Flood Timeline

Using large Post-it notes, ask the students to make a timeline for your classroom.

Suggested labels at the top of the Post-it notes: Summer 1926 – Winter (Jan, Feb) 1927, March 1927, April 1927, May & June 1927, July & August 1927, late 1927- 1928.

This timeline shows not only **what happened**, but also how the flood developed, where key decisions were made, and how the disaster changed U.S. flood policy.

Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 — Suggested Timeline

Date/Period	Event	Why It Matters
Summer–Fall 1926	Heavy rainfall begins across parts of the Mississippi River basin.	Soils become saturated and rivers remain unusually high, setting the stage for a major flood.
Winter 1926–1927	Persistent rain and high tributary flows continue throughout the Mississippi watershed.	Water accumulates across a drainage basin covering a huge portion of the United States.
March 1927	Major storms produce additional rainfall across the Mississippi Valley.	River levels rise further and pressure increases on levees throughout the lower valley.
Early April 1927	Mississippi River stages approach or exceed previous records in several locations. Communities reinforce and patrol levees.	Confidence in the existing **Levees-Only** flood-control system begins to be tested.
April 15–16, 1927	Intense rainfall falls across the lower Mississippi Valley.	The already saturated river system receives another enormous influx of water.
April 21, 1927	**Mounds Landing levee breaks** north of Greenville, Mississippi.	One of the most important moments of the disaster. Water rushes into the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, flooding farms, towns, and communities across a vast area.

Late April 1927	Flooding spreads across Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Thousands seek refuge on levees and in relief camps.	The disaster becomes a humanitarian crisis as well as an engineering failure. Black sharecroppers and laborers often experience particularly unequal treatment and restricted mobility.
April 29, 1927	Officials dynamite the levee at **Caernarvon**, downstream from New Orleans.	Leaders intentionally release Mississippi River water into St. Bernard and Plaquemines areas in an effort to reduce perceived danger to New Orleans. The decision raises major questions about **who is protected and who is asked to bear risk**.
May 1927	Additional levee breaks occur and floodwaters continue moving through Louisiana.	The flood is not a single event; different places experience rising water, evacuation, and destruction at different times.
May–June 1927	Large refugee camps and relief operations operate throughout the region.	Disaster relief exposes racial and economic inequalities. Decisions about food, labor, shelter, evacuation, and mobility become part of the flood's social history.
Summer 1927	Water slowly recedes from much of the lower Mississippi Valley.	Families return to destroyed homes and farms. Communities face rebuilding, debt, disease, crop loss, and displacement.
By August 1927	The major floodwaters have largely subsided.	Roughly 700,000 people had been displaced, although estimates of deaths and total flooded area vary among sources.
Late 1927–1928	Engineers and political leaders debate how the Mississippi should be managed in the future.	The flood demonstrates that relying on levees alone cannot provide complete protection.
May 1928	Congress passes the **Flood Control Act of 1928**.	The federal government assumes a much larger role in Mississippi River flood control. The new approach combines levees with floodways, channel improvements, tributary projects, and other structures rather than relying only on levees.
After 1928	Development of what becomes the **Mississippi River and Tributaries Project**.	Modern flood management grows from the lessons of 1927, using levees, floodways, spillways, reservoirs, control structures, and channel management together.

Five phases

1. The System Fills — 1926 to March 1927
Rain accumulates across the watershed.

2. The River Rises — Early April 1927
Levees are under increasing pressure, but confidence in the flood-control system remains high.

3. The System Breaks — April 21 onward
Mounds Landing and other levee failures turn high water into catastrophic flooding.

4. People Make Choices — Late April through Summer
Evacuation, rescue, refugee camps, racial inequality, labor decisions, and the Caernarvon levee dynamiting show that the flood is also a leadership and social crisis.

5. The Nation Changes Course — 1928
The Flood Control Act fundamentally changes federal river management.

April 21 — Mounds Landing, **April 29 — Caernarvon**, and **May 1928 — Flood Control Act** the three visually largest points on the timeline. Progression:

engineering confidence → system failure → difficult human decisions → new flood-control philosophy.

At what point did the 1927 flood stop being simply a natural event and become a human-made disaster as well?