

Examining the Raid on Peskeompskut in Western Massachusetts Through Two Sets of Eyes: 17th Century Native American and English Perspectives Compared For Grade 5

This lesson has two sessions. Students compare two women's lives across cultures in troubled times in Massachusetts in the late 17th century. They examine the 1676 attack on Peskeompskut (pess-kay-OMP-skut) (now Turners Falls, MA) through each woman's eyes and begin to understand that differences in values and needs can cause conflict. The class is divided into pairs and threesomes, with each assigned to study one woman. There should be a roughly equal number of students assigned to each role. After researching lifestyles, values, and fears, the class meets online to discuss differing reasons for why the raid took place. Students also imagine potentially better solutions than war for dealing with conflict.

Two maps are used in the lesson. The first can be found online. The second is included in this lesson plan for printing and it is also in an accompanying slideshow.

Session #1

Introduction- Assault on Peskeompskut Overview

1. Show map: [Western Massachusetts map](#)

You can zoom in to see the smaller towns more clearly. Point out **Turners Falls**. Follow the red line (Rte. 91) north to Greenfield. Turners Falls is above it and a little to the east.

In the pre-dawn stillness of May 19, 1676, 150 Englishmen led by Captain William Turner entered the Indigenous fishing camp at Peskeompskut, beside the falls on the Connecticut River. Today, Peskeompskut is called Turners Falls.

2. Show **slide #2- map of New England tribes**

Peskeompskut (unlabeled) is at the left-hand bend in the Connecticut River above Deerfield. It is in the Pocumtuck homeland. Pocumtuck, Sokoki, and Nipmuc women, children and elders had come here for safety, along with Wampanoag and Narragansett people who were escaping fighting in the south. The **Sokoki** people lived along the Connecticut River just under the border with New Hampshire. Point out the **Nipmuc, Narragansett, and Wampanoag** homelands.

At Turner's signal, the English silently surrounded the wigwams (houses) and the peaceful dawn exploded into violence. Gunshots, screams, and flames filled the air as the English shot into wigwams and set them on fire. Terrified Indigenous people fled through the smoke to the river where many were shot down or drowned. Over 300 people and one English soldier died before Indigenous men hunting nearby rushed to the scene and fought off the assailants, killing Turner and 36 others in a disorganized retreat.

In the decades before this attack, English settlements grew rapidly, threatening to overrun local Native American populations and homelands. People faced starvation and they were forced to follow English laws. They didn't understand the concept of private ownership of land so when the English bought their land and made them sign deeds to prove ownership, the Indigenous people didn't understand that their rights to use their homelands were being taken away as well. Warriors then began attacking English settlements in an effort to reclaim lost territory and halt expansion.

This attack was the first made by the English in the Connecticut River Valley during Metacom's War. Metacom, or "King Philip" as he was called by the English, was a Wampanoag leader who gathered warriors from several tribes in New England to try to drive the English from Indigenous homelands. In 1675, Native American attacks in the Connecticut River Valley forced the English to abandon both Northfield and Deerfield. In 1676, the English stopped Indigenous warriors from attacking Hatfield and Northampton and then they attacked Peskeompskut and eventually killed Metacom and won the war. This war was, by proportion, the bloodiest in American history, killing 40% of southern New England's Indigenous population (5,000) and 5% of the English (2,500).

In this lesson, you'll be exploring two different perspectives about why the attack happened. You'll learn that differences in values and needs can cause problems and that different cultures deal with these problems in different ways. You'll also think about better solutions than war for dealing with conflict.

One perspective will be from Eunice Mather, who really existed. She lived in Northampton, Massachusetts and she was 12 when the attack took place. **Point out Northampton in relation to Turners Falls on the online map.** Even though Eunice didn't live close to Peskeompskut, she would have heard about the attack because it was big news among the English people living along the Connecticut River.

A fictional woman named Weetanusk (WEE-ta-nusk) will provide the other perspective. She is a 23-year-old Pocumtuck woman. Peskeompskut is in her homeland and is a place where she spent many summers. Her grandmother- Mashalisk (MASH-a-lisk), and her father are both mentioned in her story. They really did exist.

Teaching the Lesson

1. Divide the class into pairs and threesomes and assign Weetanusk or Eunice to each group. Try to have an equal number representing each role. Students can communicate with each other via phone or email. Provide each group with its readings and worksheet.
2. Students in the Weetanusk group should divide the readings among themselves. They'll each have the same worksheet and each student will answer as many questions on the worksheet as they can. (Not all questions can be answered by one reading.) The reading for Eunice's group is short and probably doesn't need to be divided, but can be, if you feel the need. All students in the Eunice group will use the same worksheet. Give them 1-3 days to complete their readings and worksheets before holding session #2.

Readings for Weetanusk

- "Weetanusk"- Reading #1
- "Weetanusk"- Reading #2

Reading for Eunice

- Eunice Mather

Session #2

1. Hold a class discussion via an online platform. You can take the role of interviewer or moderator. Students can answer questions as they feel comfortable to do so. Ask:
 - Weetanusk and Eunice to each introduce themselves. Where do they live? How old are they?
 - What work do they do for their families and communities?
 - What is valuable to their people?
 - What they have in common. (caring for others, fear of attack, wanting a safe life for family, wanting to have enough food, wanting peace)
 - Why are their people mad? (**English-** Native people wouldn't leave an area the English thought they owned; **Native people-** the English attacked innocent people at Peskeompskut, a place of peace; the English are taking over their lands)
 - Why did the assault happen? What might the people at the Falls have said about why the English attacked them? (the English want all their land) What might the English have said about why they attacked? (easy victory, payback, wanted more land, wanted to drive back the Native peoples)
 - **Eunice-** do you think your people should have acted in a different manner or were they justified in behaving the way they did? Why? If they should have done something different, what should it have been?
 - **Weetanusk-** What might your people have done if the tables were turned and the English were in your "shoes" and you were in theirs? If the English had accused you of taking their land, making them follow your rules, and attacking them, what do you think your people would have said and done?
 - Was anybody right or wrong? Why? (Native peoples thought the English were wrong for taking over and not being more willing to cooperate; they saw the massacre as wrong because there were no warriors to fight back and innocent women, children, and old men were killed.)

- If it were up to the two of you to decide, how might you have dealt with these problems?

Weetanusk Reading #1

Weetanusk (WEE-ta-nusk) always called her grandmother Mashalisk (MASH-a-lisk) by the name of Nokomes (no-KO-mess), meaning “my grandmother”. She knew that Mashalisk was an important woman. First, she was Weetanusk’s grandmother. Then, she was the mother of Weetanusk’s father who had brought her there to live. Mashalisk was a sunksqua (SUNK-skwa) (female leader), one of the many leaders who looked after the needs of the people. It took some explaining for Weetanusk to understand that a person could be physically small, and yet also be called large. Whenever her grandmother spoke, it seemed as though everything slowed down to listen. When she laughed, it sounded like water falling. They say when Mashalisk was young, she could run down deer faster than an arrow could catch him. Weetanusk decided that her grandmother was a good model of what a girl might hope to be.

Weetanusk was only five years old and did not yet have a personal name when she came to live with her grandmother in the place beside the Quinneticook (quin-EH-ti-cook) (Connecticut) River. Her family still called her by her child-name of Nuncksquassis (nunk-SQUA-sis), meaning "little girl." Her father brought her there one spring, around fishing moon. Within a few hours, Mashalisk decided that she would be called “Weetanusk”, a name that used to be carried by one of her ancestors, a proud woman who would not back down from anybody.

When the leaves began to turn, Weetanusk wished she was out with her father, helping him to track for deer. Mashalisk had to find excuses to send Weetanusk off to her aunts and cousins, so that she could learn other skills. During one of those visits, her aunt showed Weetanusk the cloth that her husband had brought back from the trading place. She set out pins and needles, and scissors, and showed the girl how the steel tools could make holes far smaller than a bone awl (hole-making tool), in cloth that seemed far more fragile than deerskin.

Weetanusk’s father came by at least once every moon, and stayed for longer times during the fishing season, and during the festivals. He brought fresh meat from deer and moose every fall, and Mashalisk taught Weetanusk how to tan and prepare the hides.

Despite all the talk of war, the Pocumtuck felt safe.

Weetanusk Reading #2

For generations, Peskeompskut (pes-kay-OMP-skut) had been a gathering place where Native American people from different tribes fished during annual salmon runs in the summer. Even groups who did not get along were supposed to set aside their differences when they were at Peskeompskut and not fight or argue. The safety and food this place offered families was even more important during wartimes. Here, far from English forces, the Indigenous people felt secure; they posted no scouts.

In the early morning, when the sky was just turning from black to blue, Weetanusk (WEE-ta-nusk) woke up smelling smoke. She looked out of the wigwam (house) to see burning, everything was burning. As she looked around, people were scrambling to turn over the canoes on the bank, the houses were all burning, guns were echoing off the rocks, and there was no one she recognized in the smoke. Even the fish racks were burning. She grabbed the young child that had been sleeping beside her, and ran out of the wigwam, with guns blasting on every side. English soldiers were pointing their guns in wigwams, killing everybody, including women, children and elders. Terrified survivors ran to the river and were shot down; others drowned as canoes capsized in the turbulent water, carrying their occupants over the falls to their deaths.

The day before, the river was so thick with salmon that the people could almost walk across their bodies to the other shore. Now, the only red in the river was human blood. Weetanusk could not believe that anybody would attack the safe place, the fishing place.

Before the attack at Peskeompskut, the English had been trying to get all the peoples to move nearer the Pocumtecook (po-COME-te-cook) (Deerfield River), and nearer the Pocumtuck (po-COME-tuck) fort. This was because they wanted more Pocumtuck land. The sachem (SAY-chem) (leader) Chauk claimed that his English friends were settling a trading post, and that they had agreed to let all the Pocumtuck live there under protection. Just six years later though, the town had grown so full of English houses and cattle and fences that there was little room for the Pocumtuck people beside the Pocumtecook. They grew angry because this was happening all over their homeland and they began to attack English settlements in an effort to reclaim lost lands and halt expansion.

The attack at Peskeompskut was the first battle that Weetanusk had ever experienced at close range. She remembered how, back in 1663, her grandmother Mashalisk (MASH-a-lisk), who was a sunksqua (SUNK-squa) (female leader) had counseled the Pocumtuck men against further fighting. She asked the women to stop making moccasins (shoes), so the men would have to either go barefoot to war or not go at all.

When spring came and all of the tribes were gathered at Peskeompskut, the Sokoki and Pocumtuck women were asked to look after the Wampanoag, Narragansett and Nipmuc families who had fled from the English in the southern territories. Hundreds of them came to the fishing place at Peskeompskut, where all tribes, even old enemies, respected the rights of all to fish, in a place where there had never been any war.

**A Matter of Perspective
Worksheet for Weetanusk**

1. What work do you do for your family and your community?

2. What do you and your people need in order to survive?

3. What do your people value? What makes a good model for what the perfect Pocumtuck girl should be? She should be.....

4. What are your worries and fears?

5. What are the English people doing that make your people mad?

6. Why do you think the attack on Peskeompskut happened?

Weetanusk Worksheet
Answers

1. Work- hunt, fish, tan & prepare hides, sew; not in narrative- cook, look after others
2. Needed in order to survive- access to their sources of food, pelts for clothing, a place safe from attack, a place to build their homes
3. Values, good role model- pride, bravery, look after others, someone others listened to, peace, strength
4. Worries & fears- felt threatened by an increasing English population that was taking over all of their land; fear of attack, starvation
5. What the English did to make the Pocumtuck mad- forced them to follow English laws, took their land and wouldn't let them use it; attacked helpless people- elders, women, & children
6. Why the attack happened- the English wanted them to move away

Eunice Mather

Eunice Mather was born on August 2, 1664, in Northampton, Massachusetts. Her father became the first minister of Northampton in 1658. Her mother was also a minister's daughter. In Puritan (a religion) New England, ministers were at the top of the social scale, so Eunice was born into one of Northampton's foremost families. Her father died when she was five years old and 4 years later, her mother married Northampton's second minister.

As the minister's daughter—and to prepare her in turn to be a minister's wife— Eunice was taught to read and write. Although Puritan beliefs emphasized the importance of Bible reading, not everybody could read and write. Some were taught to read, but not to write; many of Eunice's female friends were unable to sign their own names.

Eunice's mother would have taught her to sew, spin, knit, and embroider at a very young age—as well as the less dainty work required to run a household, so that she could help with these chores. This work involved planting, tending, and harvesting a kitchen garden; milking cows; cooking over a fire; preserving food; sewing, mending, and washing clothing; and more.

Northampton was located on the Nonotuck homeland. During most of Eunice's childhood, relations between the English settlers and the local Nonotuck people were mostly friendly. Nonotuck villages and cornfields were nearby, and there was some trade between the two populations. When Eunice was 11 years old, things changed. Metacom's (King Philip's) War brought fear and insecurity to Northampton as it spread westward, and the local Native American population joined forces with tribes from the east. The Nonotucks disappeared from the community, except to attack people caught outside of the town center as they cut wood or harvested crops in the meadows. A wall was erected around a large part of Northampton, but Indigenous attackers broke through it on March 14, 1676, killing four men and a young girl and wounding others.

There was trouble up the Connecticut River from Northampton, too. Warriors attacked a group of farmers as they were crossing Muddy Brook near Deerfield, moving wagonloads of grain to safety in Hadley. Grief-stricken colonists buried over 60 bodies in a mass grave and renamed the site Bloody Brook. The constant threat of Indigenous attacks made planting impossible in exposed towns like Hatfield, where warriors had recently stampeded 70 head of cattle.

The threat of such attacks continued throughout Eunice's teenage years, but she strove to remain strong and cheerful, as her mother had taught her a minister's wife should be.

**A Matter of Perspective
Worksheet for Eunice**

1. What work do you do for your family and your community?

2. What do you and your people need in order to survive?

3. What do your people value? What makes a good model for what the perfect English girl should be? She should be.....

4. What are your worries and fears?

5. What are the Indigenous people doing that make your people mad?

6. Why do you think the attack on Peskeompskut happened?

Eunice Worksheet

Answers

1. Work- run household, look after others, sew, spin, knit, plant, tend, and harvest a kitchen garden; milk cows; cook over a fire; preserve food; make, mend, and wash clothing
2. Needed in order to survive- feel safe from attack, land to grow food, a place to build their homes
3. Values- owning land, reading, writing, religion, strength
4. Worries & fears- they felt threatened by the Indigenous peoples who wanted them to go away and they were worried the Indigenous peoples would attack them
5. What the Native American people did to make the English mad- they attacked English communities
6. Why the attack happened- the English felt the need to stop Native American peoples from attacking them, and they needed to protect their settlements

A Matter of Perspective

Grade 5 History & Social Science Frameworks Connections

Topic 1. Early colonization and growth of colonies [5.T1]

Supporting Question: To what extent was North America a land of opportunity, and for whom?

1. Explain the early relationships of English settlers to Native Peoples in the 1600s and 1700s, including the impact of diseases introduced by Europeans in severely reducing Native populations, the differing views on land ownership or use, property rights, and the conflicts between the two groups (e.g., the Pequot and King Philip's Wars in New England).

Further Information

[Raid on Deerfield: The Many Stories of 1704](#)

[Assault on Peskeompskut](#)



Wikipedia