

“New England’s Annoyances”

The Basics

Time Required

1-2 class periods

Subject Areas

11th Grade American Literature
Worlds Meeting, through 1760

Common Core Standards Addressed:

Writing Standards for English Language Arts 6-12

Author

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The Lesson

Introduction

Your students hear a lot about the arrival of the first settlers. They may or may not have read reports about encounters with the Native Americans but in many cases, they still have a vague idea of how those settlers subsisted. This song is presented in hopes of presenting students with a settler’s “voice” that specifically laments of the difficulties of dealing with uncultivated land and a different climate.

Offering a settler’s authentic voice provides the initial segue for introducing the unit titled “America through a Lens.” Since many kids grow up with either the “Pilgrims and Native Americans Sit Down to Thanksgiving” image or the vague idea of settlers landing ashore and almost immediately starting a highly successful colony, “New England’s Annoyances” presents some of the settler’s hardships that are not always fully addressed in history books.

Guiding Question

What was life like for the first settlers in New England?

Learning Objectives

- To compose answers to comprehension, interpretive, and analytical questions
- To reflect through discussion on personal reaction to song
- To sketch an image from the song
- To analyze image selections

Preparation Instructions

Song used in this lesson:
“New England’s Annoyances”

Lesson Activities

Pre-listening journal introduction:

Read to students (or post on board if necessary): For years, millions of people have explained to others the American land and culture through their own eyes. Of course, the best people to be able to define a culture are those who have experienced it for themselves.

Some of the first North American settlers came to colonize various parts of the Eastern shoreline. Once they landed, a large percentage of settlers had to farm to survive. With farming, as you can imagine, came many hardships. In fact, in 1643, a musical record was made of some of the hardships that a settler had to face. (2-3 minutes)

1. Optional: Ask the students to jot down what they know about the following:

Have you ever considered how it would have been to farm during the early years?

What tools were used? What clothes were worn?

Tell them to draw a line under their answers. The questions will be readdressed later. (2 minutes)

2. Journal question

Post on board: Listen to the song that I am about to play for the first time. (DO NOT REVEAL TITLE TO STUDENTS YET). While listening, jot down any or all of the following:

- the mood the song evokes
- the tone of the singer(s)
- any instruments that “stick out”
- word(s) that are repeated
- word(s) that have strong connotations/are emphasized
- anything else about the song that “sticks out” (5 minutes)

3. Post-Listening journal discussion (as a group, aloud):

Use this time to share student thoughts. Use the bulleted “leads” above to begin discussion. If the students take the discussion from one thing to the next, let them. You should serve as the link for their thoughts and as the one who reigns in the discussion if it begins to go astray. Use this time to validate instead of expound.

Shortly after the discussion has peaked, set up to play the song a second time. Where the class is at this point depends on what the students have garnered from the first listen and from their discussion. If they are a little off in their understanding of the song, you may want to preface the second listen with something similar to: “I hear that much of the class believes this song to be about (subject). Let us see, upon listening for a second time, if the overall consensus remains the same.”

(10-12 minutes)

4. Second listen: Post on board:

a) draw a line underneath the notes that you made during your first listen

b) read the lyrics as you listen to the song

c) Jot down anything new topics that you notice, new words you see, or new thoughts you have

Reveal the title of the song and pass out the lyrics (2-3 minutes)

5. Post-Listening journal discussion (as a group, aloud):

Give two to three minutes for students to jot down their “after” thoughts. Offer them the following questions as a guide:

a) What is the message of this song?

b) Did discovering the title change your view of the song?

c) What word(s) did you not understand?

d) Which word(s) do you like? Do you not like?

- e) Are there any new musical instruments (including voices) that you noticed this time that you did not notice previously? What do the instruments used tell us about these people?
- f) Do you think this song does a good job of reporting the drawbacks of farming in America during the early 17th century? (2-3 minutes)

Briefly discuss student responses in large group. (3-4 minutes)

6. Reinforcing the idea of seeing America through multiple lenses:
 - a) Sketch two images from this song that “stick out” to them. (EMPHASIZE that it does not have to be a masterpiece of any kind and that the students should be sure to choose what they deem prominent over what they deem easiest to draw because they don’t believe that they can draw!) (a & b=10 minutes)
 - b) Monitor as the students complete their sketches. The images that students choose are a window into their psyches. It reveals the dominant images in their head.
 - c) After they have completed their sketches, allow two or three to present. (5-7 minutes). Have them explain why they chose their images.
 - d) Use this time to emphasize this point: “Each of you have chosen images that are important to you as an observer. This is what everyone does when reporting some aspect of an event. A male settler’s experience is different from that of a woman’s or child’s. It is important to hear many different experiences to gain some honest insight into a culture at any given point . . .” (5 minutes)

Extending the Lesson

What were some hardships when farming in America during the early to mid-17th century?
 What tools were used? What clothes were worn?

Resources

Lyrics

“New England’s Annoyances” (Anonymous)
 [Only the first four stanzas are provided here]

New England’s Annoyance you that would know them
 Pray ponder these verses which briefly doth show them.
 The place where we live is wilderness wood,
 Where grass is much wanting that’s fruitful and good.

From the end of November till three months are gone,
 The ground is all frozen and hard as a stone
 Our mountains and hills and the vallies below,
 Being commonly covered with ice and with snow.

And when the north-wester with violence blows,
 Then every man pulls his cap over his nose;
 But if any’s so hardy and will it withstand,
 He forfeits a finger, a foot, or a hand.

When the ground opens we then take the hoe,
And make the ground ready to plant and to sow;
Our corn being planted our seed being sown,
The worms destroy much before it is grown.