Introduction and Reflection

- Statehood and the Wabanaki Grades 7-12-

Themes & Sources (for teacher use):

- Europeans and Wabanaki people exchanged technology and culture.
  - Source 1: Penobscot Powder Horn
  - Source 2: Silver Cuff
- There is a difficult and complicated history between Wabanaki people and colonists.
  - Source 3: Prices of Goods
  - Source 4: Spencer Phips Proclamation
- Wabanaki people worked to protect their rights in the new state.
  - Source 5: Petition of the Penobscot
  - Source 6: Portrait of John Neptune

CAUTION: the Spencer Phips Proclamation contains graphic and disturbing language.

Possible connections between the sources (for teacher use):

- Source 1 and 2: These sources show an exchange of culture between Wabanaki people and Europeans, encourage students to discuss this idea.
- Source 3 and 4: These two documents show extremely different sides of the interactions between Native people and Europeans—one shows a mutually beneficial trading relationship, the other encourages murder.
- Source 5 and 6: Students may notice John Neptune’s name in both the portrait and the petition (hint that there’s a connection if necessary). He was one of the Penobscot leaders who signed the petition.
Note to teachers and students:

This is a messy, complicated, history—difficult to teach and to understand. This introduction cannot come close to telling the full story, nor are we the best ones to tell it. We recommend you seek out the perspectives of Native scholars and community members who have lived with this history. There are some resources to get you started at the bottom of this document.

These materials are intended as a starting point. We hope you start conversations in your classroom and dive into further research. Wabanaki history is far too often ignored or pushed to the side. It is critical to an understanding of both Maine history and the lives of people living in Maine today.

Introduction

What names are we using? You might be confused to see a variety of terms in these materials: Native American, Indigenous, and Indian. Different people prefer one term over another, based on what feels more accurate and respectful to them. The term “Indian” is used in U.S. Federal policies and was more commonly used by the general public in the past, which is why you’ll see it in these historic documents.

Maine is the homeland of the Wabanaki, the People of the Dawn. For over 12,000 years Native Americans have made their lives here. They are the ancestors of present-day Indigenous peoples, including the Abenaki, Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot Nations—known collectively as the Wabanaki. These communities have survived despite years of violent colonization and continual violations of water, territorial rights, and sacred sites.

First Peoples

Native people’s story began long before Europeans arrived. The Wabanaki have deep cultural traditions that also changed over time. Generally, Native people practiced seasonal mobility. They traveled across their homelands to access the richest resources in the best seasons. In southern and western Maine, Native people grew corn along with other crops near their villages. They traveled over waterways to meet relatives, trade, and harvest fish runs. People often settled near the ocean in the summer and moved into the protective forest to hunt moose and caribou during the winter months. These cultural activities
strengthened their kinship networks and linked the Wabanaki peoples to their lands and resources.

**Encounters with Europeans**

European diseases arrived in the Northeast before European colonists did. Nearly 100 years before they settled in the region, European traders brought new diseases that spread widely through the Wabanaki communities. An especially devastating epidemic swept throughout the Northeast in 1617 killing between 75% and 90% of all Native peoples. This loss of life disrupted all aspects of Wabanaki life, from their land use to the passing of cultural traditions through the generations.

Beginning in the 1500s, Wabanaki people traded with the Europeans who began to visit Maine’s rocky shore to fish. These newcomers soon staked claims and settled on Wabanaki land in the name of France and England. Life for the Wabanaki changed drastically after they began trading with and living alongside European migrants.

**Wabanaki Trade, Transitions, and War**

The Wabanaki and European traders developed alliances based on shared economic interests. Europeans competed to develop strong trade relationships with the Wabanaki. By the late 1500s, the Wabanaki had a broad trade network that sent furs across the Atlantic. In the early years of contact, profitable trade gave a reason for Native peoples and European traders to work as allies.

At first, a mutually beneficial trade centered on furs. Beaver fur was the most valuable in Europe. The Wabanaki especially valued woven cloth, copper pots, and guns which became vital for hunting. The Wabanaki adapted trade goods to fit their cultural uses, but also became dependent on European-produced products. By the early 1700s, beaver population had plummeted leading to a trade imbalance and an increasingly strained relationship with the English.

France and England both claimed lands, set up colonies, and competed. Each worked to draw the Wabanaki into their trade and alliance network. They depended on strong relationships with Wabanaki peoples to get trade goods and make money. The French formed closer relationships with the Wabanaki than the English could. French Jesuit priests converted many Wabanaki to a Catholicism that respected some parts of indigenous traditional culture. By sharing a faith, the French and Wabanaki built trust and grew closer as allies and trading partners.
The English and French had different approaches to colonization. By 1700, the English had settled thousands of families in growing farm communities. They demanded more and more land. In contrast, the French focused on trade. They didn’t need a large colonial population or much land to farm. The Wabanaki and the French shared an interest in restricting English control of Maine. The Wabanaki often allied with French colonists to limit English settlement.

**War, Disease, Displacement**

Wabanaki peoples strategically protected their way of life in the midst of international conflicts in their homeland. The English need for land pushed Native people of New England to war.

In 1675, the English demand for more Wabanaki lands drove the Wabanaki to join in Metacom’s War, a multi-tribal military effort to drive the English out of New England. For nearly the next hundred years, the Wabanaki allied with the French to limit English settlement in Maine. After the 1763 Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years War (known by the English as the French and Indian War), the French largely withdrew from North America. Wabanaki peoples lost their primary trade partners and military allies. It became far harder to challenge English colonization of their homelands.

Wabanaki people responded in various ways as the French lost power and the English power grew in Maine. The Wabanaki were already weakened by widespread death from wars and disease. Without French support, Wabanaki armed resistance decreased enough that English colonists could flood north into Massachusetts’ “District of Maine.”

For years, the English government in Massachusetts viewed all “Eastern Indians” as enemies, and declared war against them. “Genocide” is the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation. The Massachusetts government wanted to completely wipe out the Wabanaki, and even offered large rewards of money to American colonists in exchange for killing and capturing Native men, women, and children. Captured people were sometimes sold into slavery.

Wave after wave of English settlements pushed deeper into their lands. Many Wabanaki people remained in small communities spread across their homeland. They relied on a deep understanding of their lands and waters to survive in the face of relentless English expansion. Some Wabanaki peoples took refuge at mission villages in Quebec, out of reach.
of English threat. Others took refuge with Wabanaki people living further north and west. Others stayed and resisted.

**New forms of resistance**

Conflict over Maine land has continued through the centuries. Some Wabanaki individuals and groups “sold” land to English colonists through the 1700s. The two cultures had very different legal and cultural understandings of what it meant to “own” land. The English believed their purchase meant that they had total ownership and control of the land—what they could do with it, who was allowed on it, etc.

In the early years, the Wabanaki understood a land sale meant that they gave permission to other people to live on the land—but they kept the right to do the same. For example, a European farmer could clear some woods to build a house and set up a farm, but a Wabanaki person could still hunt in the woods. Not only did Europeans force Native people off the land, they also pushed into land that was not theirs and did things they were not legally allowed to do. Over time, Wabanaki people became more familiar with English property law. They learned how to work within the system to protect their ownership of their homeland.

**The Wabanaki and the New State**

On March 15, 1820 Maine entered the Union as the 23rd state. Maine’s new constitution denied voting rights to “untaxed Indians” living on reservation lands. Tribal members were not legally allowed to vote in Maine until 1954—over 100 years after Maine became a state!

Maine took over Massachusetts’ controversial treaty agreements. The Massachusetts government entered into treaty relationships in 1794 with the Passamaquoddy and in 1796 and 1818 with the Penobscot. These treaties were illegal. They violated the Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790, a federal law that made it illegal for individuals or states to make independent land sales or treaties with Native American Indians without the approval of Congress.

These treaties restricted the tribes to increasingly small reservations but also protected Wabanaki hunting and fishing rights. Through a series of laws passed after 1820, the state tried to force the Wabanaki to live and remain within a narrow land base. In the meantime, new settlers from southern New England moved into Maine.

Upon achieving statehood, the new Maine government began negotiating directly with the Wabanaki. Conflicts between Maine and the Wabanaki surfaced early, for example, over fishing rights and vague reservation boundaries that Massachusetts had drawn up in a 1796
treaty with the Penobscot. Some public lands were also transferred from Massachusetts to Maine. Maine placed its public lands and Wabanaki peoples under legal guardianship. That meant that Maine government officials were given the power to manage legal and financial affairs of the land and the people.

**Continued Wabanaki Resistance**

The Wabanaki used official governmental channels to defend their land and way of life. In the years leading up to 1820, Wabanaki people sent many petitions to the Massachusetts government. They worked to keep settlers from living on their lands and to keep people from illegally cutting Wabanaki-owned timber for profit. They petitioned the government to limit dam construction on the rivers. Dams made it hard or impossible for them to fish, which was their right by treaty.

After 1820, the Wabanaki continued their cultural practices on the land, refusing to acknowledge treaty boundaries. Though the Wabanaki lost control of most of their homeland, they resisted when the Maine authorities tried to restrict them to their reservation lands. They continued to move throughout their homelands as they had always done. As more settlers established farmsteads, they began using property laws to eject Wabanaki people from the disputed land.

It is important to remember that Maine's system of laws and government was purposely built to help European Americans and to remove land, resources, and power from Native Americans. Regardless, the Wabanaki peoples of Maine have maintained their many cultural traditions to the present.

*After the topic has been introduced to students, hand out the primary sources and complete the worksheet activity*

**Class Reflection Questions:**

- What are some ways that life changed for Wabanaki people when European colonists arrived?

- How do the Fur Trading document and the Phips Proclamation show different sides of the relationship between Wabanaki people and European Americans?
• Why do you think the Phips Proclamation matters to Wabanaki people today? What could the long-term impacts be?

• How did Wabanaki people work to protect their rights after Maine became a state?

• Do you think separating from Massachusetts was good for the Wabanaki people, or bad for them? What further research could you do to find out?

**OPTIONAL Extra Materials:**

**A Note on History and Maps from an Indigenous Perspective**

*Excerpt from a Historical Primer by Shauna Johnson, University of British Columbia. Borrowed with permission from Native Land Digital: https://native-land.ca*

“In Canada and the United States, there is a long, dire history of colonization that has impacted indigenous peoples in many ways. While history books highlight famous white explorers and celebrated major events such as the discovery of ‘New Lands’, keep in mind that narratives told in the textbooks tell one side of the story; the story that the Europeans, as the all ‘superior humans’ chose to put in the history books (King, 2012).

When we talk about history, we talk about stories of the past. These stories have been organized into agreed upon events and interpretations that tell how “we” got from here to there. The problem with this is that those who held the most power chose the stories that were to become a part of history. History is a tool to tell stories about how they became powerful and how the powerful use that power to remain in power. So when it comes to the oral histories of indigenous peoples, many of the narratives were discounted, ignored, and erased from history by altering or not acknowledging the accounts of indigenous peoples (Smith, 2012) (King, 2012).

“The concept of mapping has had a tremendous impact upon indigenous peoples for centuries. Since it was first developed, the indigenous ways of orienting themselves on their lands were redefined. As soon as lines were drawn on maps by European hands, indigenous place names, which are intricately connected with indigenous history, stories, and teachings, were replaced with English names, erasing indigenous presence from the lands. Traditional homelands were divided and classified into different geographic features, properties and
imperial nations states, dividing and separating indigenous families. Languages and cultural teachings were lost as children were forced to attend residential schools and learn western ways of knowing.”

Read the full text here: https://native-land.ca/teachers-guide/

2002 The State of the Tribes Address


“From the beginning of European settlement, we held out the hand of friendship, first with the French, then the English, and finally with the American colonists. We assisted French explorers who sought our knowledge of the area as well as our help with their new settlements.

When the English arrived, we signed treaties with the understanding that we would share the land with them. We shared the land and Great Mother's bounty with the new colonists. When the new colonists arrived, we were there when they needed us.

In the hopes of protecting some of our land base, we signed a treaty with the Commonwealth and later with the State of Maine. The U.S. Congress never ratified these treaties. These treaties gave us title to several islands, a 23,000-acre township, and several smaller tracts of land, including 10 acres at Pleasant Point, which through our efforts was later increased. Despite the lack of federal protections, the tribe followed the tenets of this treaty even after the State of Maine was created in 1820.

Three years after the State of Maine was made a state, our people were given non-voting representation in the Maine Legislature. Through these representatives we were able to secure the establishment of the Passamaquoddy Trust Fund to finance emergency aid for the needy. The fund was financed from the proceeds of timber sales, grass, and power rights on our land. Such aid was desperately needed to help our people who were in dire straits. Despite being on the rail lines, our people were not allowed to take advantage of the situation and remained reliant on hunting, fishing, trapping, basket making, and other traditional arts. Interest from this fund was paid to the Indian Agents who were supposed to
be looking out for our welfare. Instead, we were given the leftovers, thus beginning a long cycle of welfare dependency. Where was the State of Maine when we needed your help and protection? Again, we had been taken advantage of by those we trusted.

Later, in the 1960s, we discovered that part of our land was sold or leased without federal consent. This discovery set off a legal battle that resulted in federal recognition for the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot peoples and a claim by the tribes to nearly two-thirds of the State of Maine. Despite legal victory after legal victory, we sought compromise with the state. The future of Maine as a whole was at stake. Government functions, businesses, and people's lives were held in the balance as long as this court case was being pursued. The result of that compromise was the Maine Indian Settlement Act, under which we operate now.

Unfortunately, the Settlement Act has not achieved its goal. It is a failed experiment in my mind. We seek only to maintain and exercise our sovereignty to protect our way of life.”

Read the full text here:

**Broken Promises: The story of Polansuwe Susehp Neptan [Francis Joseph Neptune]**

-Maine State Museum-

Passamaquoddy chief Polansuwe Susehp Neptan (1735-1834), known by English-speakers as Francis Joseph Neptune, was born around 1735 in his ancestral homeland in present-day east-central Maine.

The Passamaquoddy were long-time allies and trading partners of the French. As the son of Chief John Baptiste Neptune (d. 1788), Francis Joseph Neptune likely participated in the Seven Years War (French and Indian War, 1754-1763). He would have been on the side of the French, trying to limit the movement of English settlers deeper into Wabanaki lands. The Passamaquoddy alliance shifted to a more neutral position once it was clear the English would defeat the French.

During the American Revolution, the Passamaquoddy joined the Maliseet and Micmac in allying with the colonists against England. In 1777, General George Washington appealed to the Wabanaki to join forces with the rebels in exchange for a shared freedom after the war.

Francis Joseph Neptune was recognized for his heroic actions during the Battle of the Rim at Machias in 1777. He is credited with shooting an English officer, which led to an American
victory. After his father died in 1778, Francis Joseph led his people in protecting the eastern Maine shoreline and border. After the war, the Americans no longer needed the Passamaquoddy aid. As soon as the Passamaquoddy lost their strategic importance, they lost power with the Americans.

The Wabanaki had made brave sacrifices in their military service. They expected to have a role in treaty negotiations after the American Revolution, but they were not consulted or considered. Chief Francis Joseph Neptune went to Boston to remind the Americans of the Passamaquoddy role in the Revolution. The Massachusetts government agreed to protect 23,000 acres and establish a reservation at Pleasant Point, Maine—if the Passamaquoddy would give up other claims in the District of Maine. In the Massachusetts-Maine separation agreement, the Passamaquoddy kept the fishing and hunting rights on the lands Massachusetts had taken.

A few Maine-based resources

- **Passamaquoddy Peoples’ Knowledge Portal** offers photographs, audio recordings, artwork, books, and more. Passamaquoddy tribal members are using this archive to share parts of their history and culture.
  - https://passamaquoddypeople.com/about
- **Maine-Wabanaki REACH** advances Wabanaki self-determination by strengthening the cultural, spiritual and physical well-being of Native people in Maine. They provide educational workshops and presentations to native and non-native audiences.
  - http://www.mainewabanakireach.org/
- **Abbe Museum’s Educator Hub** offers educators a wide variety of resources to bring Wabanaki history and culture into their classrooms and meet the goals of LD291.
  - https://www.abbemuseum.org/educatorhub