

WILLIAM PENN'S PEACEABLE KINGDOM

A Unit of Study for Grades 5-8

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TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

Using primary sources, this unit explores the founding of the twelfth and most successful of the English colonies in North America, Pennsylvania. Established by the Quaker civil libertarian William Penn, Pennsylvania was intended to demonstrate that a society founded on mutual respect, tolerance, and individual responsibility could flourish. The first fifty years of this province demonstrate that European-Indian relations need not have been based on violence and the destruction of native cultures. Not only were Europeans able to dispense with fortifications for their settlements and live in peace with Indians, but the Indian population actually grew, and natives from other areas migrated to the province seeking refuge from the aggressiveness of white settlers. In a crucial departure from the past, religious tolerance was also legally guaranteed. Previously, there was a common belief that a government could not sanction more than one religion because people would quarrel if they did not agree about sacred things. However, Penn understood that separate religious groups might share common interests. The government of Pennsylvania explicitly derived its authority from the people it was intended to govern. Although Penn wrote the laws that articulated these values, the people who settled in Pennsylvania endorsed them and made them work, creating a stable, pluralistic, and tolerant society.

Students should understand that many of the values and beliefs that are fundamental to the United States originated in colonial Pennsylvania. The separation of church and state, the conviction that religious and cultural pluralism could be healthy rather than harmful, and faith in people's capacity to govern themselves were social innovations first tested in Pennsylvania. Students should also learn of the peaceful relations between Indian natives and European settlers which marked the first decades of this colony. A central tenet of American life is that tolerance is essential to a well-ordered society of happy individuals. The implications of this belief were first worked out by the heterogeneous settlers of Pennsylvania. This unit allows students to appreciate the achievement of these early Americans and reflect on the importance of tolerance.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit can conclude a study of the early colonization efforts of the English. Contrasting the colonization of Pennsylvania with Jamestown and the Massachusetts Bay Colony would be an excellent way to introduce students to some of the persistent regional differences that mark American history. This unit also prepares students to study the mature colonial America of the eighteenth century. Moreover, the values and government of Pennsylvania anticipate some of the ideological concerns

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that led to the Revolutionary War. Inasmuch as the population of the United States is increasingly enriched by ethnic and cultural groups from regions which have not traditionally supplied us with large numbers of immigrants, an appreciation of tolerance is as important today as it was in 1681.

III. CORRELATION TO NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR UNITED STATES HISTORY

William Penn's *Peaceable Kingdom* offers teachers opportunities to use primary sources in examining William Penn's Holy Experiment in Pennsylvania. The unit provides teaching materials that specifically address **Standards 1B** and **2B** of **Era 2**, "Colonization and Settlement," *National Standards for United States History, Basic Edition* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1996.) Students investigate how settlers interacted with Native Americans in Pennsylvania, Quaker beliefs, and the religious and ethnic diversity in Penn's colony.

The unit requires students to engage in historical thinking and to go beyond the facts presented in textbooks to examine the historical record for themselves. Lessons provide primary source materials that challenge students to consider multiple perspectives, to compare different sets of ideals and values, and to draw evidence from visual sources. The documents help students to better appreciate historical perspectives by describing the past on its own terms through the eyes and experiences of those who were there.

IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

1. To study historical documents in order to experience history as a dynamic discipline which studies, interprets, and debates the meaning of human artifacts and, through those, humanity's collective past.
2. To examine the effect that the Quakers' respect for life and abhorrence of violence had on establishing relations with Indians based on trust and honesty.
3. To study two of the founding principles of Pennsylvania, namely religious toleration, and faith in the people's capacity to govern, and to consider the extent to which those values remain valid in today's world.
4. To speculate on how treating women as the spiritual equals of men, rather than their inferiors, affected women and altered Quaker society
5. To appreciate the ethnic diversity of Pennsylvania and to experiment with the methods historians use to investigate people from the past.

V. INTRODUCTION TO *WILLIAM PENN'S PEACEABLE KINGDOM*

In 1681, when William Penn was granted a royal charter by Charles II to establish colony on a vast tract of land west of the Delaware River, the most distinct and, by some standards, the most successful of all the colonial experiments undertaken in North America began. Pennsylvania was established on the last segment of the eastern coast of North America to be assigned to English colonists except Georgia. Giving title to Penn as repayment for a debt originally owed to Penn's father, Charles II may also have hoped that this gift would help to rid England of Quakers, a growing and troublesome Protestant sect.

Like the Puritans, the Religious Society of Friends, derisively called Quakers, regarded the Church of England as corrupt and in need of reform. Led by George Fox and Margaret Fell, the Friends held that everyone could receive grace and achieve redemption through the "inner light" residing in each person. Their belief in the free individual quest for truth and in truth's essential persuasiveness led them to reject most of the trappings of organized religion. They believed that no church official, institution, or ritual was needed to mediate between individuals and God. Also, like the Puritans, as their movement gathered followers they were severely persecuted.

The Quaker's egalitarian doctrine of inner light had radical social implications for the

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rigidly hierarchical society of seventeenth-century England. The organized state church felt threatened by the Quakers' insistence that there was no need for a trained professional clergy to instruct those who would be saved. Civil society may have been even more thoroughly alarmed by the social manifestations of an ideology that stressed the potential that resides within each person, regardless of his or her social station. The Quaker insistence on using the plain and familiar language of "thee" and "thou" rather than the formal and deferential "you," their use of full names instead of titles when addressing persons of rank, and most conspicuously their refusal to tip their hats to social superiors, stemmed from their conviction that all people are capable of responding to an inner light. (Students usually think that "thee" and "thou" are more formal than "you" so you will probably have to clarify this for them.)

Their belief in the essential sanctity and worth of human life led them to renounce all violence, including military service. It also meant that they accepted the spiritual equality of women. Women were encouraged to preach and participate in church affairs. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the regular women's meetings of the Quakers were the only formal organizations run by white women in North America. It is not surprising that the strength, skills, and self-confidence women developed in these meetings empowered Quaker women to take leading roles in the women's rights and abolitionist movements of the nineteenth century.

From a twentieth-century perspective Quaker pacifism seems the most singular feature of Quaker social practice. But the seventeenth century was much more threatened and alarmed by the Quaker's levelling tendencies, reflected in the prominent roles achieved by Quaker women and their persistent refusal to practice any of the conventional forms of deference, from doffing hats to bowing and curtsying. In the early years of the Society of Friends, Quakers were tortured, imprisoned, and executed. Even prominent figures were regularly imprisoned. Margaret Fell, for instance, wrote *Women's Speaking Justified* while under arrest. By 1689, when the Toleration Act of William and Mary was declared, there had been over 450 Quaker martyrs. Despite the repressive times, the Quaker movement grew rapidly, attracting most of its membership from the middle ranks of English society.

William Penn was an unusual convert to Quakerism. Most Quaker men were artisans, small merchants, or independent farmers, who, by seventeenth-century standards, were economically comfortable. While they were often people of some education, most had not been to college. Penn was decidedly not of this class; he was Oxford-educated and part of England's ruling elite. His father was an admiral and a friend of the king. Upon Penn's conversion, his social position and natural talents quickly enabled him to join the inner circle of the Society of Friends. Within a year of his conversion in 1667, he was a prominent Quaker pamphleteer and lobbyist. During the mid-1670s he traveled to North

America to promote a Quaker settlement in West Jersey.

Almost from their founding, Quakers had been interested in the New World. Their commitment to proselytizing drew them there to convert both natives and European colonizers. Like the Puritans, they too sought a place free from persecution where they could pursue their dream of creating a utopian community which would serve as a model for the rest of society. But the society they sought to create bore little resemblance to the strict social and religious conformity and rigid hierarchy insisted upon by the Puritans. Quakers were committed to religious tolerance and the extension of civil liberties. When Penn was in West Jersey he helped write a remarkably modern sounding constitution which promised religious freedom, trial by jury, and a legislative assembly that was annually elected by virtually all free males. Although this community foundered in its first years amid tangled legal claims to the land, Quaker hopes were later focused on the west side of the Delaware River which Charles II granted to Penn to 1681.

If the Chesapeake can be characterized as attracting aggressive men on the make who were intent on exploiting the region's resources through bound labor, and the Massachusetts Bay Colony was marked by religious conformity and social homogeneity, which tended to suppress or expel those who diverged from a narrow norm, Pennsylvania from the beginning stressed religious tolerance, cultural pluralism, and peace between natives and immigrants. While Penn was interested in turning a profit on his real estate, he was even more concerned that this colony serve as a sanctuary for those who suffered religious persecution or the effects of hostile state power. Unlike most governments of the time, his state put faith in people's capacity to govern themselves and claimed no authority to shape the consciences of its citizens.

Penn set the initial tone of tolerance and mutual respect by contacting those already settled in the region he was to control. He assured both the Delawares and Europeans that they could continue to live in their accustomed fashion. More significantly, he acknowledged the natives as the rightful owners of the land and promised European colonists would purchase land from them on agreeable terms. By the time Quaker settlers began pouring into the region, the native Delawares and Susquehannocks had already had considerable contact with Europeans. The region had previously been part of the Dutch New Netherlands and continued to be sparsely settled by Dutch, Finnish, and Swedish settlers even after the English took control of the region in 1664. But the skepticism with which the Indians may (understandably) have greeted Penn's first letter to them was soon replaced by trust.

For over half a century the peoples of Pennsylvania proved they could live together harmoniously. But the experiment in understanding was only partially successful. Ironically, the colony's prosperity and tolerance drew numerous displaced natives who sought sanctuary from aggressive white settlers. However, during the same years

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the colony attracted large numbers of Germans and Scots-Irish who did not share Quaker beliefs and who came in their own quest for land. By the mid-eighteenth century friction between these groups was as abrasive as in other colonies.

VI. LESSON PLANS

1. The Holy Experiment
2. Inner Light
3. Peaceable Kingdom
4. A Mixed Multitude