

Change in the Time of the Massachusetts Bay Colony



How did different people's values, labor, and actions influence life in the time of the Massachusetts Bay Colony?

Framing the Unit

Cluster 1 introduces students to the development of a new colony: the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Students use visual and text sources to begin to build an understanding of the Puritans and how they differed from the Plymouth colonists that they learned about in the previous unit. Puritan values and actions are investigated through the lenses of how these values and actions affected Puritans themselves, as well as other groups in the area. Through close reading and discussion, students work to determine facts and opinions in the sources throughout the cluster.

Cluster 2 gives students a closer look at different Indigenous and Puritan leaders' values, actions, and influence. Students engage in close looking at maps of the Northeast before and after colonization and read about the events of the Pequot War and King Philip's War. Through a jigsaw, students then study four different leaders and work to identify their actions, values, and how they influenced one another.

Cluster 3 begins by helping students understand the great diversity of West Africa (and Africa as a whole). Using the Benin Kingdom as an example, they then investigate the accomplishments and strengths of precolonial West African empires and kingdoms. With this understanding as a foundation, students discuss the Triangular Trade and how the Massachusetts Bay Colony used the enslavement and forced labor of Africans to build wealth. Throughout the cluster, students are asked to consider how people's values affect their own lives and the lives of others.

In the Summative Assessment, students are asked to apply their learning from the unit to their own communities. In Part 1, they choose a group from the unit to focus on (Indigenous peoples, West African peoples, or Puritans) and respond to questions about their actions and values and how these influenced life during the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Students then connect these learnings to their own communities. In Part 2, students create a visual

Unit Overview

presentation of this work to share their learnings and recommendations with the greater community.

Note: This unit incorporates third grade content standards that address the realities of enslavement. While all content is developmentally appropriate for third grade students, it is suggested that you take extra care in previewing materials and communicating with families as needed.

Prepare to teach this unit by exploring the [Background Brief: Change in the Time of Massachusetts Bay Colony](#), 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.

Enduring Understandings

1. A group's actions are informed by its values and beliefs. These values and beliefs can have a lasting impact on both the group and the people and land around them.
2. Different leaders have different levels of power and influence. Their values guide their actions and impact the people who live under their leadership as well as other groups that interact with them.
3. Resistance to enslavement took many different forms that impacted both individuals and those in their communities. People's responses to enslavement are guided by their values.

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:

- The city of Boston has recently formed a [Task Force on Reparations](#) to address the lasting impacts of enslavement on descendants today and apply reparative justice for the city's Black residents. The site includes information about the city ordinance and several resources to learn more about reparations.
- There has also been ongoing [Indigenous Reparations Work](#) since 2021 in conjunction with the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band in Grafton, Massachusetts. The link includes a summary of their work, videos, and information from the Nipmuc Indian Development Corporation (NIDC).
- Every year, Howard University's Center for African Studies presents the Children's Africana Book Awards (CABA). You can keep up with their work and award-winning books on their [website](#).
- Some recommended texts that address the content of this unit include: [How the Word Is Passed \(Adapted for Young Readers\)](#), [Slavery and the African American Story](#), and [An](#)

[African American and Latinx History of the United States](#). The former two titles can be used for excerpts to share with students. The latter is written for adults.

Vocabulary (in order of appearance)

Tier 3 Vocabulary		
indentured barter	enslavement rights	Triangular Trade

Priority Tier 2 Vocabulary		
labor values	trade resist	property

Lesson Clusters

Cluster 1: Puritans and the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Lessons 1-7)

How did the Puritans' values and actions affect their lives and the lives of those around them?

Focus Standards: 3.T5.2, 3.T5.3, 3.T5.5, 3.T5.5a, 3.T5.5b, 3.T5.5c, PS 1, PS 3, PS 5, SL.3.1, W.3.2

This cluster explores how Puritan values and actions influenced their own community and the communities of people around them. Students examine visual and text sources to build an understanding of what Puritans deemed important as well as aspects of their daily life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Cluster 2: Leadership in Massachusetts: 1600–1770 (Lessons 8-13)

How did different Indigenous and Puritan leaders' values and actions influence one another?

Focus Standards: 3.T5.1, 3.T5.2, PS 2, PS 3, PS 5, RI.3.3, SL.3.1

This cluster explores the specific actions and impacts of Indigenous and Puritan leaders during the expansion of colonization in the Northeast. Students work to identify facts and opinions in sources as well as whether the sources are primary or secondary. Through maps, informational texts, images, and quotes, students learn how different leaders made choices and how those choices both reflected values and impacted others.

Unit Overview*Cluster 3: Enslavement and Resistance in Massachusetts (Lessons 14-21)*

How did people in Massachusetts respond to enslavement, and how did their choices affect how Massachusetts grew and changed?

Focus Standards: 3.T5.1, 3.T5.2, 3.T5.3, 3.T5.4, 3.T5.5, 3.T5.5a, 3.T5.5b, 3.T5.5c, PS 1, PS 2, PS 3, PS 5, RI.3.1, RI.3.3, SL.3.1, W.3.2

Note: This cluster incorporates third grade content standards that address the realities of enslavement. While all content is developmentally appropriate for third grade students, it is suggested that you take extra care in previewing materials and communicating with families as needed.

This cluster explores the history and impact of enslavement in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and beyond. In this series of lessons, students learn about the diversity of West Africans before they were forcibly removed from their land. Students then learn about the Triangular Trade and the lives of the enslaved and the few free Africans in the colony, along with various forms of resistance that were used. Throughout the cluster, students use maps, images, secondary source texts, and various forms of discussion to deepen their understanding.

Summative Assessment: Change in the Time of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Lessons 22-23)

Focus Standards: 3.T5.1, 3.T5.2, 3.T5.3, 3.T5.4, 3.T5.5, 3.T5.5a, 3.T5.5b, 3.T5.5c, PS 1, PS 5

In the Summative Assessment, students are asked to both summarize their learning from the unit and apply their learning to their own communities within the framework of a museum exhibition.

In Part 1, they choose a figure from the unit and write a museum wall description about their actions and values and how these influenced life during the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Students then connect these learnings to their own communities.

In Part 2, students create a visual presentation of this work to share their learnings and recommendations with the greater community.

Unit Focus Standards

Content Standards

- **3.T5.1:** Compare and contrast the roles and leadership decisions of early English leaders of the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the Pilgrims of the Plymouth colony (e.g., John Winthrop, Miles Standish, William Brewster, Edward Winslow, William Bradford, John Alden, John Cotton, Thomas Hooker) and the roles and decisions of the leaders of Native Peoples (e.g., Massasoit, Metacom, also known as King Philip).

Unit Overview

- **3.T5.2:** Explain why Puritan men and women migrated in great numbers to Massachusetts in the 17th century, how they moved west from the Atlantic coast, and the consequences of their migration for the Native Peoples of the region (e.g., loss of territory, great loss of life due to susceptibility to European diseases, religious conversion, conflicts over different ways of life such as the Pequot War and King Philip's War).
- **3.T5.3:** Using visual primary sources such as paintings, artifacts, historic buildings, or text sources, analyze details of daily life, housing, education, and work of the Puritan men, women, and children of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, including self-employed farmers and artisans, indentured servants, employees, and enslaved people.
- **3.T5.4:** Explain that in the 17th and 18th century slavery was legal in all the French, Dutch, and Spanish, and English colonies, including Massachusetts and that colonial Massachusetts had both free and enslaved Africans in its population.
- **3.T5.5:** Explain the importance of maritime commerce and the practice of bartering – exchanging goods or services without payment in money—in the development of the economy of colonial Massachusetts, using materials from historical societies and history museums as reference materials.
 - **3.T5.5a:** the fishing and shipbuilding industries
 - **3.T5.5b:** trans-Atlantic and Caribbean trade, especially the Triangular Trade that included Africans to be sold as slaves in the colonies and goods such as sugar and cotton produced by slave labor to be sold in the colonies and in Europe
 - **3.T5.5c:** the development of seaport cities of New Bedford, Newburyport, Gloucester, Salem, and Boston

Practice Standards

- **PS 1:** Identify how the particular core values of a student's community (e.g., a school or classroom) and/or other communities shape life for the people in them.
- **PS 2:** Generate questions relevant to multiple aspects of a topic.
- **PS 3:** Distinguish between primary and secondary sources.
- **PS 5:** Distinguish between facts and opinions when examining sources. Discuss how the opinions and/or point of view of a source's maker might affect its credibility.

Literacy Standards

- **RI.3.1:** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
- **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, using language pertaining to time, sequence, or cause/effect.
- **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.

Unit Overview

- **W.3.2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

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 Author

Claire Dann

Lead Reviewer

Katherine Moran

Editor

Gayle Klim

Unit Design Support

N'Dia Parker-McWhorter

Additional Curriculum Revisions

Lindsay Lyons

Kara Pranikoff

Eric Soto-Shed

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

Note: The Native Education Council does not rate or endorse curriculum materials. See the Curriculum Guidebook for more information.

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**

Benjamin Remillard, *Providence 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.