

The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson

Duration

Two or three class sessions of approximately 40 minutes each

Resources

1. Teacher Commentary



2. Student Handout



3. Homework



Objectives of Lesson

- To explain how interactions between Europeans and American Indians were characterized by both accommodation and conflict
- To describe the role of captivity narratives as records of confrontations between Europeans and American Indians
- To read a historical source with speaker, audience, and context in mind

College Board Objectives from the 2020–21 CED

- **Topic 2.5:** Interactions Between American Indians and Europeans (p. 58)
- **Learning Objective 2.E:** “Explain how and why interactions between various European nations and American Indians changed over time.”
- **Key Concept 2.1.III.C:** “Interactions between European rivals and American Indian populations fostered both accommodation and conflict. French, Dutch, British, and Spanish colonies allied with and armed American Indian groups, who frequently sought alliances with Europeans against other American Indian groups.”
- **Key Concept 2.1.III.E:** “British conflicts with American Indians over land, resources, and political boundaries led to military confrontations, such as Metacom’s War (King Philip’s War) in New England.”

Student Activities

- Class reading of *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*
- Discussion of accommodation and conflict between American Indians and Europeans between 1607 and 1754

NOTES

Write or type in this area.

How to Use This Lesson

This lesson is centered around a close reading of *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, one of the most popular American Indian captivity narratives. Produced in 1682, it is Mary Rowlandson's account of her time among the Nashaway when she was captured, held captive, and ultimately ransomed as part of King Philip's War. The goal of this lesson is to use Mary Rowlandson's text as part of an in-depth conversation about conflict and accommodation between American Indians and Europeans in New England. By examining the excerpt in this lesson and probing the (very popular) framing of captivity narratives, students will be able to develop a stronger understanding of how American Indians and Europeans interacted with one another from 1607 to 1754.

We recommend that you begin the lesson by introducing the genre of American Indian captivity narratives before discussing the specific contents of Mary Rowlandson's account. As a literary genre, American Indian captivity narratives experienced a burst of popularity in the 17th and 18th century before largely fading from the American consciousness in the 19th century. Students will most likely not be familiar with the genre, its tropes, or with Mary Rowlandson's work as the most prominent example of a captivity narrative. We have included some notes below that you can use as the basis for a class discussion before reading the excerpt in order to help your students understand the work's context and significance.

The worksheet asks students to engage with a lengthy excerpt from *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* that describes her experiences after being captured. The excerpt is followed by a series of discussion questions. Based on the needs of your class, you can work through the excerpt as a class, in small groups, or as individuals. The teacher's commentary includes teaching tips, background information, and more discussion questions.

This lesson also includes a homework assignment that uses the content from Topic 2.5. It builds on the class exercises by presenting the material in a multiple-choice format to help students practice with exam-style questions.

NOTES

Write or type in this area.

Historical Context

American Indian captivity narratives were a popular literary genre from the 17th century up to the end of the 19th century, and they had avid readers on both sides of the Atlantic. With a few exceptions, they featured a devout Christian woman who was seized by Indians, forced to witness the deaths of people she loved, who was often subject to different privations herself, but who persevered despite her difficulties as a result of her faith. These narratives were sensational accounts designed to appeal to wide readerships, not necessarily accurate nonfiction records. As such, they raise interesting questions for the reader about point of view, perspective, and audience. Beginning in the late 19th century, historians have started to examine these narratives as a potential source about Native American life, albeit ones that are heavily biased.

The most popular ones, including *The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, took place during King Philip's War in New England. Rowlandson was captured at Lancaster in the Massachusetts Bay Colony on February 10, 1675. During the raid, Mary Rowlandson and her three children were captured and several members of her extended family were killed. Mary and her youngest child were injured, with her daughter Sarah dying from her injuries a few days after the attack. Rowlandson and her remaining children were separated and sold to different Native American groups. Mary Rowlandson found some comfort in a Bible given to her by her captors, but she generally records that her captivity was extremely unpleasant. The group she was with moved around quickly in a series of events she calls "Removes" and she suffered physically and mentally. After 11 weeks, Mary was ransomed back to her husband for twenty pounds. Her remaining children were eventually returned as well.

The excerpt on the worksheet includes a scene from the Fifth Remove. In this scene, Mary Rowlandson reflects on how her ideas about Native American food have changed over time. While there are very real physical reasons why starvation and hard labor would have made Mary more appreciative of any type of food, the change is far more important on a symbolic level. The scene represents several of the major themes that dominate Rowlandson's work, including her understanding of her Christian faith, her gradual (albeit begrudging) accepting of some aspects of Native American culture, and her worries about whether her time among the Native American community would change her permanently.

NOTES

Write or type in this area.



A depiction of Mary Rowlandson from the frontispiece of the 1770 edition of her account