

Primary Source Sets and *Ghost River*

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This primary source set can be used in a history class engaging analysis of primary sources and attention to bias in those sources. This specific set uses the primary sources in *Ghost River: The Fall and Rise of the Conestoga* (Red Planet Books & Comics) in tandem with the interactive digital edition. Videos, images, and contextual essays offer useful perspectives on how the creative team behind the graphic novel, in consultation with historians and community members, create their own sources. The Paxton massacres offer a glimpse into the complicated relationship between Native Americans and colonists in the context of both Philadelphia and Pennsylvania history. Using the *Ghost River* primary sources, students will identify and trace how the perceptions of Native Americans and Quakers changed over time, how the creative team translated historical primary source materials into an historically-grounded graphic novel.

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify the events that led to the creation of primary sources.
- Students will be able to analyze the artistic decisions of the *Ghost River* creative team.
- Students will be able to analyze racial and religious prejudices in the primary sources.

Essential Questions:

- What decisions go into creating a primary source record? How do these decisions affect how we evaluate primary sources?
- Why should historical events be analyzed from multiple perspectives?
- How might the Paxton events affect the lives of Native Americans (and Quakers) today?

Grade Level: Grades 9-12

Pennsylvania State Standards:

Secondary Standards 9-12, Historical Analysis and Skills Development

- 8.1.12.B. Evaluate the interpretation of historical events and sources, considering the use of fact versus opinion, multiple perspectives, and cause and effect relationships.
- 8.1.12.C. Analyze, synthesize, and integrate historical data, creating a product that supports and appropriately illustrates inferences and conclusions drawn from research.

Secondary Standards 9-12, Pennsylvania History

- 8.2.12.A. Evaluate the role groups and individuals from Pennsylvania played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the US and the world.
- 8.2.12.B. Evaluate the impact of historical documents, artifacts, and places in Pennsylvania which are critical to U.S. history and the world.

- 8.2.12.D. Evaluate how conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations in Pennsylvania have influenced the growth and development of the US and the world. (Ethnicity and race, working conditions, immigration, military conflict, economic stability)

Secondary Standards 9-12, United States History

- 8.3.12.A. Evaluate the role groups and individuals from the U.S. played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the world.
- 8.3.12.B. Evaluate the impact of historical documents, artifacts, and places in U.S. history which are critical to world history.
- 8.3.12.D. Evaluate how conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations in the U.S. have influenced the growth and development of the world. (Ethnicity and race, working conditions, immigration, military conflict, economic stability)

Historical Background:

The relationship between Native Americans and European colonists contains many tragedies, including the Paxton massacres. These incidents occurred in December 1763 in Lancaster County when a mob from Paxtang Township murdered 20 Conestoga Indians (hence the name "Paxton Boys"). As a result of their attacks, Lenape and Moravian Indians were taken into Philadelphia for protection. Vowing to "inspect" those Indigenous peoples, the mob marched toward Philadelphia, where they were stopped just north of the city in Germantown. While the situation "physically" diffused there, the argument continued in print, with the Paxton leaders arguing that they were justified in their attack on the Conestoga people. Prominent colonial leaders produced many primary source documents available today as print and manuscript records. Today, we know that the Paxton vigilantes murdered the Conestoga people in a white supremacist campaign that began in the Seven Years' War (also known as the French and Indian War).

Ghost River: The Fall and Rise of the Conestoga is a modern retelling and reinterpretation of the Paxton massacres. Editor Will Fenton, author Lee Francis IV, and artist Weshoyot Alvitre created this graphic novel to tell the story from point of view of the Indigenous peoples at the center of the story. The book is grounded with historical primary source documents, secondary contexts from leading historians, and interviews with surviving Indigenous peoples in Lancaster County. In re-centering this historical incident on the Conestoga people, Fenton, Francis, and Alvitre recast them not as victims but spouses, parents, children, and friends.

Materials:

1. Benjamin West, The Indians Giving a Talk to Colonel Bouquet in a Conference at a Council Fire (1766). Available on Digital Paxton.
2. General Forbes, Letter to Israel Pemberton (August 18, 1758). Digital Paxton.
3. James Claypoole, Franklin and the Quakers (1764). Digital Paxton.
4. D.A. Henderson, Account of the Indian Murders (December 27, 1763). Digital Paxton.
5. James Claypoole, An Indian Squaw King Wampum Spies (1764). Digital Paxton.

In addition to the sources above, consider these videos integrated in the digital edition:

1. Video on p.29
2. Video on p.35
3. Video on p.40 (with Weshoyot Alvitre)
4. Video on p.45
5. Video on p.57

Discussion Questions:

1. How are Native Americans represented in primary sources? (Sources #1, #3, #5)
2. What type of adjectives are used to describe Native Americans, Quakers, and the Paxton vigilantes?
 - a. Are they positive or negative?
 - b. Note the author of the source.
 - c. Does the source support the Paxtons?
 - d. Are they anti-Quaker? (Sources #2, #4; Videos #1, #2)
3. What choices do the creative team make using these sources to create their graphic novel, and how do primary sources appear in *Ghost River*? (Videos #3, #4, #5)
4. How is Benjamin Franklin represented?
 - a. How does Franklin's representation compare to how you have seen him before?
 - b. How does the creative team view his role in the Paxton massacres? (Source #3)
5. How were local sites (Lancaster and Philadelphia) incorporated into *Ghost River* and to what end? (Video #4)

Teaching Activities:

1. All of these events took place near Philadelphia. Teachers could bring students to key sites from the graphic novel (e.g. the Fulton Theater in Lancaster or the historical marker of Conestoga Indiantown). These sites hold a special place in the hearts and minds of survivors and their kin and couple help students forge an emotional connection with the story. Teachers can also take advantage of local primary source resources by arranging a class visit to the Library Company of Philadelphia.
2. As indicated by the creators, *Ghost River: The Fall and Rise of the Conestoga* challenges typical narratives in history textbooks. Think about other narratives and how those might be challenged if you were taught from a different perspective. Specifically, research into other events involving Native Americans and European colonists. For example, how did Europeans “buy” Manhattan from the Lenape? Where did the \$24 narrative originate from? How have primary sources reenforced this narrative? How have the Native American perspectives been marginalized by textbooks? For this assignment, write a proposal for a book similar to *Ghost River* with a different event.

Related Teaching Sources:

"Document Analysis Worksheets," National Archives, December 18, 2018.

John Dunbar, ed. *The Paxton Papers*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957

Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn's Holy Experiment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Kristin Shanabrook, "Unmolested and Unidentified": The Paxton Boys Rebellion and the changing systems of power in eighteenth century Pennsylvania. Seminar paper and lesson plan, December 10, 2012.

Alison Olson, "The Pamphlet War Over the Paxton Boys." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 123 (1999): 31-56.

"Paxton Boys uprising," Encyclopaedia Britannica, May 13, 2015.