

MALAGA ISLAND

FRAGMENTED LIVES



CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

Purpose:

Collectively, the lesson plans encourage a comparison of fiction and non-fiction materials about the historic events that occurred on Malaga Island, Maine, encourage skill-building in critical thinking and source evaluation, explore Malaga's place in a complex ecosystem, and strengthen understanding of the scientific process. All curricular materials are designed to help students meet the Maine Learning Requirements and Common Core Standards at the middle school level.

Lesson Plan Sequence

This curriculum has been designed to support cross-disciplinary teaching (language arts, social studies, and science) and to allow teachers to adapt to the various time constraints they may experience. All teachers are encouraged to begin with Lesson 1; the lessons that follow can be used in a sequence, isolated and used selectively, or used collaboratively by multiple teachers.

- Lesson 1: Introduction to Malaga Island: Primary Sources & Fragmented Lives
- Lesson 2: Visual Literacy and Images of Malaga Island
- Lesson 3: Media Literacy, Citizenry, and Conflicting Accounts of Malaga Island
- Lesson 4: Going Beyond "Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy": Revisiting Malaga Island with Civil Action
- Lesson 5: Archaeology and Environment on Malaga Island: Understanding Scientific Process

Summary

Malaga Island is located at the mouth of the New Meadows River in Phippsburg. Bear Island lies 100 yards to the west, and the small fishing village of Sebasco is about 300 yards to the east. Like much of the Maine coast, 42-acre Malaga Island is rocky and rugged. The shell beach on the north end was the location of several settlements, beginning with Native Americans who inhabited the island within the last 1,000 years. Little is known about how these first inhabitants lived; considerably more is known about Malaga's later residents – the mixed-heritage community that occupied the island's north end from the 1860s to 1912.

The probable origins of Malaga Island's historic community can be traced back to one African American man, Benjamin Darling. He purchased Horse Island (now known as Harbor Island and located near Malaga Island) in 1794. Darling's descendants and their families soon settled on numerous islands throughout the New Meadows River. Although records are not clear, Henry Griffin

and Fatima Darling Griffin, with their family, were most likely the first to live on Malaga Island, setting up house on the east side in the early 1860s.

In the early 1900s, the Malaga Island community found itself caught in a time of great change for Maine. A poor economy, the decline of the fishing and ship building industries, a boom in real estate prices, and thriving social reform efforts all affected Malaga. At the same time, the island residents became victims of the eugenics movement, a popular theory that the poor, immoral, or criminal were born that way due to heredity. The eugenics movement was widely accepted as fact throughout the early 1900s and was supported by numerous advocates, including heads of state, teachers, religious missionaries, journalists, and scientists. The press publicized a common belief that the only way to help Malaga Island's residents and improve tourism and property values on the Maine coast was to dismantle the community.

Christian missionaries from Malden, Massachusetts, Captain George and Lucy Lane, began to visit Malaga Island during the summer of 1906. The Lanes focused their missionary efforts on educating the children of Malaga Island. They actively raised funds to build a permanent school on the island and help pay for food and clothing.

Although efforts were well underway to improve living conditions on Malaga Island, the notoriety of the island community in statewide and regional newspapers gave Phippsburg a bad reputation, just as the tourism industry was beginning to grow in Maine. Newspapers put forth commonly held beliefs that the individuals living on Malaga Island were degenerate and needed assistance to survive. The stories of Malaga Island and the actions of both the town of Phippsburg and the State of Maine to evict the community were reported throughout the New England region and in nationwide publications such as Harper's Magazine.

As early as the 1890s, efforts were underway in Phippsburg to rid itself of the Malaga Island community. Legal disputes continued until Maine's state government became involved. Governor Frederick Plaisted visited Malaga Island in 1911, along with his Executive Council, to see the island for himself. During his visit, Plaisted remarked, "the best plan would be to burn down the shacks with all their filth. Certainly the conditions are not creditable to our state, and we ought not to have such things near our front door, and I do not think that a like condition can be found in Maine, although there are some pretty bad localities elsewhere." (Brunswick Times Record, July 21, 1911)

In 1911, the State of Maine ruled that Malaga Island was owned by the Perry family of Phippsburg, who, in turn, filed papers to have the islanders evicted. On December 9, 1911, a doctor and member of Governor Plaisted's Executive Council signed papers committing eight Malaga Island residents to the Maine School for the Feeble Minded.



Early in 1912, the State of Maine purchased Malaga Island from the Perry family for \$400. Residents were told they must vacate the island by July 1, 1912. No alternative homes were provided or suggested, but when the state representative arrived on Malaga Island on July 1st, he found all the houses were gone – dismantled and removed by the residents themselves. To complete the eviction, the state exhumed the cemetery remains on Malaga Island, combining seventeen individuals into five caskets, and moved them to the cemetery at the Maine School for the Feeble Minded.

For decades, generations of descendants felt the need to hide their Malaga Island ancestry. The term "Malagite" became a racial slur commonly used on Maine's coast. Descendants experienced prejudice and slander through the years since 1912, causing many to deny any connection to the notorious island. As time passed, attitudes shifted among both the Phippsburg community and descendants. Now scattered across the nation, current generations are discovering their family history and connecting with one another through social media.



Malaga Island offers a rare example of an ethnically diverse, historic, coastal community where the homesteads of specific families are known; this has allowed University of Southern Maine archaeologists to excavate house sites and add their understanding of island life to our study of the tragic events that transpired there. Documentarians from the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies gathered family memories from Malaga descendants, further enriching this story. The Maine State Museum's 2012-13 exhibit, ***Malaga Island, Fragmented Lives***, marked 100 years after the lives of islanders became sensationalized in local and regional news and government reports, and residents were evicted.

The research conducted for the development of this exhibit offers teachers and students an ideal opportunity to explore the intersection of social studies, language arts, and science in Maine. These curricular materials were initially designed to be used in conjunction with the Maine State Museum's ***Malaga Island, Fragmented Lives*** exhibit; however, they can also be used independently, utilizing primary sources (provided online) or the historical fiction novel ***Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*** by Gary D. Schmidt.

In 2011, the Maine State Museum received permission from Phippsburg resident Peter Roberts to use his extensive collection of historic photographs of Malaga Island residents. Following years of archaeological excavation by the University of Southern Maine, in 2011, the Maine Coast Heritage Trust donated its Malaga Island collection to the Maine State Museum for preservation and exhibition. In addition, research for the exhibit uncovered documents from the Maine State Archives and the New England Historic Genealogical Society. Collectively, these comprise the primary sources or "evidence" available for student inquiry.



Online Teacher Resources – Malaga Island:

Malaga Island Radio Documentary “A Story Best Left Untold” -

<https://malagaisland.mainememory.net/page/5126/display.html>

Malaga Island: Fragmented Lives exhibit -

www.mainestatemuseum.org/exhibits/malaga_island_fragmented_lives/

Maine Coast Heritage Trust - <https://www.mcht.org/preserve/malaga-island/>

Maine Memory Network “Institutional Care: From ‘Feeble-Minded’ to ‘Disabled’” -

www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/301/slideshow/307/display?use_mmn=&prev_object_id=567&prev_object=page&slide_num=1

Maine Memory Network – Malaga Islanders with missionary image -

www.mainememory.net/search?keywords=malaga&submit=SEARCH

Maine Memory Network – “1870-1920 The End of the Ocean Highway” -

<http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/905/page/1316/display>

Online Instructional Resources:

- Learning for Justice <https://www.learningforjustice.org/>
- Facing History and Ourselves <https://www.facinghistory.org/>
- Library of Congress’ Teaching With Primary Sources Program www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/
- Smithsonian Sources: Resources for Teaching American History www.smithsoniansource.org
- The National Archives www.archives.gov/education/

Books

Seeking History: Teaching With Primary Sources in Grades 4-6 (2000) Monica Edinger. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.

Making History: A Guide to Historical Research Through the National History Day Program (2006) National History Day (The Making History Set includes: A Guide to Historical Research, The How to Create a Historical Documentary, How to Create a Historical Paper, How to...)

Reading Like a Historian: Teaching Literacy in Middle and High School History Classrooms (2011) Sam Wineburg, Daisy Martin, and Chauncey Monte-Sano. New York, NY: Teachers College Press

Maine’s Visible Black History: The First Chronicle of Its People (2006) H.H. Price and Gerald E. Talbot. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House Publishers.

Choosing to Participate (2009). Facing History and Ourselves Foundation, Inc., Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves Foundation, Inc.