

Murder, Theft and Silence: The Conestoga Massacre

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Lesson Overview:

This lesson will cover events, interpretations, and perspectives about the murder of the Conestoga Indians in 1763, the theft of their land, and ensuing pamphlet war in colonial Philadelphia. Students analyze 3 political cartoons and 4 primary source documents from 1763-64, read *Ghost River: The Fall and Rise of the Conestoga*, create their own political cartoon from the historical point of view of the Conestoga Indians, and research current events about Native American individuals and organizations fighting for social and economic justice.

Essential Questions:

- Why hasn't the story of the Conestoga been told from Native American perspectives?
- How do power dynamics, bias, notions of (in)justice, race relations, and colonial politics shape our understanding of this historical event?
- How would the Conestoga people have responded in the 1764 pamphlet war?

Lesson Objectives:

- Interpret and analyze the point of view (POV) of primary source images.
- Identify and explain key words and phrases from primary source readings.
- Draw conclusions based on textual and visual evidence.
- Collaborate with classmates to read and present historical evidence.
- Analyze historical POV by creating a political cartoon from the perspective of the Conestoga (or another Native American people).
- Identify character strengths of historical people involved in this event (ref: work of Dr. Seligman, Dr. Pawelski, and MAPP program at UPENN).
- Research current Native American owned/operated organizations throughout the United States working to promote social and economic justice.

Grade Level: Grades 8 and 9

Standards: Designed for Independent School in alignment with Pennsylvania State Standards.

- **5.1.8C:** Analyze the principles and ideas that shaped local, Pennsylvania and National Government
- **5.1.8F:** Analyze how political symbols are used by the media and leaders to influence public opinion
- **5.2.8B:** Describe how citizens resolve conflicts in society and government
- **5.2.8C:** Describe the role of political leadership and public service
- **5.3.8H:** Describe the role of mass media on government
- **8.8.1B:** Compare and contrast a historical event using multiple points of view from primary and secondary sources

Historical Background:

William Penn's Philadelphia was grounded in Quaker ideals, evident in his relationship with Native Indian communities throughout colonial Pennsylvania. The Quaker community in Philadelphia of the early-mid 1700s wielded significant economic and political power and was directly involved in the governance of local affairs. The Treaty of Paris of 1763 (issued February of that year) concluded the North American chapter of the Seven Years' War and the Proclamation of 1763 (issued that October) infuriated British settler colonists by limiting westward expansion. After a century of contact, conquest, and economic, political, and cultural exchange, the relationship between a multitude of Native American peoples and settler colonists had grown increasingly tense and violent, as exemplified by Pontiac's War. That December, a group of former militiamen, the Paxton Boys, murdered 20 Conestoga Indians to express their disapproval of the Quaker dominated-government, to make a political statement about their beliefs about race relations, and to seize their land. Following the massacre, a massive public debate unfolded (the 1764 pamphlet war) through more printed materials published than any time prior (to 1763). Those pamphlets and political cartoons speak to priorities of colonists, but largely neglect the stories of the Conestoga. By March 1764, the land previously inhabited by Conestoga people was already being claimed by relations to and beneficiaries of the massacres.

Materials:

Digital Paxton Materials (for projection)

- Franklin and the Quakers
- An Indian Squaw King Wampum Spies
- The Paxton Expedition
- John Penn Proclamation December 22, 1763
- John Penn Proclamation June 4, 1765
- Jacob Whistler Letter to William Peters March 12, 1764
- Jacob Whistler Letter to William Peters April 9, 1764

Source Materials and Excerpts (optional handout)

Graphic organizers for image analysis and document analysis

Blank 16 x 11 paper, markers, pencils, paint, art supplies, and color printer

Procedure, Assessment, and Extensions:

This lesson asks students to analyze three primary source images (political cartoons) about the Paxton massacres; jigsaw 4 primary source documents and report out to the group; read excerpts of *Ghost River* and grapple with historical POV by creating a Conestoga response to the propaganda produced by non-Native American authors. Lastly, students will research and select a current event around similar theme (e.g. violence towards Native American peoples, absence of justice, resilience in the face of atrocities) and identify contemporary organizations, businesses, Native American communities, and/or legislation that seeks to protect and/or celebrate Native Americans histories (e.g. Indian Country Today, Native American Indian Policy Center, Native American Art Council).

Step 1: Students begin by discussing the 3 political cartoons. Possible prompting questions:

- Who is present and who is not?
- Whose story (or point of view) is told or omitted? What implications does this have?
- What adjectives would you use to describe what you see?
- How are women portrayed in these images?

Teacher makes a Wordle using student responses.

Step 2: After preliminary analysis and discussion, students perform jigsaw activity. Reading excerpts from 4 primary sources in groups of 4. Students should make marginal notes and/or annotations, discuss POV, and identify key words and phrases. Prompting questions:

- Do the primary source readings align with their interpretations of the political cartoons?
- Whose story is told?
- Is it accurate?

Students share findings through brief presentations. Students complete graphic organizer. Teacher provides brief historical overview of the massacres and ensuing pamphlet war, projects primary source materials, and/or circulates hard copies of Source Materials and Excerpts.

Step 3: Students read aloud excerpts of *Ghost River* that give voice to the Conestoga perspective (e.g. pages 11-14, 29-37, and 50-60), acknowledging their responsibility to integrate the voices and experiences of those who have been excluded from historical narratives. (For clarification, teacher may share guidelines for interpreting political cartoons from Eastern Illinois University.) Students are encouraged to recognize the courage, strength, and resilience of Native Americans who have endured hundreds of years of genocide and institutional racism, to understand the multitude of Native Americans living today, and to deconstruct negative and inaccurate stereotypes.

Given that Conestoga voices are largely absent from historical records, students will offer their own counter arguments by creating a political cartoon from the Conestoga or indigenous POV (similar to those they analyzed in step 1). The teacher provides supplies (16 x 11 paper, colored pencils, markers, rulers, paints, and color printing for those using digital media). Students sketch, paint, or use digital images (with proper citations) and share their work via Google Classroom and/or gallery walk. Students use Padlet to ask questions, give peer feedback, and make observations about each other's work. Prompting questions:

- How do these modern cartoons differ from the historical pamphlets that circulated in Philadelphia in 1764?
- What adjectives would you use to describe the images?

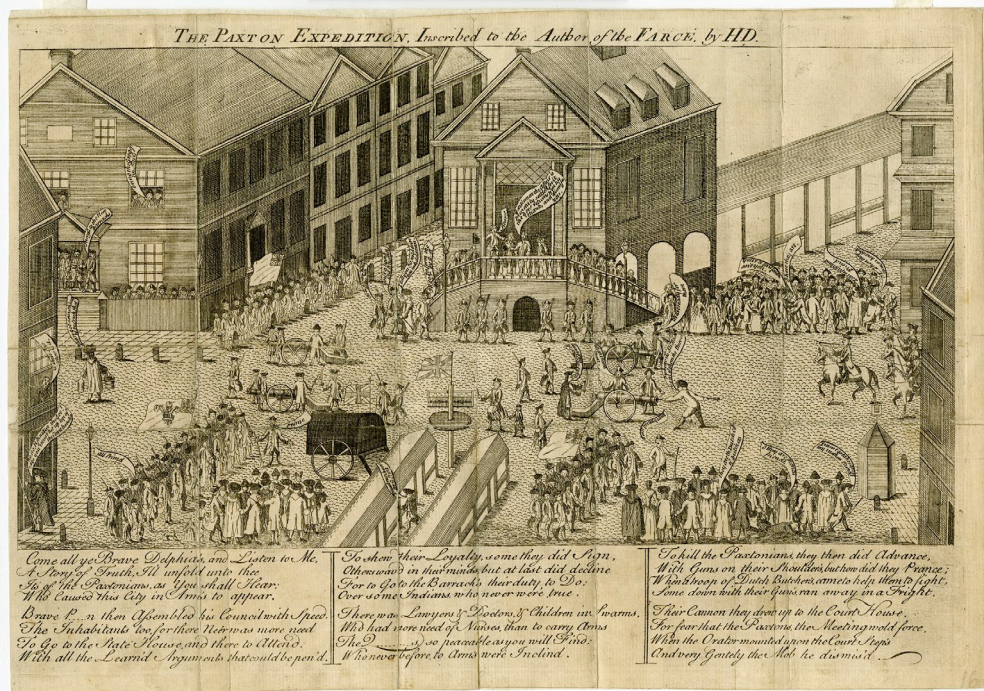
Make a Wordle from the responses and compare to one from historical political cartoons.

Step 4: Students research and report on a current event that parallels the events of the Conestoga massacres and post 2-3 sentence justifications to Google Classroom or similar platform. Current events may concern violence, trauma, injustice, physical/mental health issues, (mis)treatment of and violence against Native women, or idea that silence is compliance by majority & politicians. Ideally, they will engage in conversation about Native American courage, strength, and resilience. Teacher should encourage students to rely upon Native American sources such as Indian Country Today.

Assessment and Extensions:

1. Graded graphic organizer for primary source documentation jigsaw
2. Graded political cartoon
3. Graded homework grade for current event analysis
4. Graded participation for level of engagement and depth of contributions to discussions
5. Ungraded Student Reflection

Henry Dawkins, The Paxton Expedition. Digital Paxton.



John Penn, Proclamation, December 22, 1763. Digital Paxton.

"I have therefore by and with the advice of the Council, thought fit to issue this proclamation, and do hereby strictly charge and enjoin all judges, justices, sheriffs, constables, officers civil and military, and all other His Majesties liege subjects within this province, to make diligent search and enquiry after the authors and perpetrators of said crime, their abettors and accomplices, and to use all possible means to apprehend and secure them in line of the public goals of this province, that they must be brought to their trials and be proceeded against according to law...And whereas a number of other Indians, who lately lived on or near the frontiers of this province, being willing and desirous to preserve this ancient friendship, have at their own request been removed from their habitations and brought into the county of Philadelphia for their better security. I do hereby strictly forbid all persons whatsoever to molest or injure any of the said Indians, as they will answer the contrary at their peril."

John Penn, Proclamation, June 4, 1765. Digital Paxton.

"I have therefor thought fit that by and with the advice of the council, to issue this proclamation, hereby publishing and declaring to all His Majesties subjects within my government that from and after the twentieth day of June, all intercourse and trade with the several nations and tribes of Indians, in Amity with the crown of Great Britain, and living under His Majesties protection, shall be free and open to all persons residing in this province."

Jacob Whistler, Letter to William Peters, March 12, 1764, Digital Paxton.

"I take the opportunity to inform you that last Friday two men came to my house to forewarn me not to work on the Indian land in the manor of Conestoga, for that nine or ten of the families from the back parts intended to come and settle on it in this week or next. I thought it my duty to inform you of this matter, that you may be able to give such orders as you shall judge necessary. I told the men I had no power to settle on the land but only to take care of it."

Jacob Whistler, Letter to William Peters, April 9, 1764. Digital Paxton.

"As I have been appointed to care for the Indian Manor, therefore acquaint you that there is already two families living on said land and a third is expected to arrive...they had population and would lose their lives before they would be turned of the land, they care for no governor nor sheriff nor any other officer...and will allow no other person or persons to settle there."