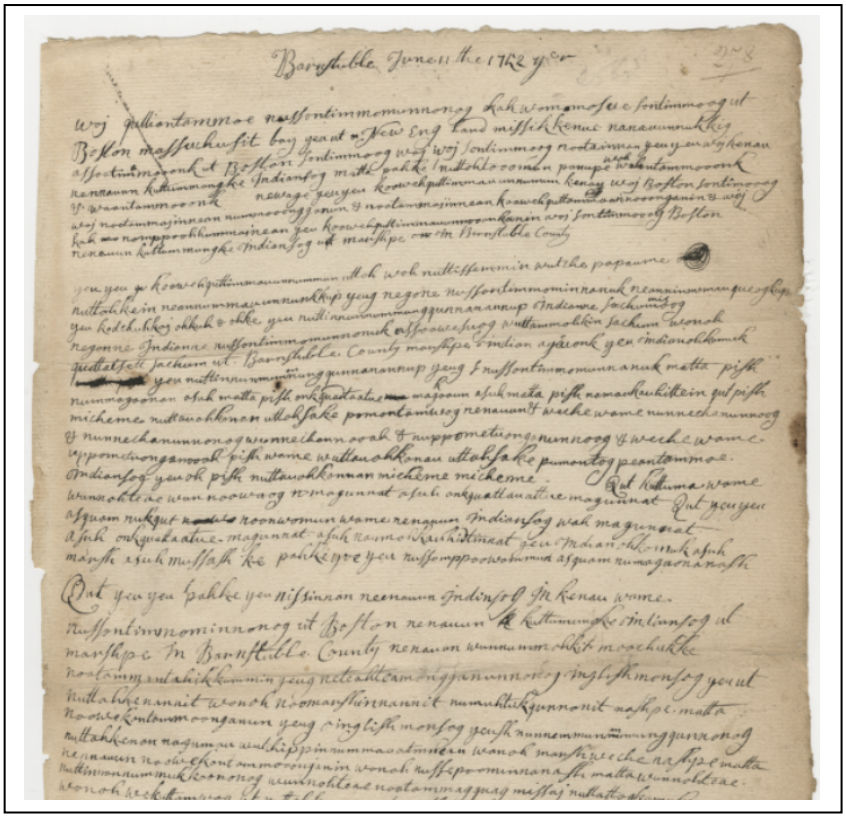
PRIMARY SOURCE

Straight from the Source
Close Readings for Elementary Social Studies

Wampanoag Appeal to Colonists for Land Rights



Grade Level: 3

MA Standards: Explain the diversity of Native Peoples, present and past, in Massachusetts and the New England region; Explain the consequences of Puritan migration for the Native Peoples of the region.

Common Core Standards: RI.3.2; W.3.1

Image Source: Massachusetts Archives Collection, v. 32 p. 277, Petition to the General Court from the Mashpee Indians regarding abuses by their English neighbors in English, June 11, 1752. SC1/series 45X. Massachusetts Archives. Boston, Massachusetts.

Courtesy of the Massachusetts Archives.

Abstract:

Students read excerpts from a petition written by Mashpee Wampanoag Indians in the mid-18th century, outlining their claims to the land and demanding just treatment by the English colonists. Students locate Wampanoag lands, and those of other New England native people, on a historic map. They think about persuasive speech and consider how Indian people used their own written language as a tool for expressing grievances. Writing prompts are provided for the Common Core text types, as well as an accompanying academic vocabulary list.

Rationale and Source Context:

This primary source, the Mashpee Wampanoag Petition to the Massachusetts General Court of 1752, highlights two key themes in the history of Wampanoag people in Massachusetts – themes echoed in the history of Native American people across North America. One is the attachment to ancestral land. The other is Native America's five century pursuit of equity and justice.

Many historical accounts continue to obscure or misrepresent the history of indigenous Americans. One common misperception is that Native people vanished from New England as a result of King Philip's War (1675-1678). The war and its aftermath did indeed bring devastation to Wampanoag people and their allies. After their military defeat, many Indian men from Massachusetts were sold into slavery in the West Indies by the colony's rulers. Other Wampanoags were forced or pressured to relocate. Yet despite all of these oppressive conditions, the nucleus of Wampanoag communities persisted.

One of the most important and persistent communities was Mashpee, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. In the 17th century, Mashpee was established as one of the so-called "Indian praying towns" of Massachusetts – a community of Christian converts under the protection of the Puritan church. "Praying town" residents were ostensibly granted a modicum of security and the right to live a communal existence. Later, Mashpee received and absorbed waves of Indian people forced off their traditional lands from other parts of Cape Cod and elsewhere in Massachusetts.

Throughout the 18th century the colonial government of Massachusetts passed laws further restricting the autonomy and land rights of Indian people. In 1746 they created an onerous system of guardianship for Native communities. In the paternalistic thinking of the time, the white overseers assigned to supervise Indian communities were supposed to act in the best interest of their charges. But this was far from the reality. The guardians stood by while neighboring whites infringed on Indian resources at will, seizing land, lumber, game and fish. Often the guardians themselves became the problem, engaging illegally in the sale of land for their personal benefit. By the early 1750s, the Mashpee Wampanoag had reached a peak of anger and frustration. Seeking relief from the encroachments of neighboring white people, who took timber and shellfish from Indian land and threatened Indian people with violence, the Mashpee Wampanoag penned this eloquent petition to the Massachusetts colonial assembly based in Boston (the legislative body for the Massachusetts Bay colony).

As a document, the petition of 1752 is significant on many levels. First, it outlines in compelling terms the Wampanoags' claim to the land and, in stark language, the essential injustice of their treatment by white colonists. Discuss with students the notions of fairness embedded in the Wampanoags' petition and ask if they believe the Wampanoags were treated fairly. The petition is a fine example of persuasive writing – a type of writing that is featured in the Common Core State Standards for student writing.

It is important to point out that the petition was written in the Wampanoag language. Wampanoag people were the first in the Americas to gain an alphabetic written language. A substantial body of writing from the 18th century—including land deeds, wills, and letters—attests to the importance that writing attained in the cultural, political and economic life of Wampanoag people. (If you'd like to see the original document, follow this link http://bit.ly/U3cVhC; the original handwritten Wampanoag document appears first. Scroll through subsequent pages for typewritten Wampanoag and English translations.)

Like other literate Americans of the colonial era, Wampanoags also used the written word to engage in political discourse. In formulating this document, the Mashpee Wampanoags employed an important tool of English democracy, the written "petition" – a formal request or demand submitted to a body of government, in this case the Massachusetts colonial assembly, to ask for protection of their land, livelihood and way of life. (Later, after the American Revolution, African Americans enslaved in the New England colonies similarly used the right of petition to bid for individual and group freedom). Assist students in learning some basic vocabulary of American civics by studying this document, and test their evolving ideas about the fair treatment of others through this historical case study.

In the 19th and 20th centuries Wampanoag people continued to resist white encroachment on their land and degrading and discriminatory treatment. In 1833, for example, Native American preacher William Apess helped Mashpee Wampanoags to submit another powerful petition deploring their loss of land and the constant harassment of whites. This time their cause was championed by prominent Massachusetts reformers, notably abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. The Massachusetts state legislature granted Mashpee the right of self-government in 1834. (You can learn about this incident and read the 1833 petition at Mass Moments, "Indians in Mashpee Demand Self Government, May 21, 1833" http://www.massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=150).

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*Text Complexity (Grade-Level Edited Text)**

Lexile	ATOS	Degrees of Reading Power	Flesch-Kincaid
760L	3.8	50	4.78

*The readability measures listed here refer to the adapted grade-level edited version of the text, not the original text.

Suggested Guidance for Teaching Close Reading of Text with Accompanying Materials	
Pre-Reading	1. It is best to use this primary source after you have introduced students to the Wampanoag people and the conflicts between Native peoples and European settlers. 2. Show students this map of New England (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patuxet#/media/File:Tribal_Territories_Southern_New_England.png) to illustrate the ancestral lands of the Wampanoag people in Massachusetts. Explain to students that the British colonial governments in Massachusetts restricted the land rights of Indian people and, in response, the Wampanoag tribe in Mashpee appealed to the colonial laws to secure their rights. Tell them they are going to read the document that the Wampanoags wrote to the Massachusetts colonial assembly in Boston. 3. Have students read the text independently and annotate for understanding.
1st Reading: Key Ideas and Details	4. Focus on these questions for the first reading of the text: a. What do you think this document is about? b. What is a petition? c. Who are the "honorable gentlemen in Boston" to whom the Wampanoag people are writing? (Paragraph 1) What are the Mashpee Wampanoags trying to persuade them to do? (Paragraphs 1, 4) d. For what purposes did the Mashpee Wampanoags use their land? (Paragraph 3) Why was this specific land important or special to them? (Paragraph 2) What words in the document tell you this?
2nd Reading: Craft and Structure	5. Focus on these questions for the second reading of the text: a. What words or phrases did Indian people use to compliment the "gentlemen in Boston"? Why do you think the authors included compliments in their petition? (Paragraphs 1, 4) b. What arguments did the Wampanoags use to persuade the Massachusetts colonial leaders to help them? Which of their arguments do you think is the best, and why? (Paragraphs 2, 3)
3rd Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	6. Focus on these questions for the third reading of the text: a. Why is the chance to petition the government an important right for people to have? Why was it important for the Wampanoags? b. If you were going to petition your town council, mayor or another politician to change one thing about your city or neighborhood, what would it be? c. Were the English neighbors being fair to the Wampanoags of Mashpee? Choose a specific example from the text and show how it supports your opinion.

Post-Reading	7. Remind students that the Wampanoag people wrote the original petition in the Wampanoag language and that the Wampanoag people were the first in the Americas to use an alphabetic written language. Show students the original document written in Wampanoag, which can be accessed here: http://bit.ly/U3cVhC. See if they recognize any words in the text. Ask them to try reading some of the language out loud. Can they tell it is not English? How? 8. In the 19th and 20th centuries Wampanoag people continued to resist white encroachment on their land and discriminatory treatment. To learn more about a petition the Mashpee submitted in 1833, explore the history through this article "Indians in Mashpee Demand Self Government, May 21, 1833" from Mass Moments: http://www.massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=150.
Writing Prompts	9. After students analyze the text, assign one of the following writing prompts: d. (Opinion) Were the English neighbors being fair to the Wampanoags of Mashpee? Choose a specific example from the text and show how it supports your opinion. e. (Informative/Explanatory) A friend wants your help to write a petition to the city's mayor about something that is wrong. Describe the things that he or she should include in the petition using the Wampanoag petition as your model.

Key Vocabulary

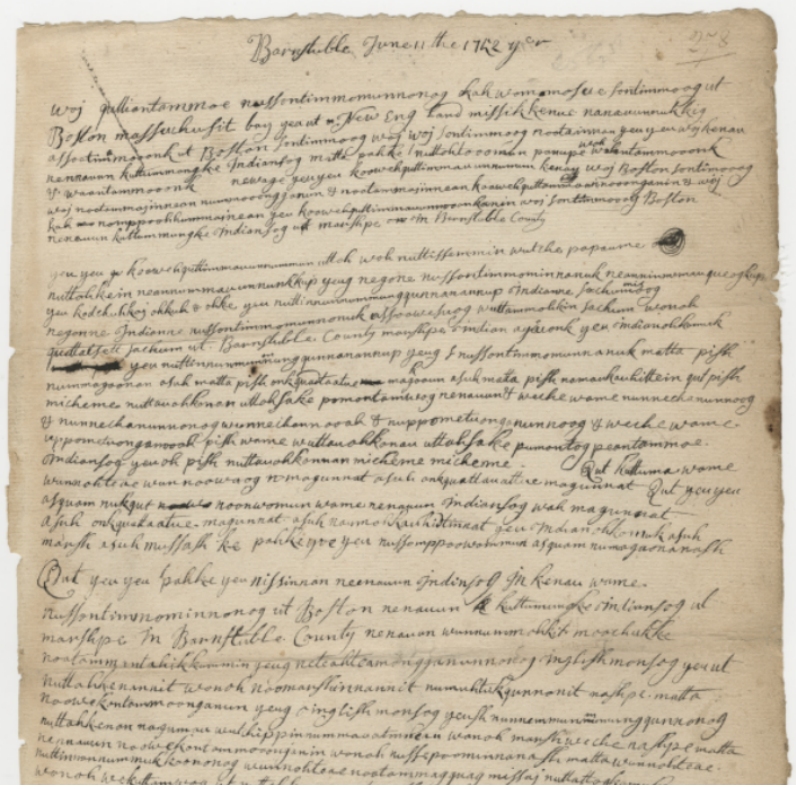
Tier 2	convey	*(v.) to communicate something*
	descendants	*(n.) relatives; family*
	former	*(adj.) past*
	honorable	*(adj.) something or someone in a high position; worthy of respect*
	will	*(n.) one's choice; doing something you want to do*

Tier 3	beseech	*(v.) to ask for something*
	colony	*(n.) a settlement that is ruled by another country*
	court	*(n.) a place in government to settle disagreements*
	petition	*(n.) a written request; (v.) to ask for something*
	sachem	*(n.) the leader of a Native American tribe*

Additional Resources:

Bain, Angela & et al, "Native Peoples in New England."
http://www.memorialhall.mass.edu/classroom/curriculum_6th/lesson2/bkgdessay.html
Calloway, Colin G. *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices from Early America*. Bedford/St. Martin's, Boston, 1994 (pp. 104-106).
"Indians in Mashpee Demand Self-Government." Mass Moments. 14 September 2012.
http://massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=150
The Mashpee Wampanoag Timeline: http://www.mashpeewampanoagtribe-nsn.gov/timeline
"Natick Established." Mass Moments. 14 September 2012.
http://www.massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=57

Wampanoag Indians at Mashpee
Petition to the Massachusetts General Court
1752



Barnstable, June 11, 1752

1 Oh! Our honorable gentlemen and kind gentlemen in Boston in Massachusetts Bay. Here in New England. The great ones who oversee the colony in Boston, gentlemen. Oh! , Oh!, gentlemen, hear us now, us poor Indians. Oh! Boston gentlemen. Oh! Hear our weeping, and hear our beseeching of you. Oh!, and answer.

2 This Indian land, this was conveyed to us by these former sachems of ours. We shall not give it away. Nor shall it be sold. But we shall

always use it as long as we live, we together with all our children, and our children's children, and our descendants.

3 But now clearly we Indians say this to all you gentlemen of ours in Boston. We truly are much troubled by these English neighbors of ours being on this land of ours, and in our marsh and trees. Against our will these Englishmen take away from us what was our land. As for our streams, they do not allow us peacefully to be when we peacefully go fishing. They beat us greatly. They have houses on our land against our will. We poor Indians soon shall not have any place to reside, together with our poor children, because these Englishmen trouble us very much in this place of ours in Mashpee, Barnstable County.

4 Therefore now, Oh! you kind gentlemen of Boston, in Massachusetts Bay, now we beseech you. Defend us, and they would not trouble us any more on our land.

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Transcription available through Ives Goddard and Kathleen Joan Bragdon, *Native Writings in Massachusett*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1988 (pp. 370-373); E-book edition from Google Books: http://bit.ly/U3cVhC.

Wampanoag Indians at Mashpee
Petition to the Massachusetts General Court
1752

Barnstable, June 11, 1752

1 Oh! Our honorable gentlemen and kind gentlemen in Boston in Massachusetts Bay, here in New England, the great ones who oversee the colony in Boston, gentlemen. Oh!, Oh!, gentlemen, hear us now, Oh! ye, us poor Indians. We do not clearly have thorough understanding and wisdom. Therefore we now beseech you, Oh! Boston gentlemen. Oh! Hear our weeping, and hear our beseeching of you, Oh!, and answer this beseeching of you by us, Oh!, gentlemen of Boston, us poor Indians in Mashpee in Barnstable County.

2 This Indian land, this was conveyed to us by these former sachems of ours. We shall not give it away, nor shall it be sold, nor shall it be lent, but we shall always use it as long as we live, we together with all our children, and our children's children, and our descendants, and together with all their descendants.

3 But now clearly we Indians say this to all you gentlemen of ours in Boston: We poor Indians in Mashpee, in Barnstable County, we truly are much troubled by these English neighbors of ours being on this land of ours, and in our marsh and trees. Against our will these Englishmen take away from us what was our land…. As for our streams, they do not allow us peacefully to be when we peacefully go fishing. They beat us greatly, and they have houses on our land against

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