Teaching the Old New York Diorama

Reconsidering the Old New York Diorama

The Old New York diorama at the American Museum of Natural History depicts an encounter between Dutch and Lenape leaders in 1660. New Amsterdam, at the southern tip of Manhattan Island, was controlled by the Dutch at this time. The city had a diverse population and robust economy, but in just a few years would be taken over by the English and become New York. Over the course of these colonizations, the Lenape were pushed, often violently, off the island and out of the region altogether; many were killed in the process. By 1660, the Dutch had already begun this process of displacement.

In 1939, the Museum unveiled the diorama as part of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall. The purpose of this diorama was to celebrate Roosevelt’s Dutch ancestry. But the depictions of the Native people, like many in popular culture then and now, reflect common stereotypes and a fictional view of the past. Laws, treaties, and policies had continually eroded Native Americans’ sovereignty and self-determination since the Colonial period, and although the 1930s saw some legal advances for Native Americans, it would be decades before the civil rights legislation of the 1960s provided some firmer legal protections.

In 2018, the Museum added new text to the display to help visitors re-examine the encounter depicted in the Old New York diorama and to correct misrepresentations of the Native people and their relationship with colonists. This is part of a larger effort to acknowledge the ongoing impact of colonialism, as well as the urgent need to reconceive how diverse peoples and cultures are represented in the Museum.
Activity Overview

In this activity, students view and respond to the event portrayed in the Old New York diorama. First, students observe a photograph of the diorama as it existed when it was first unveiled in 1939, prior to the text overlays that were added in 2018. At the Museum, they view the actual diorama and interact with the text overlays and the new information provided in 2018. Back in the classroom, students synthesize the new information and reflect on what they learned. The activity has three components:

1. **BEFORE THE VISIT:** Students study a map of New Amsterdam in 1660 as well as a photograph of the Old New York diorama as it existed when it was first unveiled in 1939. They use their observations to infer the narrative (implicit and explicit) that is depicted in the diorama.

2. **AT THE MUSEUM:** Students work in groups to observe the Old New York diorama and analyze the new text that the Museum added in 2018. Students compare and contrast the two narratives relayed by (1) the original diorama and (2) the diorama with the added text.

3. **BACK IN THE CLASSROOM:** Students synthesize their learning to consider issues of bias and stereotyping when viewing artifacts and representations of Native peoples.

### Materials

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**FOR STUDENTS:**

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Before the Visit

Students study a map of New Amsterdam in 1660 as well as a photograph of the Old New York diorama as it existed when it was first unveiled in 1939. They use their observations to infer the narrative (implicit and explicit) that is depicted in the diorama.

**TIME**

30 minutes

**PREPARATION**

(Optional) Find a map to help orient students to the location of lower Manhattan today (e.g. satellite map of Manhattan or tri-state area).

Project the 1660 map and diorama photograph or distribute copies to students.

**PROCEDURE**

**Part 1: Observe a map of New Amsterdam in 1660** (10 minutes)

(Optional) Students view a map of current-day New York City and lower Manhattan.

Students view and analyze the Castello Plan—a 1660 map of New Amsterdam—as a class. The Castello Plan (discovered at the Villa di Castello in Italy) is the earliest known map of New Amsterdam. The Castello plan was created by Jacques Cortelyou, a surveyor of the early Dutch colony.

Suggested prompts:

- What do you notice about the 1660 map?
  - Locate the wall (present-day Wall Street).
  - Locate Broadway (the widest street on the map).

- Why do you think the wall was built?
  (According to most sources, the wall was an actual 12-foot-tall stone, earth, and wooden wall. It was built in 1653 to protect the Dutch inhabitants of New Amsterdam from potential invasion by the English, local indigenous groups, and other colonists.)

- What do you think existed north of the wall?

- How would you describe the settlement of New Amsterdam in 1660?

- What do you think was the purpose of the fort (Fort Amsterdam)?

**Part 2: Observe a photograph of the Old New York diorama** (20 minutes)

Students observe the photograph of the Old New York diorama as a class. Students note that the area shown in the diorama is identified on the map.

Students describe the scene and make inferences about who/what is portrayed and what narrative is relayed by the scene. Have students support their interpretations with evidence from the diorama.
PROCEDURE (CONTINUED) Suggested prompts:

- What do you notice in the diorama that you saw in the map?
- How does the diorama portray the Dutch and the Native Americans?
- What is the relationship between the Dutch and the Native Americans? How do you know?
- Who seems to have the power? What details make you think this?
- Based on what you know about Native Americans during this time, are they portrayed accurately? Why or why not?
- Consider the diorama from the creators’ point of view, purpose, historical context, and audience. Whose perspective is omitted? Why?
- Define/review the term “stereotype.” Does the portrayal of Native Americans in the diorama include any stereotypes? If yes, what are they?

After a class discussion, divide students into groups. Students work in their groups to complete the Before the Visit section of the student worksheet.

At the Museum

Students work in groups to analyze the Old New York diorama up close and read and analyze the new text on display. Students discover the inaccuracies and biases in the original representation.

LOCATION OF DIORAMA The Old New York diorama is located on the first floor of the Museum, near the Central Park West and 79th Street entrance in the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall.

TIME 20 minutes

PREPARATION Distribute worksheets

PROCEDURE Students work in their groups to read and discuss the Old New York diorama text on the glass and side panels.

Students compare and contrast their understanding of the event based on the original diorama and the diorama with the added text.

Students use the prompts on their worksheets to gather and interpret the new information learned.

Students should be encouraged to also record any questions they have.
Back in the Classroom

Students synthesize their learning and discuss the biases in the diorama. Students also view the video, “Behind the Updates to the Old New York Diorama” and analyze a primary-source document. Extension activities are provided for additional exploration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>30-40 minutes</th>
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<tr>
<td>PREPARATION</td>
<td>Project or print copies of the excerpts from the Stuyvesant letters from 1660.</td>
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**PROCEDURE**

**Part 1: Class discussion (10 minutes)**

In their groups, students review their notes, observations, and analyses to draw conclusions. You may want to distribute copies of the diorama text (pp. 10–11). Students then engage in a class discussion and share their findings. Suggested prompts:

- **What is most important to know about the differences between the story the diorama tells without the added text, and the story it tells with the added text?**
- **Why do you think the Museum made the decision to add the new text?**
- **How does the new text enhance your understanding of the relationship between Dutch colonists and Native people? How does it enhance your understanding of how and what we learn about Native peoples in general?**
- **In what other ways does the addition of the new text affect the viewer?**

**Part 2: Students watch and discuss the video, “Behind the Updates to the Old New York Diorama.” (10 minutes)**

You may want to show the entire video or selected sections, as well as pause between sections for discussion. For segment overviews, vocabulary, and suggested discussion questions, see p. 12.

**Part 3 (Grades 9-12 only): Students read and discuss an excerpt from a primary-source document. (10 minutes)**

Students read an excerpt from a primary source that records an important negotiation between Pieter Stuyvesant and Oratamin (the sachem pictured in the diorama) to understand Dutch attitudes and behavior toward Native Americans in 1660. (You may wish to read the text aloud and work with students to paraphrase each section.)

Students engage in discussion using the suggested questions at the end of the reading; see p. 17.
PROCEDURE
(CONTINUED)

Part 4: Students engage in culminating class discussion. (10 minutes)

Suggested prompts:

- What surprised you most about what you learned as a result of participating in this activity?
- What questions do you still have?

Extension Activities for Further Reading and Thinking

- Given that the Old New York diorama is part of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall, research this president’s policies and attitudes toward Native Americans.

- Research the role that the development of the National Parks played in the treatment and history of Native Americans.

- Research and consider the policies of other American presidents toward Native Americans (e.g. John Q. Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Calvin Coolidge, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, Lyndon B. Johnson, Barack Obama).

  - What were the effects of particular policies on Native American culture and lives?
  - How have presidents responded to the contemporary issues and concerns of Native Americans? (Suggested resource: American Indians/American Presidents: A History, ed. by Clifford Trafzer.)

- Find out how other cities, museums, and cultural institutions are reconsidering the artifacts and histories of Native Americans.

- Consider the recent controversies surrounding Confederate monuments or the revisiting of many historic statues in New York City. What do these events teach you about history and historical interpretation?

- Read about Native American history and culture from a Native American perspective. Book recommendations can be found at firstnations.org/knowledge-center/books/

Student Worksheet

1. Study the photo of the Old New York diorama.

Based on your observations, describe what is happening. What story is being told? What evidence supports your interpretations?

**Answers will vary but may include:**

• Three Native American men are walking up to two Dutch colonist men.

• The Native Americans are holding items in their hands as if offering them to the Dutch men, one of whom is holding his hand out to take the items.

• In the background, Native Americans and colonists are walking up and down a hill leading to the ocean.

• In the distance various types of boats are visible: large colonial ships with sails and smaller Native American canoes.

2. Focus on the two groups of people in the diorama.

What can you infer about the relationship between the Lenape and the Dutch colonists? What evidence supports your interpretations?

**Answers will vary but may include:**

• The Colonists seem more powerful because they have a gun and are standing next to a fort/stone wall that looks like it belongs to them.

• The Lenape seem less powerful because they are coming to give things to the colonists, who are ready to take them. The colonial ships in the background are larger and stronger looking than the Native American canoes that can also be seen.
Observe the Old New York diorama carefully and note any new details. In your group, read the added text on the glass and side panel.

Note the specific ways that some depictions of the two groups were inaccurate. List some of them below:

* Oratamin, sachem, and diplomat
* Wampum clothing
* Women in the background
* The Lenape people, then and now

What is your reaction to the new text? Talk to your group members about what you learned reading the new text and your reaction to the information. Record responses:

* Answers will vary.

Why do you think the new added text is important for visitors to the Museum? How is it important for Native Americans? How is it important for our understanding of past events in general?

* Answers will vary.
Diorama Text

LEFT PANEL

Why is this diorama here?
The Museum unveiled this diorama in 1939, as part of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall, where you stand now. The original purpose of this scene was to celebrate the Roosevelt family’s Dutch ancestry.

Many of the details related to the Dutch, such as the buildings and clothing, are shown accurately. But the depictions of the Native people, like many in popular culture, reflect common stereotypes and a fictional view of the past. Callouts to the diorama at right now give more context to this scene.

[Map of New Amsterdam, showing location of diorama, plus map of Lenape sites on Manhattan island.]

New Amsterdam
The Dutch arrived in North America in 1609 and soon after established the colony of New Netherland, which included the city of New Amsterdam on the island of Manhattan. By 1664, the English had taken over and the colony was renamed New York. Like the Dutch, the English wanted to control the region at the expense of the Lenape people.

CALLOUTS ON GLASS

Reconsidering this scene
This 1660 encounter between Dutch and Lenape leaders was intended to celebrate the Dutch founders of “Old New York.” But the scene offers only stereotypical representations and ignores how complex and violent colonization was for Native people.

Oratamin, sachem and diplomat
The original diorama label identified Stuyvesant but not Oratamin, a sachem (leader) of the Hackensack, a Munsee branch of the Lenape. Oratamin was a respected diplomat who conducted complex negotiations between Native groups and the Dutch newcomers. This scene does not show a true negotiation but rather subjects bringing tribute to a ruler.

Wampum
The casual presentation of this wampum belt, made from white and purple mollusk shells, does not fully capture the significance of wampum to the Lenape. The designs and colors of wampum belts have meaning, and record treaties, laws, important traditions and significant moments in history. Many Native nations throughout the Northeast used wampum.

Tobacco
The cultivation and production of tobacco is an agricultural technology developed by Native people. Among the Lenape, kwushahteew (tobacco) is used as a sacrament and given as a diplomatic gift.

Clothing
The Lenape would have dressed up for an important meeting. But here they are wearing very little clothing—a clichéd way to show Native people. In reality, these diplomats would have worn fine fur robes with adornments signifying their important role as leaders. The faces of the Lenape men appear almost the same, as though they had no individual identities.

Pieter Stuyvesant
The Dutch leader Pieter Stuyvesant is shown in a position of power. Although this scene supposedly shows a peace negotiation, it depicts a one-way exchange. Stuyvesant’s hand is outstretched, demanding tribute, while the soldier behind him displays a gun.

Dutch windmill
Windmills are closely associated with Holland, and by including one in the scene, the designers wanted viewers to focus on the Dutch. The first windmills
were used as lumber mills. Timber was important to the Lenape as well. Indeed, in the Munsee language, “Manhattan” means “the place where we get bows,” after hickory trees on the island with wood well-suited for making bows.

**European ships, Native canoes**
The numerous ships shown here communicate a sense of European power and wealth. Native people made enormous contributions and sacrifices to lay the foundation for colonial markets—and America itself. Yet this history is not always told. The small canoes were also vital to trade: they made it possible to access trade items found much further inland.

**Women in the background**
These Lenape women are shown as subservient and only engaged in physical labor—and they would not have been dressed this way. In reality, women in Lenape society, both in the past and today, hold leadership roles, are knowledge keepers and help maintain cultural continuity. The female sachem (leader) Mamanuchqua was active in treaty negotiations during the mid-1600s.

**Who’s missing?**
There are very few women shown in the scene, and others are missing as well. In 1660, Manhattan was home to immigrants from Holland, as well as France, England and other European countries. Jewish immigrants arrived from Brazil and elsewhere; enslaved and free Africans also lived in New Amsterdam.

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**RIGHT PANEL**

**The Lenape people, then and now**
The Lenape people refer to themselves as Lenni-Lenape, and are a network of allied groups commonly called Delaware: the Unalachtigo, the Unami and the Minisink, later known as the Munsee. Before the arrival of Europeans, they lived across Lenapehoking—an expansive territory that included parts of present-day New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

Early exchanges with Europeans were sometimes peaceful and sealed with gifts. But this changed as colonizers began to drive the Lenape out of their homeland through a combination of violence, introduced diseases, forced removal and pressures to assimilate. Yet the Lenape people and their culture have endured. Today the Lenape live in Kansas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Ontario, Canada.

**Wasalaangweew (Bright Star)**
*Molly Miller*
“The early years of colonization caused much inter-generational trauma and the hiding of our culture. We now celebrate over 40 years of cultural reawakening and the 13th year of Lenape-Munsee language revitalization. Our knowledge of our history, culture and language are most important to our survival as a people.”

Wasalaangweew is an appointed Clan Mother of the Turtle Clan, an Elder, Teacher and Wisdom Keeper of the Stockbridge-Munsee, Mohican Nation of Wisconsin.

**Lenapehoking**
*(Lenape homeland)*
15,000–30,000 people (c. 1600)
~12,000 square miles (~31,000 square km)

**Lenape Relocations (1700–2014)**
Over several generations, Lenape people were repeatedly forced to relocate farther and farther west, despite resistance. Today some 16,000 Lenape live in Kansas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Ontario, Canada.

[Key]
- Current settlements
- Former settlements
- Forced relocations

**Colonialism and cultural representation**
The American Museum of Natural History and all of New York City are on original Lenape territory. In an effort to acknowledge the ongoing impact of colonialism, as well as the urgent need to reconceive how diverse peoples and cultures are represented in the Museum, we have undertaken a series of initiatives in our cultural halls. These initiatives, including re-examination of this diorama, will add a diversity of voices and perspectives to the Museum’s displays.
Educator Notes for Video

Behind the Updates to the Old New York Diorama

Show students the video. You may want to pause between sections for discussion. Below are segment overviews, vocabulary, and suggested discussion questions.

0:00–0:52

Segment Overview: Bradley Pecore (visual historian) discusses the representation of all “Indians” as a homogeneous group, versus the reality that Native Americans have diverse cultures. The Native Americans portrayed in the diorama were portrayed as stereotypical “Indians,” but we know that they were members of the Munsee group, one of three allied groups that together make up the Lenape people.

Vocabulary: “indigenous” (a region’s original inhabitants)

Discussion Questions:

In the video, Bradley says, referring to the Native Americans shown in the diorama, “…Those are not Indians. Those are a group of Hackensack of which we know are Munsee people.” Why is it important to identify them this way instead of just calling them “Indians”?

How do Bradley’s statements fit with what you thought you knew about Native Americans today? About the Lenape in New York?

0:52–1:18

Segment Overview: Lauri Halderman (vice president, Exhibitions Department) identifies the two most important people in the Diorama (Oritamin and Peter Stuyvesant). She discusses the stereotypical images of Native Americans that she grew up with in New England. She mentions that the Old New York Diorama opened in 1939, and that its representation of the scene is outdated to our perception now.

Vocabulary: “stereotype” (cliché); “trope” (motif)

Discussion Questions:

In the video, Lauri says, “This diorama was finished in 1939. I think our eyes are different today than they were in the 1930s.” What do you think she means by this?

What images of Native Americans were you exposed to growing up?

What perspectives do we see today that we were unable to see in the past?

1:24–2:09

Segment Overview: Peter Whiteley (curator, Division of Anthropology) discusses why it is important to add to past, out-dated representations of people. Bradley Pecore then talks about the fact that while representations of Native American culture are often set in the past, giving the impression that they are gone, the Lenape people still live in this region.

Vocabulary: “appropriation” (the act of taking something, usually without permission)

Discussion Question: In the video, Peter talks about including the perspectives of Native Americans when updating the diorama. Bradley talks about showing the public that Native peoples are living in this region today. Why are these things important?

2:09–3:09

Segment Overview: Peter and Bradley discuss why the diorama was updated instead of covered, removed, or replaced. They explain that leaving the diorama with the addition of the text acknowledges the history of Native American oppression, and encourages modern viewers to talk about it openly, as well as use it as a tool for teaching and rethinking.

Vocabulary: “oppression” (the state of being kept down by unjust use of force or authority)

Discussion Question: Why did the Museum choose to add labels to the diorama rather than remove it or replace it with something else?
Student Worksheet

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

1. Study the photo of the Old New York diorama.

Based on your observations, describe what is happening. What story is being told? What evidence supports your interpretations?

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2. Focus on the two groups of people in the diorama.

What can you infer about the relationship between the Lenape and the Dutch colonists? What evidence supports your interpretations?

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Student Worksheet

AT THE MUSEUM

Observe the Old New York diorama carefully and note any new details. In your group, read the added text on the glass and side panel.

Note the specific ways that some depictions of the two groups were inaccurate. List some of them below:

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What is your reaction to the new text? Talk to your group members about what you learned reading the new text and your reaction to the information. Record responses:

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Why do you think the new added text is important for visitors to the Museum? How is it important for Native Americans? How is it important for our understanding of past events in general?

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Primary Source: A Negotiation Between Pieter Stuyvesant and Oratamin

Between September 1659 to September 1663, the Esopus tribe (a tribe of Lenape) fought a series of conflicts, known as the Esopus Wars, with the Dutch colonists. The document below is an account by the Dutch of a meeting between Pieter Stuyvesant (leader of Dutch colony) and Oratamin (leader of the Hackensack indians).

Conference between the Director-General and Council and the chiefs of Hackensack and Haverstraw. 
An armistice is granted to the Esopus Indians.

3rd June (1660)

Present in Council, the Right Honorable Director-General, Petrus Stuyvesant and Mr. Nicasius de Sille.

At the meeting appeared Oratamy, chief of Hackinkesack and Curruppin, chief of Haverstroo with some other savages.

1. The chief Oratamy says, that during the last rencontre at the Esopus 4 or 5 days ago, when only the chief Preumaeker was killed, about 20 Esopus savages were together, who all wished to live in peace.

2. He says, that the Esopus chief Seuwackenamo, who was with them at Gemoenepa and on Staten-island yesterday, was very sad upon hearing of the death of the aforesaid chief Preumaeker and that he suddenly departed thereupon, whereas he did not know now what to do or not to do, but he had left in haste in order to see, whether he could quiet the savages and would come back in 10 or 12 days.

3. He states, that the aforesaid chief Seuwackenamo had told him and the chiefs hereabout, that just before he came here he had spoken with the soldiers, that is the fighting savages, who camp by themselves and had asked them, what they desired; they had answered: We do not want to fight any more; then he had spoken with the women about what they thought best; they had answered, that we may peacefully plant the land and live in peace: then he had gone to the unexperienced young men, who camp alone upon another place, to ask them, what they thought and they had said, to make peace with the Dutch and that they would not kill a pig nor a chicken.

After the foregoing propositions had been answered to the effect, that we too were inclined to make peace, the chief Oratamy replied, that he thought it strange then, that our people had only lately made an expedition against the savages and killed the chief Preumaeker. He was told, it was our way, to do our best as long as we had no firm peace, whereupon he requested that there might be an armistice on both sides during the negotiations for peace. We answered him, that, if he would go there himself with our interpreter Claes de Ruyter or send somebody in his name, to hear, whether the Esopus Indians were minded as they said, we would send him and them in the Company’s yacht and keep an armistice until their return. He accepted immediately to do this, saying, he would now see himself, whether the Esopus savages were well disposed. Done at Fort Amsterdam in N. Netherland on the day as above.


Discussion Questions

■ What term does the author use refer to the Lenape? Why do you think he chose that word?

■ What does the text reveal about Dutch colonists and their attitudes toward the Lenape during the 1660’s? How do you think these attitudes affected/determined their actions?

■ What does the text reveal about Oratamin? How does this description of Oratamin fit with the new text added to the diorama?
Recommended Resources

**BOOKS**

Native American Children's Literature Recommended Reading List

1491: *New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* by Charles Mann

*American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* by David Stannard

*American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities* by Devon Miheswah

*American Indians/American Presidents: A History*, ed. by Clifford Trafzer

*An Indigenous People's History of the U.S.* by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz

*Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown

*Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World* by Linda Hogan

*In a Barren Land: American Indian Dispossession and Survival* by Paula Marks

*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Native American History* by Walter Fleming

*The Island at the Center of the World* by Russell Shorto

*White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* by Vine Deloria

**WEBSITES**

First Nations Development Institute
[firstnations.org](firstnations.org)

New Netherland Institute
[newnetherlandinstitute.org](newnetherlandinstitute.org)

“The True Native New Yorkers Can Never Truly Reclaim Their Homeland” by Colleen Connolly, Oct. 5, 2018

“Ulysses Grant’s Failed Attempt to Grant Native Americans Citizenship” by Mary Stockwell, Jan. 9, 2019
[smithsonianmag.com/history/ulysses-grants-failed-attempt-to-grant-native-americans-citizenship-180971198/](smithsonianmag.com/history/ulysses-grants-failed-attempt-to-grant-native-americans-citizenship-180971198/)