Introduction:

In the aftermath of King Philip’s War the Puritans of New England immediately set out to write the history of this traumatic conflict. While the initial tenor of these histories adopted the message of the jeremiad, calling the English to reform their ways or suffer further judgment, over time the ways in which the war was remembered changed significantly. Following the undulations of New England history, New Englanders continued to repurpose this narrative according to their needs. What began as a story of barbarous savages over time became an epic tragedy of native extinction leading right up to the present day when the Indigenous still struggle to be recognized.

In this lesson students will learn to distinguish between the categories of history and memory by examining the way that King Philip’s War has been remembered over time. More specifically, they will analyze five images and explain how these primary sources reveal change over time.

Guiding Questions:

1. What is the difference between history and memory?
2. Is the act of remembering necessarily an ethnocentric endeavor?

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be able to understand the relationship between history and memory in the case of King Philip’s War.
2. Students will be able to utilize historical thinking tools paying particular attention to continuity and change over time.

Background:

Technically, what became known as King Philip’s War began in 1675. As with many disputes between Native peoples and Euroamericans, however, a long history of land dispossession was at the heart of the conflict. Almost since their arrival in 1620 English colonists had begun to acquire native land and their victory in the Pequot War of the 1630s had only accelerated this process. Over time, these encroachments soured what was an ostensibly peaceful relationship with local native tribes such as the Wampanoags, Nipmucs and Narragansetts. To make matters worse the death of a powerful Wampanoag sachem, Massasoit, in 1661 was followed a year later by the death of his son Wamsutta, also known as Alexander, whom many believed to have been poisoned by the English. One such person was Metacom, also known as Philip, who was Wamsutta’s brother and the one who assumed the Wampanoag sachemship in the wake of his kinsmen’s death. Given the continued efforts of the English to seize native land Metacom did not pursue the relatively cordial relationship his father had maintained with these foreign invaders.
The final act that precipitated armed conflict was the execution of three of Metacom’s associates. These men were accused of murdering the Christian Indian John Sassamon under the suspicion that they were avenging Sassamon’s betrayal of information to the English. That same month Pokanokets retaliated with violent force at Swansea in Plymouth.

The war proved to be devastating to both Native and English populations. In a bloodbath that saw the highest casualties per capita of any conflict in American history, forty percent of New England’s Native population was lost as well as five percent of the English presence. To make matters worse, many Native Americans were exiled to Deer Island during the conflict to assuage English fears of attack. In one of the most tragic events of the war many of these same people were sold into slavery. Clearly, the consequences of warfare were disastrous for both sides, but without the benefits of widespread literacy many tribes lacked the ability to create a written record of their side of the conflict. Conversely, many English colonists took their version of the conflict to the presses straightaway and, until recently, their narratives have controlled the dominant discourse on the war. As historian Jill Lepore has noted, the English won the war as much in its retelling as with their guns.

The purpose of this lesson will be to examine the ways in which that retelling has both persisted and changed over time. Through the creative use of texts and symbols the memory of King Philip’s War has frequently been refashioned to meet the requirements of what has been called a “usable past.” In the immediate aftermath of the war, Increase Mather published A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New-England, an ominous jeremiad that interpreted the conflict as God’s judgment on the Puritans, who had fallen away from the purity of their forefathers. Years later the New England colonists found themselves on the brink of a revolution against the British Crown. This time the frontispiece of Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative from King Philip’s War was transformed to present Rowlandson as a daughter of the revolution fighting often Native raiders who look suspiciously like British Regulars. By the 1850s the revolution had been fought and won, but now paternalistic New Englanders sought to memorialize what they believed to be the tragic extinction of Native peoples. Hence G.I. Brown’s Last of the Wampanoags portrays Philip fading into obsolescence as the last of his race. With the work of forgetting native presence accomplished by the turn of the century, the “Great Swamp Monument” was erected as a paean to America’s Puritan forefathers that neglects to even acknowledge American Indians at all. Finally, as recent events have demonstrated, Native peoples have not disappeared and continue to lobby for recognition in the public sphere. In particular, the initiative to have a memorial erected at Deer Island, where there is currently a sewage plant operated by the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA), shows that the legacy of King Philip’s War is still the subject of public discourse.

Clearly, the relationship between history and memory is complex. This lesson is designed to get students to think critically about that relationship and begin to explore the complicated ways in
which humans continually interact with the past by interpreting historical events and crafting resonant narratives.

Resources:


**Preparation Instructions:**

1. Review the history of King Philip’s War.
2. Download or link the following documents:
   - History and Memory Worksheet
   - Image Analysis Worksheet

**Lesson Activities:**

**Activity One**: History and Memory (15 mins.)

1. Have a few students take turns reading aloud the opening quotation from the History and Memory Worksheet found in Horton et. al. *Slavery and Public History*.
2. Encourage students to discuss the difference between these two ideas as they are explained in the handout and have them fill in the Venn diagram by coming up with examples from each category and a few that might be considered both.
3. When students have completed the handout have them discuss what they have written down.
Activity Two: Image Analysis (30 mins.)

1. Provide a brief synopsis of King Philip’s War to help students recall information they read the night before.
2. Drawing on their discussion of memory, introduce the Image Analysis Worksheet to the students and explain that they will be analyzing the way King Philip’s War has been remembered over time. A list of the images provided includes
   - The title page of Increase Mather’s *A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New-England* (1676)
   - The Frontispiece of *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1770)
   - *Last of the Wampanoags* by G.I. Brown (c. 1850)
   - A photograph of the Great Swamp Monument (1906)

   Have students examine each image and answer the corresponding questions provided in the handout.

3. Discuss student responses with the class and conclude the lesson by having students draft a thesis statement that makes an historical argument about the ways in which King Philip’s War has been remembered.

Assessment:

Have students use their thesis statements to write an essay that asks them to analyze the ways in which King Philip’s War has been remembered. How is the memory of the war related contemporary issues? What is the relationship between art and memory? Is the act of remembering necessarily an ethnocentric endeavor?

Extending the Lesson:

1. Have students view the PBS documentary episode “We Shall Remain: After the Mayflower” ([http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the_films/episode_1_trailer](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the_films/episode_1_trailer)) and analyze the ways in which public history relates to national memory.
2. Have students create an image that they feel would be an appropriate way to remember the war.