

Classroom Connection:

The Trouble with History

About This Resource

Created as part of the *Native New York* exhibition, this animated short video shows how even accepted histories reflect the perspective of the person narrating them. Changing the narrator of a particular story allows us to see it in a different light. Using the story of the Lenape “sale” of Manhattan in the 1600s, the video presents the knowns and unknowns of the supposed transaction from the perspective of both Dutch and Lenape traders. Addressing the question “What’s the most important thing for everyone to know about Native people in New York State?” the video also emphasizes the continued existence and vibrancy of Native people and nations in New York State today.

Cultural Terminology

Today, *Lenape* refers to the descendants of the many communities in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware that spoke the Munsee and Unami languages. The word *Lenape* means *the original people*.

Historical Overview

The “sale” of Manhattan has often been presented as a mutual understanding between Lenape and Dutch traders. However, the only evidence of the exchange is a letter written by Pieter Schaghen, a Dutch representative, in 1626. There is no record of the Native people who participated in this transaction or their understanding of it. This resource asks us to consider whether the Lenape and the Dutch considered it the same kind of agreement.

Key Message: The way a story is told depends on the narrator. When we consider history, it is important to consider multiple perspectives.

Where Could This Fit in My Curriculum?

This video could introduce your students to a unit on the American colonial period. It could also be used more generally within any social studies or history unit to provide students with a broader understanding of the biases that may shape historical narratives, particularly those featuring Native people and other underrepresented communities.

Ideas for Implementation

Suggested Activities:

1. Ask students to think about where they are from and consider what it means to be “native” to a place.
2. Before they watch the video, ask students to write three adjectives describing Native Americans. After showing the video, ask them to repeat the exercise. Discuss how their ideas may have shifted.
3. Ask students to reflect on a historical event in their community that has been mischaracterized in books, movies, or images. How would they revise the story, based on what they know?
4. Have students revise the narrative of a historical event that has been discussed in class. What perspectives (e.g., those of women or children) were missing from the version presented to them? How would they rewrite the narrative from a different viewpoint?



Discussion Questions

1. After watching the video, has your definition of a New Yorker changed? OR, Who is a Native New Yorker?
2. Why do you think the video is called *The Trouble with History*?
3. Whose account of an event becomes the “official” version?