



Teaching Guide

SEGMENT 2, WEBISODE 3

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



Segment Overview

The New England Puritans, in seeking to purify the Church of England and lead godly lives, wanted to create “a city upon a hill,” an example for all to look up to and emulate. The civil government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony had the authority to enforce rigorous rules concerning godly behavior, adherence to Biblical teachings, and strict observance of the Sabbath. Puritan leaders believed this form of government was essential for the success of the New England colony. Hostilities with the Native Americans resulted mostly from the unyielding views of the Puritans.

Roger Williams, a Puritan minister, took a different view of both religion and the natives. He believed in the separation of church and state and insisted on people having freedom of conscience, the freedom to choose how they worship. Williams argued that the native people owned all the land and that colonists should purchase it from them and not from the king of England. These unpopular views led to Williams’ banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636.

In Rhode Island, Williams established the colony he had always envisioned. His colony had representative government. The church and state were completely separate: church attendance was not required; the state did not support the church; and church membership was not necessary to be permitted to vote.

Teacher Directions

1. Write the following phrases on the chalkboard
 - freedom of conscience
 - separation of church and state
 - Native Americans’ land rights
2. Ask the students if they have heard these phrases before and what they mean. If students are unfamiliar with the phrases, ask them to speculate what the phrases might mean. Help students arrive at acceptable definitions. Explain that the first two principles have become basic to American life, but that Roger Williams caused an uproar in Puritan Massachusetts by believing and preaching them.



Let's Discuss



History Sleuth

Teacher Directions

1. Display the comment by Williams' biographer Edmund S. Morgan on the chalkboard or on chart paper.

"We may praise him...for his defense of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. He deserves the tribute...but it falls short of the man. His greatness was simpler. He dared to think."

2. Ask the students, in their teams, to discuss the following questions.
 - Why is thinking a daring act?
 - Is acting on what you believe a simple thing?
 - When does it take courage to act on your beliefs?
3. Teams share their responses with the entire class.
4. Working in their teams, students think of circumstances in their lives when they might need the courage to think for themselves and act on their beliefs. Each team develops and performs a brief skit based on such a circumstance.

Teacher Directions

1. Ask the students.
 - Would life have been easier for Roger Williams if he had just kept quiet about his beliefs and taken the good jobs that the Puritans offered to him? Why?
 - How might Puritan leaders have resolved their differences with Williams other than by banishing him?
 - Do you think that freedom of conscience is the best way to approach religious tolerance? Explain your opinion.
2. Students share and support their opinions with the entire class.

Teacher Directions

1. Discuss the following information with students.

In the seventeenth century, religious intolerance was common not only in the New England colonies but also in the other colonies. Roger Williams' views, although widely accepted today, were quite unusual in colonial times. At that time, nonconformists such as Catholics, Jews, and Quakers who sought an alternative to the Puritan way suffered persecution for their religious beliefs. Roger Williams, his relationship with the Narragansett Indians, and a charter from the king of England helped establish the Rhode Island Colony as an inclusive environment where people were judged by their character and not by their skin color or their religious affiliation.



What do you Think?



Moving Toward Freedom

2. Students imagine that they are members of groups that have faced religious intolerance in England or in the colonies and have moved to Rhode Island. Students write letters to friends or family they have left behind describing their new situation in Rhode Island. What would they say to encourage these people to come to Rhode Island. How was moving to Rhode Island a move toward freedom?

Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Local History — Students research when their state offered religious tolerance to its residents.

Language Arts/Writing — Students write poems about Roger Williams through the eyes of the Narragansett Indians. Other students write poems about Roger Williams through the eyes of John Cotton or John Winthrop. Students compare the poems and decide which point of view in their opinion is more accurate.

Art — Students create posters illustrating and labeling what they think the colony of Rhode Island looked like based on Roger Williams' philosophy of religious tolerance, freedom of conscience, and separation of church and state.

Government/Library/Technology — Students research the Bill of Rights to investigate what influence Roger Williams' philosophy played in some of our rights today as American citizens. Students choose one of these rights and draw a poster illustrating that right to share with the class.



Connections