

**LESSON TITLE: THE VALIDITY OF ORAL TRADITIONS IN RELATION TO THE LATER WRITTEN ACCOUNTS OF  
SASSACUS'S RETREAT TO THE STONE CHURCH IN DOVER, NY**

**GRADE/AUDIENCE:**

- **Middle School/High School**

**STATE STANDARDS: Connecticut**

- Content Standard 2: Local, United States And World History – Educational experiences in Grades K-12 will assure that students use historical thinking skills to study the following periodization with escalating scale of breadth and depth: United States, Connecticut and Local History – encounters of peoples from the Americas, Western Europe; European colonization and settlement [1400s-1763]; European colonization and settlement [1492-1763]; World History – emergence of the first global age [1450-1770].
- Content Standard 4: Applying History – initiate questions and hypotheses about historic events they are studying; describe and analyze, using historical data and understandings, the options which are available to parties involved in contemporary conflicts or decision making; be active learners at cultural institutions such as museums and historical exhibitions; display empathy for people who have lived in the past; and describe relationships between historical subject matter and other subjects they study, current issues and personal concerns.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES: At the conclusion of the lesson students will be able to:**

- Identify Sassacus and the role he played in the Pequot War.
- Describe his escape from the Fairfield Swamp Fight, July 13-14, 1637 and his retreat to the Stone Church in Dover, NY from oral traditions as found in later printed sources.
- Explain why there are no primary sources validating the oral tradition of this stronghold.
- Identify the first and subsequent written accounts of Sassacus and his followers at the Stone Church.

- Analyze the oral traditions and determine whether they are probably based on actual events or should be dismissed as “folk tales” or “legends.”

**LESSON OBJECTIVES FOR YOUR STUDENTS: At the conclusion of the lesson students will be able to:**

- Explain what oral traditions related to events of the past are still with us today.
- Support the argument that oral traditions should or should not be considered as based on actual events of the past.
- Defend their own beliefs, drawn from the written sources, as to whether or not the oral tradition is valid.

**COMPELLING/GUIDING QUESTIONS:**

- Who was Sassacus?
- Did he and his Pequot followers take refuge in the Stone Church?
- Why aren't there any primary resources confirming the oral tradition?
- Who was the first person to record this event in writing?
- Can this oral tradition be considered as based on fact?

**DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING TASKS / ACTIVITIES:**

1. Students read written documents alluding to the oral traditions (see Primary or Secondary Resources, below).
2. Visit the Stone Church site (If possible) or Mashantucket Pequot Museum (If possible).

**Time Needed For Lesson:** Two to three days

**MATERIALS, RESOURCES, TECHNOLOGY NEEDED:**

- Computer

**PRIMARY OR SECONDARY RESOURCES (WORKS CITED):**

- Anderson, Teja “Day Tripper: Dover Stone Church” – (NB: Old Dover’s under renovation) – [http://livinginmedia.com/article/day\\_tripper\\_dover\\_stone\\_church.html](http://livinginmedia.com/article/day_tripper_dover_stone_church.html)

- Bruce, Wallace – “The Hudson: Three Centuries of History, Romance and Invention,” 1907.
- Dover Stone Church: “360” – <http://bit.ly/1chtTSK>
- “Dover Stone Church Preserve,” “Dutchess Land Conservancy Newsletter,” Fall 2003
- Ghee, Joyce C. And Joan Spence, *History/Dover Plains Image of America: Harlem Valley Pathways: Through Pawling, Dover, Amenia, North East, and Pine Plains* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, 1998).
- Krattinger, William, New York State Division for Historic Preservation, - Personal Communication - August 13, 2014.
- Lossing, Benson J., *The Dover Stone Church, With Two Illustrations*, (Amenia: De Lacey & Walsh, 1876).
- Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center - Battlefields of the Pequot War, “History of the Pequot War” in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Summer Scholars Teacher Workshop Booklet, (Mashantucket, CT: Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center, 2012).
- National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, United States Department of the Interior – National Park Service, Dover Stone Church, William E. Krattinger, New York State Division for Historic Preservation, April 2014.
- New York Historical Society website. Accessed at: <http://www.nyhistory.org>
- Oral traditions alluded to in the secondary resources – no first-hand primary sources exist.
- Smith, Philip H., *General History of Dutchess County, from 1609 to 1876 inclusive*, (Pawling, NY, 1877). Pp. 149-174.
- Smith, Philip H., “History of Dover, NY”, from *General History of Dutchess County From 1609 to 1876, Inclusive*, (Published by the author, 1877).
- The Dover Stone Church Visitor’s Guide, 04/01/2013. Accessed at: [http://www.oblongland.org/pdf/stone\\_church\\_dover.pdf](http://www.oblongland.org/pdf/stone_church_dover.pdf)
- Town of Dover, NY website. Accessed at: [http://townofdovernny.us/Stone\\_Church.cfm](http://townofdovernny.us/Stone_Church.cfm)

**PRIOR LEARNING, CONNECTIONS, STUDENT NEEDS OR INTERESTS, COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS:**

- Prior learning – students living in Connecticut or southeastern New York may have heard about, or even studied, Sassacus and/or the Stone Church, but no prior learning is necessary
- Common Misconceptions – If something isn’t written down, it’s not true
- Interests – a fascination with the “mystery” of whether Sassacus and his followers sought refuge at the Stone Church

**SUGGESTED DIFFERENTIATIONS:**

- Write a brief, well researched, composition as to the validity of the oral traditions relating to Sassacus and the Stone Church, in your opinion.
- Draw a map of the supposed route of Sassacus's retreat from the Fairfield Swamp to the Stone Church.
- Brief composition – "Why I believe/don't believe that Sassacus and his followers sought refuge in the Stone Church."
- Brief composition – Since the Stone Church is quite near the town of Dover, do you believe that residents of the community were aware of the presence of the Pequots? Why or why not?
- Brief composition – If you believe the residents of Dover were aware of the Pequots why didn't they inform the colonial forces?
- Draw a picture of what you feel Sassacus's camp site inside the Stone Church might have looked like. Use drawings and photographs of the site as reference points.

**CROSS-DISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:**

- History/Literature – the validity or lack thereof of oral traditions
- Geography/Geology – the geologic formation of the Stone Church making it a more than suitable place for Sassacus to be able to survive there
- Warfare – The importance of natural features such as swamps and caves as places of refuge for Native Peoples

**FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PROCESSES (INCLUDING STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT):**

- There are many formative assessments (see Suggested Differentiations above for examples)
- Self-Assessment – Students place themselves in the mindset of Sassacus literally fighting for his life and the lives of his people. Would the students seek refuge in such a place as the Stone Church if they considered themselves in danger?; Would they make a stand against the enemy and fight to death if it came down to that?; or Would they surrender in the hopes of saving the lives of all? Would they come up with an alternative method of dealing with the situation? Choose the answer which the students feel appropriate and defend that decision.