



Past Shapes the Present

A Turning Point in Indigenous US Colonial History

Historical Context

In the late 1600s, tensions between English colonists and Native American tribes in New England reached a breaking point. These tensions led to King Philip's War (1675–1676), one of the most deadly and destructive conflicts in early American history. The war is named after Metacom, also known as King Philip, a Wampanoag leader who tried to protect his people's land and way of life from colonial expansion. At first, the Wampanoag and other tribes had tried to live peacefully with the English settlers. But over time, colonists took more land, forced Native people to follow English laws, and pressured them to give up their traditions. Metacom and his allies, including the Narragansett and Nipmuc tribes, decided to fight back. They attacked colonial towns and villages, and the English responded with harsh military force. The war lasted over a year and caused great destruction on both sides. Thousands of Native Americans and colonists were killed. Many Native villages were destroyed, and some tribes were nearly wiped out. After Metacom was killed in 1676, the colonists claimed victory. They sold many Native survivors into slavery and took even more land. King Philip's War was a turning point in US colonial history. It weakened Native resistance in New England and allowed English settlers to expand further west with less fear of Native retaliation. The war also increased distrust between Native tribes and colonists, leading to deeper divisions and long-lasting damage to Indigenous communities. Today, the war is remembered not just for its violence, but for how it reshaped the power balance in early America and marked the beginning of large-scale Indigenous displacement in the region.

Connection to Habit

King Philip's War reshaped the relationship between Indigenous peoples and colonial settlers in lasting ways. The war led to massive loss of life, land, and political power for Native tribes in New England, setting a pattern of dispossession and marginalization that continued throughout United States history. The conflict also reinforced settler control and expansion, laying the foundation for future US policies of westward movement and Indigenous removal. By examining this war, we see how early colonial decisions and violence still affect Native communities today through land loss, cultural disruption, and ongoing struggles for recognition and rights. Understanding this history helps us better grasp the roots of current Indigenous resistance and advocacy.

Discussion Questions

- What factors led to King Philip's War?
- Some Native tribes allied with the English against other Indigenous groups? Why do you think they did so, and what does this reveal about the complexity of the conflict?
- How did colonial efforts to impose English culture and religion influence the relationship between settlers and Native communities?
- What were the short- and long-term effects of King Philip's War on Indigenous communities in New England?
- How did the war contribute to the consolidation of English power in the region?
- How did the war influence settler attitudes and government policies toward Native Americans in the years that followed?
- What connections can we draw between the outcomes of King Philip's War and the ongoing challenges faced by Native peoples in the US today?

Suggested Activity

Materials Needed:

- [King Philip's War Primary Source Analysis Chart](#)
- Notebook paper (or use the back of the primary source analysis chart)

Step 1: Source Analysis [20 mins]

Divide students into pairs or small groups. Provide the [King Philip's War Primary Source Analysis Chart](#) (includes the two primary sources).

Directions: Use the primary sources from King Philip's War to complete the analysis chart.

- Source A: Mary Rowlandson (Puritan captive, 1676)

"The Lord renewed my strength still, and carried me along, that I might see more of His power... The heathen were ready to starve, yet they never wanted food... The Lord made it so. It was to humble me, and to show me the power of His hand."

- Source B: Metacom (Wampanoag leader, 1675) — as recorded by John Easton

"The English have grown strong by wronging the Indians. They drive us from our lands, take away our hunting grounds... We are not their subjects. We were once friends. Now they treat us as enemies."

Step 2: Whole Class Discussion [10 mins]

Discussion Questions:

- How do these two sources reflect different understandings of justice, survival, and resistance?
- In what ways did King Philip's War shape the power dynamics in New England?
- Why is it important to include Indigenous perspectives when learning about colonial history?
- How do the emotions and claims in these texts help us understand that the past shapes the present?

Step 3: Perspective Role-Writing [20 mins]

Assigned or have students select one of the following roles:

- A Wampanoag elder
- A Puritan settler in Massachusetts
- A modern Indigenous student reflecting on this history
- A historian writing about the war today
- Prompt: Write a journal entry (5–7 sentences) from your assigned perspective. Using that role perspective, how do you feel after hearing both voices from the war? Then choose one key idea from today's discussion that helps explain why King Philip's War still matters today. Write 2–3 sentences explaining how this historical moment continues to shape Indigenous-colonial relationships in the United States.

Primary Sources

Source A: Mary Rowlandson (Puritan captive, 1676)

“The Lord renewed my strength still, and carried me along, that I might see more of His power... The heathen were ready to starve, yet they never wanted food... The Lord made it so. It was to humble me, and to show me the power of His hand.”



Source: Illus. from: Mary Rowlandson. A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson. Boston: Nathaniel Coverly, 1770. Mary Rowlandson was captured in an attack on Lancaster, Massachusetts in 1676, during King Philip's War.

Source B: Metacom (Wampanoag leader, 1675) — as recorded by John Easton

“The English have grown strong by wronging the Indians. They drive us from our lands, take away our hunting grounds... We are not their subjects. We were once friends. Now they treat us as enemies.”



Source: Yale University Art Gallery.

King Philip's War Primary Source Analysis Chart

Name: _____

Directions: Use the primary sources from King Philip's War to complete the analysis chart.

Source A: Mary Rowlandson (Puritan captive, 1676)

"The Lord renewed my strength still, and carried me along, that I might see more of His power... The heathen were ready to starve, yet they never wanted food... The Lord made it so. It was to humble me, and to show me the power of His hand."

Source B: Metacom (Wampanoag leader, 1675) — as recorded by John Easton

"The English have grown strong by wronging the Indians. They drive us from our lands, take away our hunting grounds... We are not their subjects. We were once friends. Now they treat us as enemies."

Question	Mary Rowlandson (Source A)	Metacom (Source B)
What events or beliefs shape the speaker's perspective?		
What does each speaker say about the other group?		
What emotions or values are present in the source?		
What does this tell us about the causes or impact of the war?		