/seq-1/
- [The Broad Ax. \(Salt Lake City, Utah\), June 18, 1921.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024055/1921-06-18/ed-1/seq-1/) Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024055/1921-06-18/ed-1/seq-1/
- [“Race Riot in Tulsa—Under Martial Law.” Henderson, Virgil L. State Sentinel \(Stigler, Okla.\), June 2, 1921.](https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc99867/) The Gateway to Oklahoma History. gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc99867/
- [Editorial Page, Dunjee, Roscoe. The Black Dispatch \(Oklahoma City, Okla.\), June 17, 1921.](https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc152337/) The Gateway to Oklahoma History. gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc152337/

Supporting Question 3

Were there any other factors that ensured this event would be called a riot?

Formative Performance Task

Students need to understand that, in addition to the practice of labeling similar events as “riots”, there was another important factor in assuring this would be designated as a “riot,” and that was the riot exemption standard in insurance policies at the time. If official authority designates the event as a “riot,” then insurance companies do not have to honor the claims of their policyholders. The Redfearn brief provides an in-depth overview of one of the claimant’s arguments in a civil suit against his insurance company.

Students will examine sources discussing the relationship between the designation of “riot” to describe the event and the refusal to pay out insurance claims.

Featured Sources

[“William Redfearn’s Brief in *Redfearn v. American Central Insurance Company*, Oklahoma Supreme Court 1924.](https://tulsaraceriot.wordpress.com/research-topics/accounts/william-redfearn-brief/) tulsaraceriot.wordpress.com/research-topics/accounts/william-redfearn-brief/

Supporting Question 4

Why was the name changed from Tulsa Race Riot to Tulsa Race Massacre?

Formative Performative Task

Students can use the sources below to learn the major reasons why the name changed. The video clip provides more context.

Students will read and watch the clip to learn why the name changed. Students will list the reasons given. Featured Sources

Featured Sources

- [Krehbiel, Randy. “1921 Centennial Commission to Replace ‘Riot’ with ‘Massacre’ in Official Title.” *Tulsa World*, November 27, 2018.](https://tulsaworld.com/news/local/government-and-politics/centennial-commission-to-replace-riot-with-massacre-in-official-title/article_128d9304-6d59-5b5f-872a-f72509d3ecd8.html) tulsaworld.com/news/local/government-and-politics/centennial-commission-to-replace-riot-with-massacre-in-official-title/article_128d9304-6d59-5b5f-872a-f72509d3ecd8.html
- [“Tulsa 1921 Race Riot Commission renamed Race Massacre Commission.” KJRH-TV, November 29, 2018.](https://www.kjrh.com/news/local/tulsa-1921-race-riot-commission-renamed-race-massacre-commission/2018/11/29/) (Starting at :59) youtube.com/watch?v=jCpscEgV_5Y

Summative Performance Task

Argument

Students will write a reflection on the labels used to explain history and how they can sometimes foster or check bias. Students should ground their reflections in specific historical information so that they include some analysis.

Extension

Is “Tulsa Race Massacre” the best name? Students can briefly research names to determine if a more accurate label is available.

Taking Informed Action

Students can learn more about the fluidity of descriptive terms in history, such as “slave” and “enslavement” or “illegal alien” and “undocumented.”