Redrawing History: Decolonization through Artistic Reinterpretation

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The Paxton Massacres of 1763
The 1764 Pamphlet War
Letters, Diaries, & Treaty Minutes
**Digital Paxton** (digitalpaxton.org)

**i. Digital Collection**
2500+ scanned pages of art, books, broadsides, newsprint, pamphlets, political cartoons

**ii. Interpretative Materials**
a dozen historical overview, conceptual keyword essays

**iii. Educational Materials**
half a dozen high school and university lesson plans
i. Digital Collection

Conversation with the Indians, April 19, 1756 - 1
Substance of an occasional Conversation with Several Indians after dinner at lor: Pemberton; Philada: 19:April:1756

Present
Scarroyada
Abram. Farrington
Old Belt
Joshua Dixon
Jonathan
Ira: Pemberton
Conestoga Indiantown was at the forefront of Native American-Colonial relations in the eighteenth-century mid-Atlantic. The colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia each signed treaties through Conestoga concerning a range of Native American issues that impacted the entire continent as Europeans traveled west.

In hundreds of accounts written between 1701 and its demise in 1763, Indiantown served as a reference point in the first survey to determine the Pennsylvania/Maryland border 16 miles to the south (Colonial Records of Pennsylvania). The records indicate that as Europeans moved in, Indiantown was increasingly regarded as a reservation and its inhabitants made increasingly dependent on both the Pennsylvania government and their European neighbors for sustenance.

One strength of Digital Paxton is that it provides access to various materials that eighteenth-century audiences would have encountered reading while the texts. While a digital facsimile is not the same as the physical object it stands in for, the digital object can be easily searched and broadly disseminated without overbuilding the fact that the text was a material object. More than words on a page, this materiality provides key insights into the text itself, its production, circulation, and reception.
iii. Educational Resources

This lesson is appropriate for mid- to high-performing history students. The assignment will require one 45-minute period with homework, or one 90-minute period with additional closure on another day. This assignment pairs well with An Interview with the Paxton Boys.

Relevant Standards

- CC 8.1.9.B through 8.1.9.D.
- CC.8.5.9–10.B.
- CC.8.5.9–10.D.
- CC.8.6.9–10.C.
- CC.8.6.9–10.E.

Questions

- How do we analyze and evaluate sources?
- How do we interact with historical memory?
- How do we navigate and interpret archives and the sources they contain?

Learning Objectives

- Students will decipher the literal and practical meaning of eighteenth-century printed text.
- Students will analyze and evaluate bias in primary sources.
- Students will successfully navigate a digital archive.

Differentiation

Allow students to phase from guided practice into independent work. Engage with struggling students until they demonstrate ability to reliably transcribe and interpret a

- Upper case letters were used to for nouns, as well as to begin sentences.
- The lower case s was written in elongated form at the beginning of a word, in the middle of a word, and when written twice, as in pass. The elongated s can be mistaken for an f, and as can look something like a p. See the examples, “proposed” and “Mississippi” below.

- Shortened versions of words were indicated by beginning the word in regular-sized letters and ending with superscript letters, maybe with a line underneath where the missing letters would be. Some writers simply shortened words and left no other indication of the missing letters. In the example below, you see a shortened version of “which.”

- Spelling was not standardized. Writers would spell words differently in different documents or even within a single document. Many writers spelled phonetically, using the way the words sounded as a guide. Although challenging to read, such spelling tells us much about pronunciation before sound recordings existed.
- In words like the, y could stand for the th and the e was added in superscript. The y was pronounced as we pronounce a th today. Here’s an example:
The Limits of a Digital Edition

When thoughtfully structured, digital editions can accommodate a constellation of material forms, voices, and perspectives. Unfortunately, many indigenous records have been lost or systematically excluded from collections.

• How do we tell the story of a colonial massacre, mediated through colonial documents, in a manner which doesn’t simply reproduce colonial biases, assumptions, & erasures?

• What if we could imagine a perspective on the Paxton massacre that, given the genocide of the Susquehannock, could not be retrieved?

• What if, instead of telling a story about the Paxton vigilantes, we told a story about the Conestoga, their resilience, and their central role in the history of colonial Pennsylvania?
Redrawing History: Indigenous Perspectives on Colonial America

i. Teachers’ Institute
   National institute co-sponsored with the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

ii. Educational Graphic Novel
   Written, illustrated, & published by Native American partners

iii. Public Art Exhibition
    Presented at the Library Company of Philadelphia

iv. Digital Edition
    Free, open-access enhanced edition of graphic novel

Funded by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage
i. Teachers’ Institute

- Led by Dr. Daniel Richter (MCEAS) and Justin Enrich (GLI)
- Convenes 35 educators from across the nation
- Furnishes new educational materials for digital edition
ii. Educational Graphic Novel

*Ghost River: The Fall & Rise of the Conestoga*

Graphic Novel (60 pp.)
- Script by Dr. Lee Francis (Laguna)
- Hand-painted art from Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva)

Interpretive Materials (60 pp.)
- Artist statements
- Sources
- GLI lesson
- Contextual essays
- Annotated script

Published by Native Realities Press (October 2019)
"History is complicated. Violence is easy."
iii. Public Art Exhibition

Redrawing History

• Places *Ghost River* art into conversation with the library’s historical records

• Invites patrons into the scholarly-creative collaboration that made *Ghost River* possible

Nov. 11, 2019 – Apr. 10, 2020
iv. Digital Edition

• Curates essential primary & secondary source material
• Makes explicit connections between art & collection items
• Accommodates additional educational materials
• Offers readers a free, open-source edition of *Ghost River*
Learn More

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*Redrawing History: Indigenous Perspectives on Colonial America*
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