

Two Accounts:

The Meeting Between the French and the Iroquois

Students will learn...

- About France and England's relationship with Northeastern Woodland tribes before the French-Indian War.
- To examine a primary document for bias
- To understand the difficulties historians have in interpreting history.

You will need...

- The French's Account of the Meeting
- Washington's Account of the Meeting
- Two Accounts Worksheet

Opener: French and Indian War

- Tell your students that before the Revolutionary War, Washington already had military experience. What war do they think it could have been?
- Review the French and Indian war and Washington's role in it.

The French and Indian war (1756-1763) also known as the Seven Years' War in Europe was between Britain and French that started over a series of clashes when the French began expanding into the Ohio Valley in 1754. Washington was sent by the Virginia Governor, Robert Dinwiddie, to deliver a letter telling the French Commander, Legardeur de St. Pierre, to return to Canada. On his way there, he relied on the Iroquois for navigation and in his Journal (which was published in England and the Colonies) he describes his interactions with them.

Task: Comparing the Two Accounts

- Explain to your students that in all historical accounts there is more than one story about what happened. One meeting between the Half King, a representative of the Six Nations, and French General Marin has been recorded twice, with different accounts on what happened.
- Split your students into pairs. One student will read the French's Account and the other will read Washington's Account and then they will switch.
- Have them then talk together to question the sourcing of the document through the questions on the Two Accounts Worksheet.

Closer: Conclusions

- Go over the questions but also ask what they think historians should do with two conflicting sources. How would they write about this incident if they were writing a history book?
- Stress that Washington also may have had his own agenda in writing what he wrote. We think of Washington in ideological terms, but he was not perfect and had a complex and often contradictory relationship with Northeastern and Southeaster Woodland tribes that evolved over time. As President, he believed strongly in westward expansion and displaced many native tribes.
- Also, don't forget that memory and the message we received from an interaction will affect how we recall it.



Washington's Account of the Half-King and French's Meeting

George Washington was on his way to deliver a letter from the Governor of Virginia to the French Commander. To find them, he needed the help of the Iroquois to guide him. He asks to meet with the Half-King, Tanahisson, one of the leaders of the Six Nations or Iroquois people. The Half King has already met with the French, which is what he describes to Washington here.

1 November 25th, 1753

2 About 3 o'Clock this Evening the Half-King came to Town; I went up and invited him and
3 Davison, privately, to my Tent, and desir'd him to relate some of the Particulars of his Journey to
4 the French Commandant, and Reception there... When he went to the Fort, he said he was
5 received in a very stern Manner by the late Commander; Who ask'd him very abruptly, what he
6 had come about, and to declare his Business, which he said he did in the following Speech.

7 ... Fathers, it is you that are the Disturbers in this Land, by coming and building your Towns,
8 and taking it away unknown to us, and by Force. Fathers, We kindled a Fire a long Time ago, at
9 a Place called Montreal, where we desired you to stay, and not to come and intrude upon our
10 Land. I now desire you may dispatch to that Place ; for be it known to you, Fathers, that this is
11 our Land, and not yours... If you had come in a peaceable Manner, like our Brothers the English,
12 we should not have been against your trading with us, as they do; but to come, Fathers, and build
13 great Houses upon our Land, and to take it by Force, is what we cannot submit to. Fathers, Both
14 you and the English are white, we live in a Country between; therefore the Land belongs to
15 neither one nor t'other: But the Great Being above allow'd it to be a Place of Residence for us;
16 so Fathers, I desire you to withdraw, as I have done our Brothers the English ; for I will keep you
17 at Arms length: I lay this down as a Trial for both, to see which will have the greatest Regard to
18 it, and that Side we will stand by, and make equal Sharers with us. Our Brothers the English have
19 heard this, and I come now to tell it to you, for I am not afraid to discharge you off this Land.

20 This he said was the Substance of what he said to the General, who made this Reply.
21 Now my Child, I have heard your Speech, you spoke first...but you need not put yourself to the
22 Trouble of speaking, for I will not hear you : I am not afraid of Flies, or Musquitos, for Indians
23 are such as those ; I tell you, down that River I will go, and will build upon it, according to my
24 Command : If the River was block'd up, I have Forces sufficient to burst it open, and tread under
25 my Feet all that stand in Opposition, together with their Alliances; for my Force is as the Sand

26 upon the Sea Shore: Therefore, here is your Wampum, I fling it at you. Child, you talk foolish;
27 you say this Land belongs to you, but there is not the Black of my Nail yours: I saw that Land
28 sooner than you did, before the Shannoahs and you were at War : Lead was the Man that went
29 down, and took Possession of that River: It is my Land, and I will have it, let who will stand up
30 for, or say against it. I'll buy and sell with the English, (mockingly). If People will be rul'd by
31 me, they may expect Kindness, but not else.

French's Account of their Meeting with the Half-King

This account describes one of the leaders of the Six Nations or Iroquois people, Tanacharison's (the Half-King's), meeting with the French General Paul Marin de la Malgue. It was recorded by *The Contrecoeur Papers and other Documents Concerning the Anglo-French Conflict on the Ohio from 1745 to 1756*. The author of this report is unknown but was written by a Frenchman who was presumably present at the meeting.

- 1 September 2, 1753 Council held by the Sonontouans from the Belle Riviere
- 2 ...My father, today I am going to tell you my feelings, without hiding anything, as you told us to
3 do. When M. de Niverville left this spring, we made use of that occasion to show part of our
4 sentiments. There arrived a messenger in three days journey from La Presentation with two
5 strings of wampum¹ to announce that the French were coming to wage war on us. Two others
6 came who confirmed the same thing and then two more came from the English and the Great
7 Saber, who still said the same thing. That, my father, is the reason for our trip... M. de Joncaire
8 had come there three years ago with much merchandise which he distributed as he desired, after
9 which he said that he had acquired the land as far as Riviere au Boeuf, and that pained me. I
10 would like, my father, to know your feelings about that. We were told that you were coming with
11 quantities of goods, just as M. de Joncaire had come before, and that you were coming to take
12 pity on your children. We think that when you have clothed us, you will say that the land has
13 been paid for...
- 14 ...With this belt we stop you and beg you to have them cease setting up the establishments you
15 want to make. All the nations have always called upon us not to allow it. We have told our
16 brothers, the English, to withdraw. They have done so, too. We shall be on the side of those who
17 take pity on us and who listen to us... This is the first and last request that we shall make of you
18 about it, and I shall strike out at whoever does not listen to us...
- 19 (Marin's answer)

¹ Wampums are shell beads, usually woven onto belts by members from the Southeast and Northeastern Woodlands tribes and used as money, storytelling, or to record treaties and historical events.

20 ...I am not answering all the speeches you gave me and I return them to you because you seemed
21 like people to have lost your minds. I am glad, however, to inform you about my course of action
22 according to the order which I have received for it from your father Onontio². The establishments
23 which I am setting up and which I shall continue along the Belle Riviere are founded on the fact
24 that it belongs unquestionably to the King, since M. de La Salle took possession of it when it was
25 inhabited by the [Shawnees], against whom the Iroquois made war incessantly, and who have
26 always been our friends. Far from wishing to disturb the nations who live along the Belle
27 Riviere, we want only to... make a good road to make it easy for you to go listen to your father
28 and easy for us to supply your needs. And this road will be free for all the children of Onontio.
29 His Majesty has ordered, these establishments in order to be assured of the faithfulness of his
30 children, and His Majesty leaves them complete freedom to go trade their furs wherever they
31 think best. This was already announced to your village beginning in the spring... I despise all the
32 stupid things you said. I know that they come only from you, that all the warriors and chieftains
33 of the Belle Riviere think better than you... I am obliged to tell you that I shall continue on my
34 way and, if there are any persons who de are so bold as to set up barriers to hinder my march, I
35 shall knock them over so vigorously that those who have made them may be crushed by them.
36 Likewise, those who have not taken part in them and who are recognized as the children of
37 Onontio will experience, they and their children, the favors that their father Onontio bade me
38 bestow upon them... Perhaps you will come to your senses and recognize your error the risk you
39 were running...

² The title used by tribes in the Great Lakes region to refer to the Governor of New France. They were the head of the French-Indian alliance and so was expected to settle arguments, provide supplies and keep the alliance. Tribes from the Great Lakes allied to the French addressed Onotonio as 'Father.' In 1753, the Governor of New France changed from Marquis de la Jonquière, who died in 1752, to Marquis Du Quesne.

Two Accounts: What is the Truth?

Instructions: Answer the following questions about the sourcing of the two documents to establish if there are any biases there.

The French's Account

1. Who is recording this event? Is it the same person who is telling the story?

2. Was the person at the actual event? _____

3. Who is the document's audience? _____

4. Why was the document written? _____

5. What is the author's perspective? What claims do they make? What is their evidence?

6. What words or phrases does the author use to persuade the document's audience?

7. How reliable is this document? Why? _____

George Washington's Account

1. Who is recording this event? Is it the same person who is telling the story?

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Comparing the two

1. On what points do the two accounts differ? _____

2. On what points do the two accounts agree? _____

3. Whose perspectives are we missing? _____