

Indigenous Peoples of the Northeast



How have Indigenous peoples lived in the Northeast, past and present?

Framing the Unit

The first cluster of this unit is intended to support map skill-building and set the stage for the beginning of the school year. Students work with a variety of maps and learn core map-based vocabulary. It is intended to be separate from the rest of the unit. Teachers are encouraged to be flexible about when and how they teach those lessons based on their start-of-year schedule.

The second cluster of lessons is focused on how Indigenous peoples of the Northeast describe their relationship with the natural world. Students explore picture books, videos, images, and short texts to address the Supporting Question: *How do Indigenous peoples of the Northeast describe their relationship with the land?*

In Cluster 3, students focus on the impact of colonization on various cultures of Indigenous peoples of the Northeast. Students learn about the cultural practices of wampum beads and belts, mishoons, and language to answer the Supporting Question: *How do Indigenous peoples of the Northeast keep their cultures alive today?*

The Summative Assessment pulls together the themes that are built throughout Clusters 2 and 3 and asks students to use two sources from the unit to help them make a claim about the importance of learning about the unit's Essential Question: *How have Indigenous peoples lived in the Northeast, past and present?* Students then create a mini slide deck to share their learning with their community.

Prepare to teach this unit by exploring the [Background Brief: Indigenous Peoples of the Northeast](#), which was designed to help you build content knowledge through a variety of resources. The brief also highlights current perspectives and research—along with potential misconceptions and any debates you should know about—so you can present this unit with confidence.

Unit Overview*Enduring Understandings*

1. There are many different kinds of maps that can share information about the land. It is important to consider who made a map and why when thinking about the information it shares.
2. Indigenous peoples of the Northeast who have lived in a given area for long periods of time have developed ways of living that work best for them. This includes their housing, their food, and their relationship with the land.
3. Indigenous culture and traditions are passed through generations and are important to maintain and protect.

Connections to Current Events and Issues

Connections to today's world and students' lives are built into this unit. Other contemporary connections could be added or developed for various topics of study within this unit, and we encourage you to take advantage of opportunities to connect students' learning to contemporary local, national, and global developments that may arise as you teach this unit. Some ideas for linking this unit to current events and issues include:

- This unit focuses on Indigenous peoples of the Northeast, past and present, and their connection to the land. For an example of how Narragansett and Pequot peoples of today are ensuring their histories and traditions endure, you can read "[For Native Americans, there's an enduring spiritual connection to the land.](#)"
- Connecticut Public Radio's [Still Here: Native American Resilience in New England](#) features short 7–8 minute audio histories of Indigenous experiences and perspectives in the Northeast.
- Cluster 3 addresses the importance of language revival, including work by Jessie Little Doe Baird. You can read more updates about Little Doe Baird's work in "[Bringing a Language Back from the Dead.](#)"

*Vocabulary (in order of appearance)***Tier 3 Vocabulary**

legend
political map

cardinal directions
map scale

physical map
colonization

Priority Tier 2 Vocabulary

Indigenous peoples
gratitude

culture
tradition

Lesson Clusters

Cluster 1: Skill-Building Cluster: Maps of the Northeast (Lessons 1-5)

How can maps help us learn about where we live?

Focus Standards: 3.T2.1, 3.T2.2, PS 2, PS 4, RI.3.7, SL.3.1, W.3.8

This introductory cluster serves as a map skill-building collection of lessons to begin the school year. It is formatted to be separate from the rest of the unit. Key map-related vocabulary terms are introduced and practiced. Students work with various types of maps to practice and apply their learnings.

Cluster 2: Indigenous Peoples and the Land (Lessons 6-11)

How do Indigenous peoples of the Northeast describe their relationship with the land?

Focus Standards: 3.T2.2, 3.T2.3, 3.T2.3a, 3.T2.3b, 3.T2.3d, PS 2, PS 6, RI.3.2, RI.3.3, SL.3.1, SL.3.2, W.3.1

Cluster 2 explores the interconnected relationship between humans, land, water, plants, and animals. The lessons address how Indigenous peoples of the Northeast describe their relationship with the natural world. Students explore picture books, videos, images, and short texts to gain understanding of both overarching Indigenous values and the diversity of Indigenous peoples of the Northeast.

Cluster 3: Indigenous Culture (Lessons 12-18)

How do Indigenous peoples of the Northeast keep their cultures alive today?

Focus Standards: 3.T2.3, 3.T2.3a, 3.T2.3b, 3.T2.3d, PS 2, PS 4, PS 6, RI.3.7, SL.3.1, SL.3.2, W.3.4

Cluster 3 starts with an examination of the idea of culture and its importance to Indigenous communities. Students use examples from their own lives to generate a definition for culture, which will include elements that are passed down through generations. A series of lessons provides cultural examples from a variety of Indigenous nations in the Northeast through images, videos, readings, and discussions.

Summative Assessment: Indigenous Peoples of the Northeast (Lessons 19-20)

Focus Standards: 3.T2.3, 3.T2.3a, 3.T2.3b, 3.T2.3d, PS 2, PS 4, PS 6

For Unit 1's Summative Assessment, students create a short slide presentation that makes claims about why it is important to learn about how Indigenous peoples have lived in the Northeast, past and present.

Unit Overview

On Day 1, students work in pairs or small groups to identify one source and one handout from the unit, the source's purpose, and how the source and handout can help them make a claim.

On Day 2, students use their work from Day 1 to create an informative mini slide deck. They then add any additional questions that they have to the deck as a way to support ongoing learning and inquiry. The lesson closes with time for students to share their work with one another.

Unit Focus Standards

Content Standards

- **3.T2.1:** On a physical map of North America, use cardinal directions, map scales, legends, and titles to locate the Northeast region and identify important physical features (e.g., rivers, lakes, ocean shoreline, capes and bays, and mountain ranges).
- **3.T2.2:** On a political map of the current United States, locate the New England states (Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine).
- **3.T2.3:** Explain the diversity of Native Peoples, present and past, in Massachusetts and the New England region.
 - **3.T2.3a:** the names of at least three native groups (e.g., Abenaki/Wabanaki, Massachusett, Mohican/Stockbridge, Narragansett, Nipmuc, Wampanoag)
 - **3.T2.3b:** the locations of tribal territories in the state
 - **3.T2.3d:** contributions of a tribal group from the area of the school (e.g., language, literature, arts, trade routes, food such as corn, beans, and squash, useful items such as baskets, canoes, wampum, and useful knowledge of medicinal plants, words such as powwow and moccasin, and many names for waterways, hills, mountains, islands and place names, such as the Connecticut and Merrimack Rivers, Mount Wachusett, the Taconic Range, Nantucket, Natick, Seekonk, Agawam, Chicopee)

Practice Standards

- **PS 2:** Generate questions relevant to multiple aspects of a topic.
- **PS 4:** Identify the purpose of a primary source using information about the source type and maker.
- **PS 6:** In response to an inquiry question, respond with a claim based on evidence.

Literacy Standards

- **RI.3.2:** Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.
- **RI.3.3:** Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, mathematical ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text,

Unit Overview

using language pertaining to time, sequence, or cause/effect.

- **RI.3.7:** Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words, numbers, and symbols in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).
- **SL.3.1:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.3.2:** Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- **W.3.1:** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting an opinion with reasons.
- **W.3.4:** Produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **W.3.8:** Recall information from experiences or gather information from print or digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.

Acknowledgements

This Investigating History unit was developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in partnership with the following organizations and individuals:

Pilot Curriculum Authors: Educurious by NCEE

Lead Authors

Elaine Santelmann
Katherine Moran

Lead Reviewer

Kasha Browning

Editor

Gayle Klim

2025–26 Curriculum Revisions: Educurious by NCEE

Lead Author

Katherine Moran

Lead Reviewer

Kasha Browning

Editor

Gayle Klim

Digital Media Specialist

Angela Rosenberg

Senior Advisor

Sara Nachtigal

Indigenous Curriculum Review: Native Education Council of Massachusetts

Est. 2019 by the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Education Department

Led by

Linda Coombs (Aquinnah Wampanoag)

With

Annawon Weeden (Wampanoag, Pequot, Narragansett)

Brad Lopes (Aquinnah Wampanoag)

Darius Coombs (Mashpee Wampanoag)

Jannel Carey (Mashpee Wampanoag)

José Lugo (Chicano)

Tia Pocknett (Mi'kmaq)

English Learner Consultants: English Learners Success Forum

Note: ELSF does not rate or endorse materials. See the Curriculum Guidebook for more information.

Unit Overview**Scholar Advisor**

Siobhan Hart, *Skidmore College*

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Kathryn Gabriele
Dylan Geesey-Pearce
Reuben Henriques
Rebekah Judson
Miesha Keita
Julia Lucas
Katherine Tarca

Copyright Notice

All original content in this work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) and © 2026 by DESE. Third party content including, but not limited to, images, illustrations, and photographs, are subject to their own license terms.

Reference in this curriculum to any specific commercial products, processes, or services, or the use of any trade, firm, or corporation name is for the information and convenience of the public, and does not constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Our office is not responsible for and does not in any way guarantee the accuracy of information in other sites accessible through links herein. For more information please contact: InvestigatingHistory@mass.gov.