

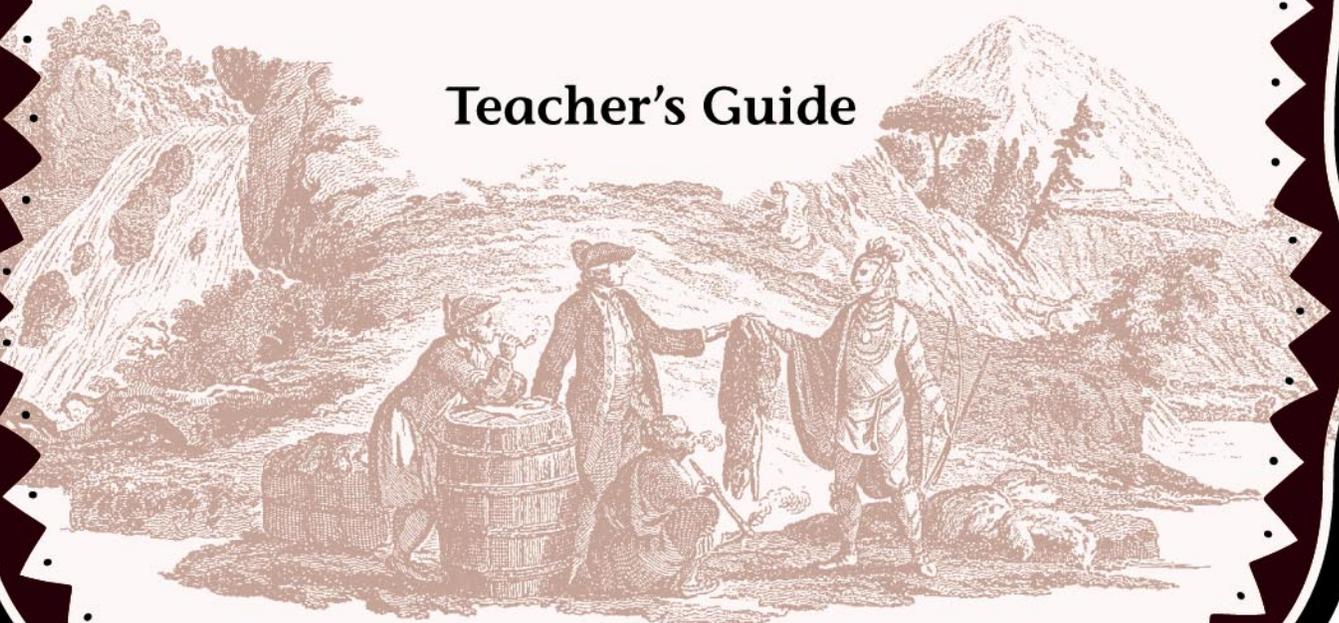
Vermont Historical Society



Abenaki in Vermont

A History Kit
for Students & their Teachers

Teacher's Guide



Using the History Kit

This kit contains a variety of materials for exploring the history and present status of Vermont's Abenaki. These materials include books, artifacts, tapes, maps, and images. The kit is divided into 4 sections:

The **Introductory Activities** explore commonly held stereotypes about Native Americans. **Standards 4.3, 4.4**

The **pre-European section** examines Abenaki lifeways before the arrival of Europeans. **Standard 6.9 b,c**

Contact with Europeans explores the changing cultures of Europeans and Abenaki as they came into contact. **Standards 6.8, 6.20**

"We Were Always Here:" The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries discusses the "disappearance" and re-emergence of Abenaki culture over the past two hundred years. It also focuses on several generations of one family—the Obomsawin family. **Standard 6.14**

A **Reference Section** provides books for additional background information and materials for student research. The bibliographies found in *A New Dawn* are especially helpful for locating research materials, classroom speakers, and other resources. The essays on contemporary Abenaki life, also located in *A New Dawn*, are important supplements for this kit.

For each section of the history kit, the **Teacher's Guide** provides teaching objectives, reference books, a list of related artifacts, images and stories, background information, and discussion questions.

In the end, we hope that students will have an expanded understanding about the history and condition of Abenaki in Vermont. Students should acquire a sense of the length of time Abenaki have lived in Vermont and understand that they still live here today. Students should also be able to identify enduring elements of Western Abenaki culture and see how cultural interactions changed the lifestyles and affected worldviews of both the Abenaki and Europeans. Finally, and most importantly, we hope that students will move beyond their stereotypical views of Native Americans.

Kit Contents: by section

1) Introductory Activities

Reference Book:

- ❖ *Teacher's Guide*
- ❖ *New Dawn*

Contents:

- ❖ *Finding One's Way*
- ❖ Place-Names Worksheet
- ❖ *Roger's Raid: Two Points of View (handout)*

2) The Abenaki before the Arrival of the Europeans

Reference:

- ❖ Keith Wilbur, *The New England Indians*

Contents:

- ❖ Time-line
- ❖ How Pottery Was Made – activity sheet
- ❖ What is a Tool? – handout

Artifacts:

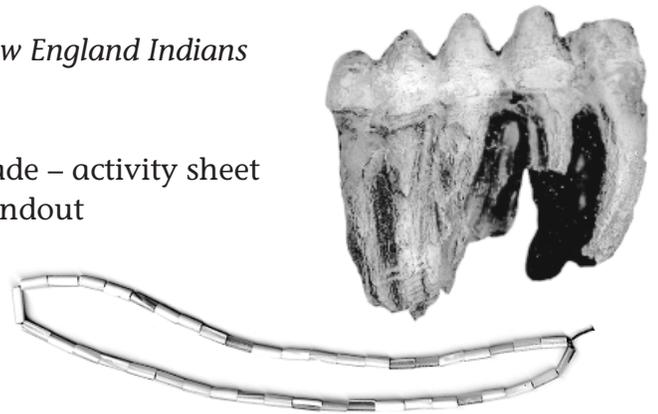
- ❖ Mammoth Tooth
- ❖ Painted deerskin
- ❖ Projectile Points
- ❖ Wampum

Images:

- ❖ *Mammoth Hunt*
- ❖ *An Abenaki Year*

Stories:

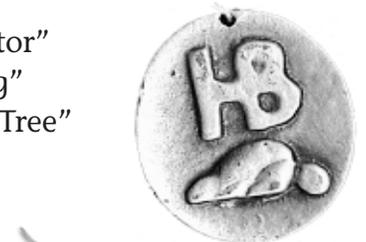
- ❖ Joe Bruchac: "Gluskabe & the Creator"
- ❖ Joe Bruchac: "Gluskabe's Game Bag"
- ❖ Wolfson: "Gluskabe & The Maple Tree"



3) Contact with Europeans

Artifacts:

- ❖ Broadcloth
- ❖ Trade Medallion
- ❖ Trade Silver
- ❖ Fish hook & Sinew



Images & Maps:

- ❖ *An Abenaki View of the World*
- ❖ Justus Dankert, *Novi Belgii Novaque Angliae*, ca. 1683.
- ❖ *A Map of the Inhabited part of Canada from the French Surveys...*, 1777.
- ❖ *Great Mortality among the Indians*
- ❖ J. D. Kelly, *The Discovery of Lake Champlain, 1609*

Stories:

- ❖ *The Singing Beaver*

4) “We Were Always Here:”

The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Artifacts:

- ❖ Basket
- ❖ Book mark
- ❖ Splint
- ❖ Sweetgrass braid
- ❖ Tape: *Alnobak*
- ❖ Video



Images & Maps:

- ❖ Obomsawin Family Photographs
- ❖ Obomsawin Family Timeline
- ❖ Poster: *We Were Always Here*

Books:

- ❖ Reprint from *Visit'n*

Reference

- ❖ Haviland & Power, *The Original Vermonters*
- ❖ *New Dawn*
- ❖ Colin Calloway, *The Abenaki*
- ❖ Joe Bruchac, *The Wind Eagle*
- ❖ Nebesek News Autumn – Taguogo, 1997
- ❖ N’agizi Autumn – Taguogo, 1997
- ❖ N’agizi Winter – Pebon, 1997

Introductory Activities

Objectives

Students will:

Standard 4.3, 4.4

- ❖ Examine how misunderstandings and stereotypes of Abenaki have developed
- ❖ Reconsider their perceptions of Native Americans

Students will also:

- ❖ Learn where Abenaki settled in Vermont
- ❖ Learn how historians have portrayed Abenaki

Reference Book

- ❖ *New Dawn*

Contents

- ❖ *Finding One's Way*
- ❖ Place-Names Worksheet
- ❖ Rogers' Raid: Two Points of View (Handout)

Introduction

The information for this portion of the artifact kit has been taken from New Dawn (pages 94 – 99).

Most students have preconceived ideas about Native Americans that include feather war bonnets, teepees, war-like behaviors and scalping. Often students don't even know that they have such stereotypical views. It is very important that students identify their stereotypes (biased views of an entire people) before they use the materials in this kit. Stereotypes must be dispelled before new understandings can occur.

Identifying and Examining Stereotypes

1. List on board characteristics that make up Native Americans (save this list)
2. Read *Finding One's Way*
3. Define stereotypes using *New Dawn*, pgs. 94-99.
4. Discuss the stereotypes that Louis's classmates had and why they teased him.
5. What characteristics of Abenaki can students find in the story?
6. Compare these with the list on the board and discuss ways stereotypes and prejudices can be overcome.

After using this kit, have students again create a list of qualities that characterize Native Americans (or, more specifically, Abenaki). Compare this with their original list.

Abenaki in Vermont

This activity is based in part from the teacher's guide to Finding One's Way.

1. Hand out copies of the "Abenaki Place-Names" sheet.
2. After students complete the sheet, have them find the places on a map of Vermont.
3. Have students try to find other places with Abenaki names.
4. Assign small groups of students places in Vermont to research.
5. Have students examine the local histories of their assigned places to see what references there are to Abenaki. There may be none! There may be very stereotypical or Eurocentric stories of Abenaki. Have students discuss how historians have portrayed Abenaki and their relationships with European settlers.
6. The two stories of Rogers' Raid illustrates two very different points of view of an historical event.

ANSWER KEY for place name exercise

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 8. G | 15. I |
| 2. J | 9. B | 16. C |
| 3. L | 10. H | 17. S |
| 4. E | 11. R | 18. O |
| 5. M | 12. K | 19. N |
| 6. T | 13. P | 20. D |
| 7. A | 14. Q | |

*Abenaki Place Names in Vermont**

Abenaki were in Vermont long before Europeans. There are many places in Vermont today that still carry their original Abenaki names. Most of these names are “simple directives” giving a place description such as “place of the huge rock.”

See if you can match the Abenaki names with the present name of each location.

1. Mt. Philo (Charlotte)
2. Norwich
3. Lake Champlain
4. Owl's Head Mountain
5. Bellows Falls
6. Metalluk's Brook (Canaan)
7. Lake Wallis (Canaan)
8. Brunswick
9. Brighton
10. Mt. Mansfield
11. Fair Haven
12. Winooski River
13. Passumpsic River (St. Johnsbury)
14. Lake Memphremagog
15. Brandon
16. Bird Mountain (Castleton)
17. Grand Isle
18. Lake Bomoseen (Castleton)
19. Rock Dunder (Burlington)
20. Joe's Pond (Danville)

* from *Finding One's Way*

- a. Na-maas-ko-tick, "The Lake trout place"
- b. "Island-in-Pond"
- c. Wee-ko-wam-aden-sees, "Mountain shaped like little Abenaki wigwam"
- d. Sozap Nebees, Sozap is the Abenaki pronunciation of Joseph. Nebees means pond.
- e. Walowadjo, Owl's Mountain
- f. Ma-te-guas-aden, Rabbit Mountain
- g. Nebi son-bik, "Water which has a different taste"
- h. Kodakwadjo, the cloud hidden mountain
- I. Neshobe, place very full of water.
- j. Ompompanoosuc, at the place of the mushy, quaky ground
- k. Winoski-tuk, onion land river
- l. Pe-ton-bowk, waters that lie between
- m. Kitchee Ponteguh, the great rapids
- n. Wo-ja-ho-sen, "the guardian's rock"
- o. Obum-Sawin, "keepers of the ceremonial fire"
- p. Pa-som-kasic, "clear water with the sandy bottom"
- q. Man-low-baug-og, the place of the very extensive lake.
- r. Cocksackie, snake place
- s. Keechee Manan, the big island
- t. Maw-lawl-dak, which is the name of an Indian who lived in Coos County, New Hampshire (the Abenaki word Maw-lawl-dak means Cedar Tree, and it is said that Mawlawldak/Metalluk called himself "the Cedar Man").

Rogers' Raid: Two Points of View¹

The European Historian's Version

In 1759, Sir Jeffrey Amherst, supreme commander of the British forces, ordered Major Robert Rogers, an adventurer and scout from New Hampshire, to attack and destroy the Abenaki village at Odanak. Rogers and his Rangers boarded whale boats at Crown Point in September and sailed up Lake Champlain to the Missisquoi Bay. From there, they marched northward to Odanak, where they slaughtered the villagers and burned their wooden houses.

Pursued by French soldiers and vengeful Indians, the Rangers split up into groups and retreated across Vermont. The few who made it to the Connecticut River became folk heroes.

Rogers later claimed that he and his men had surprised and annihilated the village in a dawn raid, killing over 200 Indian men, women and children. The French, who arrived at the scene soon after the raid, said only about 30 Indians died. But there is no doubt that many died. Some were burned alive inside their homes. Others were killed as they tried to escape across the St. Francis River in boats.

The Abenaki Version

Abenaki oral tradition contradicts Rogers' version on several points. In 1957, Elvine Obomsawin Royce, told one such story of the raid to anthropologist Gordon Day. Royce heard the story from her aunt, Mali Msadokwes, who in turn heard it from her grandmother, who lived in St. Francis (Odanak) at the time of the raid. According to the Obomsawin family tradition, the St. Francis Indians were dancing to celebrate the autumn harvest when they were warned of the raid. Although many were killed, many more escaped. Here is Day's translation of the story as told by Elvine Obomsawin:

"And they danced and sometimes celebrated late, dancing and sometimes going out because it was a nice cool night. They rested, some went to smoke and rest. And one, a young girl, a young woman, she did not immediately go in when the others went in.

"... When she was ready to go in, then someone stopped her. He said, 'Don't be afraid.' In Indian, you understand, he said, 'Friend.'

¹ Patricia Haller, "Long before there was Vermont," *Burlington Free Press*, February 27, 1991.

"I am your friend and those enemies ... they are there in the little woods (planning) that when all (the Abenakis) leave for home they would kill them all, their husbands, and burn your village, and I came to warn you.'

"And surely the young woman went in to the council house, the dancing place, and she warned the other Indians what he told. She warned what she had been warned. And some did not believe her, because she was so young, because she was a child. ...

"And some Indians at once hurried home. ... They went to see about their people, their children, in order to run away as soon as possible. ... Our aunt's great-grandfather gathered everyone—it was dark of course—in the dark no one kindled a light. They gathered their children in the dark, you can be sure.

"And they left to hide somewhere where they could not find them. ... They hid—in a big ravine where they could not find them. And that man, the old man, they counted their children to see if they were all there. And one had been left! My aunt's grandmother was the one who was missing! And she did not know that she was alone in the house, but already she was awake, and she was sitting at the foot of the bed and she was looking out of the window leaning on the window sill. She was singing, she was calmly singing (to herself). She did not even know that the others were gone. Suddenly then, her father quickly entered in the dark, entering quickly, and he took her—he found her singing—this one.

"Right away he took her and left as quickly as he possibly could to the ravine—the big ravine ... And there they hid, the Indians, the Abenaki.

And my (aunt's) grandfather, the Great Obomsawin, the Great Simon, he crossed the river, just as the sun was rising. Just as the sun is seen first. He didn't arrive soon enough, and just at that time he is almost across the river when the sun showed. And his hat—something shone on his head, something (bright) that he wore. And there he shot down on the other side. ... All that were with the houses—well, that was when they burned the village—the others, surely many were killed of the others, all that were with the houses."

The Abenaki before the Arrival of Europeans

Objectives

Students will:

Standard 6.9b,c

- ❖ understand the relationship of changing climates, vegetation, and food supplies to how people lived
- ❖ understand how basic needs were met in Vermont's distant past

Students will also:

- ❖ acquire a sense of the length of time Abenaki have lived in Vermont
- ❖ understand the nature of archeological evidence

Reference Books

- ❖ Keith Wilbur, *The New England Indians*
- ❖ Haviland & Power, *The Original Vermonters*

Contents

- ❖ Time-line
- ❖ How Pottery Was Made – activity sheet
- ❖ What is a Tool? – activity sheet

Artifacts:

- ❖ Mammoth Tooth
- ❖ Painted deerskin
- ❖ Projectile Points and Scraper
- ❖ Wampum
- ❖ Pot Sherd

Images:

- ❖ *Mammoth Hunt*
- ❖ *An Abenaki Year*

Stories:

- ❖ Joe Bruchac: "Gluskabe & the Creator"
- ❖ Joe Bruchac: "Gluskabe's Game Bag"
- ❖ Wolfson: "Gluskabe & The Maple Tree"

Introduction

The information for this portion of the artifact kit has been taken from the outlines in New Dawn and from Haviland & Power. More information may be found in those books, as well as in Keith Wilbur's book.

Much of the evidence about prehistoric lifeways comes from archeological evidence. Written historical records of Vermont begin with European colonization. Because of this, historians must turn to archeologists. There are several important sites in Vermont that reveal much about the culture of Paleo-Indian, Archaic, and Woodland peoples. Evidence found at those sites is listed on the time line.

Archeological sites are very precious. They should be preserved and only excavated by experienced archeologists who are seeking answers to questions about the past, or who need to save a site from being destroyed. Once excavated, a site can never be replaced. Prehistoric sites include the Paleo-Indian and Archaic archeological periods. Precontact sites include the Woodland period when Abenaki lifestyles had already adapted to their climate changes (food and animals), rise in populations (due to abundance), band associations (trade routes and territories), seasonal activities (new tools and technologies), and world views (connection to Mother Earth and all their relations), or religion. Precontact encounters with Viking, French, English and Portuguese fishermen helped set the stage for changes in the Abenaki world.

Like archeology, oral history has much to add to understanding the Abenaki before contact with Europeans. A very rich and diversified oral history was in place at contact. This oral history, handed down for thousands of years, covers from creation to the present. Also, the extended family bands preserved their local histories through stories, traditions, and lifeways long before the colonists and explorers arrived. When the Europeans arrived, they didn't record these oral histories or learn the Abenaki language. The few written records that historians do have were recorded by Jesuit priests after much had been lost or changed. Oral histories are just as important as archeological sites and written records.

Approaching the Time-Line

1. Ask students to describe their idea of how Abenaki lived in Vermont before Europeans arrived.
2. Help students to understand the length of 10,000 years. Compare the amount of time Abenaki were in Vermont before Europeans arrived to the time 400 years afterwards. Relate some dates to other world events. For instance, farming began in the Middle East in 7,000 B.C.E., the pyramids were built in 2,500 B.C.E.
3. Pass out the time-line without the “evidence” portion. Have students examine the chart, then give them the evidence for just one period and see if they can match the evidence to the lifeways revealed in the chart.
4. Match artifacts to the cultures on the chart. Discuss why the artifacts appear at particular times in history. What climatic or cultural changes had to occur for the artifacts to be developed or used?
5. Divide the class into small groups. Use the artifacts and Keith Wilbur’s book to illustrate the three periods represented on the time line. Post the illustrated time-line on the bulletin board.
6. Use the stories as a way to discuss the relationship between the Abenaki and the environment. What are the lessons that Gluskabe learns? What lessons can we learn from the stories today?

Discussion Questions

Think critically about the ways that changes in the land and climate change culture. Among all those changes, which is the most important and why?



A PaleoIndian mastodon hunt with hand and atlatl thrown spears.
Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, painting by L.K. Townsend.

How Pottery was Made

The most common method of pottery making was the coil method. The potter's wheel was unknown to the Native Americans.

First clay was dug from a local deposit. Next, the clay was dried and the small rocks and pebbles removed. Water was then added to the pure clay. Native Americans tempered their pottery, much as modern potters put "grog" in their clay. Temper added body to the clay to prevent it from shrinking and cracking during firing. Many things were used for temper, the most common in Vermont being crushed quartz. Crushed chert, bone, limestone and fine river-washed gravel were also used. The temper was mixed into the clay in different proportions depending upon what group of Native Americans was making the pots. Three parts clay to one part temper was a common mixture.

Next a round, flat disc was made and the edges bent up to form a shallow cone or bowl shape. This formed the base of the pot. Long coils were made and spiraled around the base to form the sides. The top of the pot was made straight or curved inward or outward. Lips were flattened or left rounded. Sometimes the lips were scalloped, or in the case of Iroquois pottery, castellated.

Then the coils were smoothed together with a flat river stone and a paddle made from a piece of wood or cord-wrapped stick. Once the coils were fused together and the desired surface finish achieved, decorations were applied. Carved wood and stone pieces, pointed sticks, shells, fabric, netting and cord-wrapped sticks were pressed into the clay, creating many different designs. Sometimes decorated collars

were applied around the rim of the pots. The lips and interiors of the rims were also sometimes decorated.

The pottery was then ready for firing. A hot fire was built and left to burn until a bed of ashes and coals were left. The pots were placed in the fire with ashes and coals heaped around and over the pots. After many hours the fire was left to burn out and the pots cooled. Some of the pots turned gray or black, others turned tan or orange depending on the type of clay used and the conditions of firing. After firing, the pots became strong and hard.

Project 1:

Using native clay or modeling clay or play dough, make a pot, taking turns making bases, coils, smoothing the surfaces, etc.

Project 2:

Make pottery markers from sticks wrapped with yarn, drinking straws or hollow reeds, pointed sticks, carved stamps, shells, and textured fabrics. Decorate pieces of modeling clay using the patterns shown below.

Decorative Patterns



Rocker Stamp



Fabric Impressed



Shell Impressed



Cord-Wrapped Stick



Reed Punctate



Iroquois Castellations



Check Stamp



Incised Line

What is a Tool?

Sometimes it is hard for an archaeologist to determine if a certain stone was used as a tool or if it is a natural stone formation. Some pieces of stone, chipped away from a rock out-cropping by freezing and thawing action, look similar to pieces chipped off by Native Americans to make tools. Water and wind action can carve and polish stones into shapes that look man-made. There are certain features that archaeologists look for to determine whether or not a particular stone was shaped by man. Archaeologists look for signs of use, such as battering and abrading. Stones are also inspected for signs of chipping, pecking, and grinding.

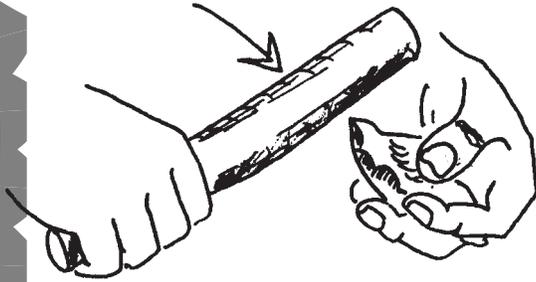
Pick up pieces of stone with sharp edges (quartzite is very good for this) and round river stones. Try using the stones for tools for cutting through a small stick, mashing roots, grinding corn, and other uses. These look at the use marks left on the stones. See how they are chipped and abraded from use. These are the same kinds of marks that archaeologists look for on Native American tools.

To make a stone tool:

Step 1. A large chunk of workable stone, such as quartzite or chert, is struck very hard with another stone called a hammerstone. Deliberate chips are taken off until the chunk is the correct shape for removing workable flakes. This prepared chunk of stone is called core.



Step 2. A large flake is then struck from the core with the hammerstone.



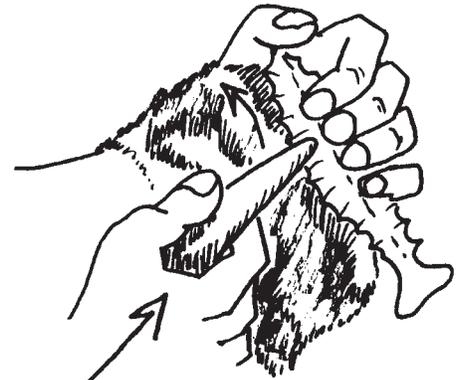
Step 3.

Step 3. The flake is then chipped with an antler or hardwood billet into the rough shape of a projectile point.



Step 2.

Step 4. Then a deer tine, or antler prong, is pressed very hard against the flake to take off small chips. The edges are worked with the tine until they are thin and sharp and the base is thinned for hafting to a stick. Sometimes the base is ground smooth with sand or an abrasive stone.



Step 4.

Projectile Point

These points were used on the ends of a spear shaft. Made of flint, quartz or other glass-like stone, Archaic projectile points are more finely chipped than points of the Paleo-Indians.

Scraper

These small stone tools were used to scrape animal hides and prepare foods. Scrapers are made from the same stone as projectile points but have one sharp chipped edge. They come in various sizes and shapes to suit the task.

Abenaki Before the Arrival of Europeans

10,500 – 6,000 B.C.E

8,000 – 1,500 B.C.E.

1,000 B.C.E. – 1600

Paleo-Indian Period

Archaic Period

Woodland Period (Pre contact)

Social & Cultural Patterns

small, nomadic hunting groups, beliefs in shamanism, animal, & other spirits

small, family, nomadic hunting groups, burial rituals

more sedentary; seasonal settlements on floodplains; trading

Climate & Vegetation

cold; Champlain Sea; tundra grasses; marshlands, scattered evergreen trees

warming climate; Champlain sea to lake; thickening forest, extinction of large mammals; wetlands

cooling

Food

hunting & fishing; caribou, woolly mammoth, sea mammals, mollusks, crustaceans, fish

seasonal hunting & gathering; smaller animals (see Haviland & Power, p. 61); deer, bear, birds; more plant food (nuts, berries, seeds, leaves, roots, flowers)

more plant foods gathered, fishing; adoption of horticulture; hunting

Equipment

stone tools, spear, hide boat (Mozolol)

dug-out canoe; containers from animal hides, basketry; skin-working tools; spear; weapons for hunting, smaller animals (atlatl & dart); fishing equipment (plummet, line, harpoons)

pottery; bow & arrow; bone fish hook; textiles; household utensils (wooden spoons, bowls, dishes, mortars & pestles); bark canoes

Evidence

Reagan Site (East Highgate): charcoal; fire cracked rocks; stone tools (hide processing scrapers); projectile points; decorative pieces

Vergennes Archaic Sites: woodworking tools (adzes & axes); slate points; gouges for making canoes; fragments of stone bowls; ochre-stained graves; copper beads

Winooski Site: ceramics (pottery); cordage & basketry; stone tools; copper beads; smoking pipes; projectile points; textile fragments

Abenaki Before the Arrival of Europeans

10,500 – 6,000 B.C.E

8,000 – 1,500 B.C.E.

1,000 B.C.E. – 1600

Paleo-Indian Period

Archaic Period

Woodland Period (Pre contact)

<p>Social & Cultural Patterns</p>	<p>small, nomadic hunting groups, beliefs in shamanism, animal, & other spirits</p>	<p>small, family, nomadic hunting groups, burial rituals</p>	<p>more sedentary; seasonal settlements on floodplains; trading</p>
<p>Climate & Vegetation</p>	<p>cold; Champlain Sea; tundra grasses; marshlands, scattered evergreen trees</p>	<p>warming climate; Champlain sea to lake; thickening forest, extinction of large mammals; wetlands</p>	<p>cooling</p>
<p>Food</p>	<p>hunting & fishing; caribou, woolly mammoth, sea mammals, mollusks, crustaceans, fish</p>	<p>seasonal hunting & gathering; smaller animals; deer, bear, birds; more plant food (nuts, berries, seeds, leaves, roots, flowers)</p>	<p>more plant foods gathered, fishing; adoption of horticulture; hunting</p>
<p>Equipment</p>	<p>stone tools, spear, hide boat (Mozolol)</p>	<p>dug-out canoe; containers from animal hides, basketry; skin-working tools; spear; weapons for hunting, smaller animals (atlatl & dart); fishing equipment (plummet, line, harpoons)</p>	<p>pottery; bow & arrow; bone fish hook; textiles; household utensils (wooden spoons, bowls, dishes, mortars & pestles); bark canoes</p>

Contact with Europeans

Objectives

Students will:

Standard 6.20

- ❖ Understand the major types of encounters that occurred between Abenaki and Europeans

Standard 6.8

- ❖ Understand how cultural interactions changed the lifestyles and affected worldviews of both the Abenaki and Europeans

Students will also:

- ❖ acquire a sense of the length of time Abenaki have lived in Vermont
- ❖ understand nature of archeological evidence

Contents

Artifacts:

- ❖ Broadcloth
- ❖ Trade Medallion
- ❖ Trade Silver
- ❖ Fish hook & Sinew

Images & Maps:

- ❖ *An Abenaki View of the World*
- ❖ Justus Dankert, *Novi Belgii Novaque Angliae*, ca. 1683.
- ❖ *A Map of the Inhabited part of Canada from the French Surveys...*, 1777.
- ❖ *Great Mortality among the Indians*
- ❖ J. D. Kelly, *The Discovery of Lake Champlain, 1609*

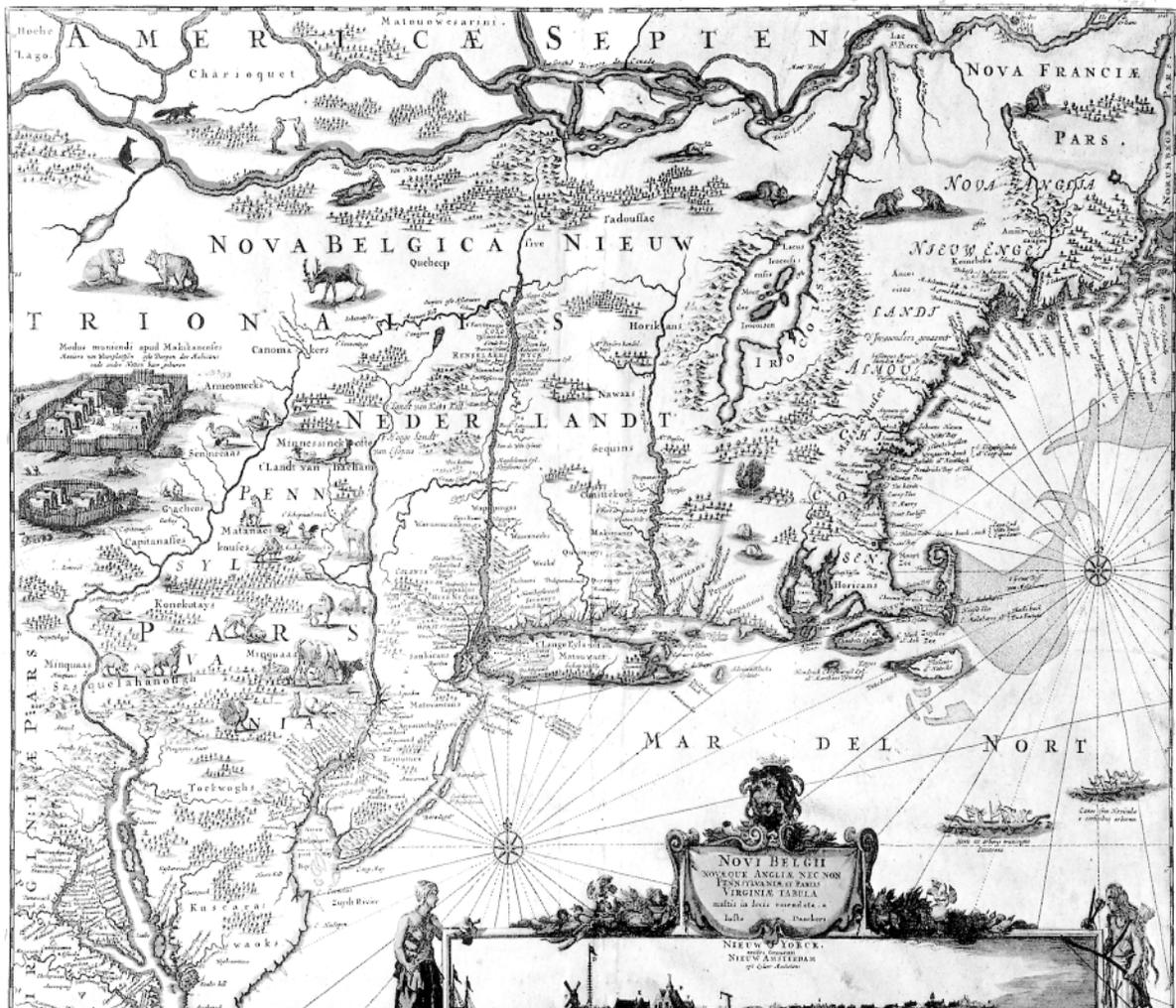
Stories:

- ❖ *The Singing Beaver*

Introduction

The information in this portion of the kit has been taken from Haviland & Power, chapter 6. More information can also be found in New Dawn, pages, 45 – 48 and 69 – 71.

The story of encounters between Abenaki and European is a complex one. In the 1600s, thousands of western Abenaki lived in northern New England. Together, Europeans and western Abenaki shaped Vermont as they exchanged ideas, farming techniques, languages, and other aspects of their cultures. While there were times of cooperation, there were other times of confrontation caused by disease, trade, land disputes and cultural differences. While the encounter with Europeans would prove to be disastrous for the Abenaki, it is important to not view them as victims but as a people who played an important role in the shaping of what we now know as Vermont.



Justus Dankert, *Novi Belgii Novaque Angliae*, ca. 1683
Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont

Differing Points of View

The French were in contact with the Abenaki a hundred years or more before the English. They viewed the natives as trading partners who were necessary allies and friends if the French were to maintain their empire in the new world. The French were encouraged to live among the natives, intermarry, learn the language, and exchange goods and ideas.

The English also wished to maintain their empire. However their approach was to settle on and own the lands. They viewed the natives as uncivilized who needed to be tamed into the English idea of civilization.

The Abenaki believed that one could not own the land—it was a gift from Great Spirit and belonged to all living things. One could only receive and use its gifts for survival and sustenance and take only what was needed to live. And, they also believed that a person only had to answer to Great Spirit, one's self, and the community; the concept of a king and laws was foreign to them.

These differing attitudes and viewpoints explain how the fur trade, colonization, and adaptation to their changing world confused the Abenaki. Some tried to hide and keep their old ways by remaining neutral and moving into undiscovered areas. They often weren't allowed to keep their old ways due to wars, disease, expansion of Euro-American populations, and loss of foraging and hunting territories.

Disease

The Abenaki felt the impact of European exploration years before any Europeans came to Vermont. There were several diseases that did not exist in the Americas. These included smallpox, chicken pox, measles, and whooping cough. Because these did not previously exist, the Abenaki had not built up any resistance to them when the first Europeans arrived to fish along coastal waters. Abenaki caught the diseases more easily than the Europeans and few survived. Epidemics in 1616 and 1617 killed thousands of natives. It is thought that as many as 90% of New England's Native Americans may have died of disease by the time Europeans began to settle. Because of this, Europeans saw many cleared lands that were abandoned.

The Fur Trade

When Europeans first came to North America, they were impressed by the large amount of fur-bearing animals that could be found. There was a great demand in Europe for furs. Unfortunately, beavers and other fur-bearing animals had been overhunted in Europe and traders were searching for new places to acquire furs.

Manufactured cloth was the number one item sold to Native Americans. Not only was cloth easier to turn into clothing than hides, it was also more comfortable. Other items acquired by the Abenaki through trade included iron goods, beads, pipes, brass, and guns.

The fur trade brought much change to Abenaki culture. Concepts of territory changed as hunting territories became more defined and access became restricted. Roles of leaders in Abenaki communities changed as leaders tried to respond to European ideas of government. Relationships between bands became strained. Religion and worldviews were also affected as the Abenaki came into contact with French missionaries interested in converting the natives to Christianity.

While Abenaki began to use European goods such as knives, needles, and axes and wear woven cloth, Europeans learned to hunt and grow new crops. They also began to adopt Native ways. Birch-bark canoes and snowshoes are just two examples.

War

From the early 1600s to 1763, the Abenaki were involved in several wars, sometimes allying themselves with the French against the English. Over eighty years of war disrupted the Abenaki way of life. War meant that trade was halted, crops were destroyed, villages were temporarily abandoned, and men could not provide for their families. Famine and illness struck, and the Abenaki became more dependent on European goods.

At the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War, the Abenaki were still living on their ancestral lands. Throughout the war, they tried to avoid being caught up in the hostilities. They had three choices for survival: they could live in their village, adapting to European ways; they could live on the outskirts of town, maintaining their own identity; or they could move to villages farther away. In the end, while these strategies saved the Abenaki from becoming involved in war, it meant that the Americans such as Ira and Levi Allen were able to claim that the Abenaki were from Canada rather than from Vermont, and thus had no claim to land.

Using the Artifacts to Discuss Cultural Encounters

1. Mix up the artifacts from parts two and three of the kit.
2. Have students sort the artifacts into “pre-” and “post-” European contact categories.
3. Have them explain why they categorized the artifacts in the way they did.
4. Hand out *Great Mortality among the Indians*. Ask students what is happening in the picture. Discuss the impact “invisible encounters,” such as epidemics, had on the Abenaki population.
5. Hand out the frontispiece of *A Map of the Inhabited Part of Canada*. Have students figure out what is happening in the picture (A Native American is about to trade a beaver pelt with a European). Discuss what might have happened just before this picture was drawn. What will happen next?
6. Look at the artifacts again. The broadcloth, trade medallion, trade silver, and fish hooks were just some of the items that might have been given in exchange for beaver pelts. Have students redraw this picture, showing the European handing items to the Abenaki. Discuss how these items of trade might change the lifeways of the Abenaki. Which items from the second part of the kit might become obsolete? Why?
7. Hand out *The Discovery of Lake Champlain, 1609*. Which items are the Europeans using or wearing that may have come from the Abenaki? Discuss with students the meaning of the statement, “They exchanged much more than material goods.”
8. Compare *An Abenaki View of the World* with Justus Dankert, *Novi Belgii Novaque Angliae*, ca. 1683. What do these two images say about the world views of each group?
9. Read the story “The Singing Beaver.” What does it say about the Abenaki perspective on encounters with Europeans?

Thinking about Value

- 1) Divide the class into an even number of small groups.
- 2) Have each group gather items that it would like to trade with another group.
- 3) Which of the items do they think are the most valuable? The least valuable? Why do they think this?
- 4) Have the groups trade with each other. Did the other group agree with the value of the items? Why or why not? What made the objects valuable? What negotiations had to occur in the trading?
- 5) Which of the historical artifacts had the most value to the Europeans? Which had the most value to the Abenaki? What negotiations did they have to make?



Detail from: "A Map of the Inhabited part of Canada from the French Surveys...", 1777.
National Archives of Canada/ Neg. No. C7300

*The Singing Beaver of Missisquoi*¹

as told by Jesse Bowman Bruchac

Early one morning, an old woman² from an Abenaki village on the Missisquoi River, walked to the foot of the falls, in Swanton. As she bent to wash her hands and face, she heard someone singing softly out on the water. She looked around, but it was too foggy to see. So, she just sat quietly and listened. Then, the fog lifted and she saw a beaver sitting on a flat rock out in the rapids. It was singing a slow and sad melody, and she listened closely to try and understand. Soon she could. "Anakwikaji kd'odana," the beaver sang, "the trees will grow in your village." She went and told the others. The people were frightened by this. Many gathered their belongings and headed north to the St. Francis River. However, some were too old to travel and others didn't want to leave their village, so they stayed behind.

Soon, the Awanoch³, or strangers came. These strangers made life very hard for those who stayed behind. In time, they too were driven from their homes. When they left, the trees began to grow in their village, just as the beaver had foretold.

One day, when all is safe along the Missisquoi, the beaver will return. He will prepare the village by cutting the trees and then sing another song to the people. However, few still look for such signs and even fewer listen for the song of the beaver, the song of return.

¹ First recorded c. 1922 by A. Irving Hallowell, informant Theophile Panadis: Hallowell Collection. MSS.26, B1F6, Series II American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

² Sophie Panadis, paternal grandmother of Theophile, is the *old woman* who heard the singing beaver.

³ Awanoch- Abenaki name for Europeans, from *awani*, *who* and *nigik*, *those*. Translated literally, *who are those*, or commonly *strangers*.

*Their bodies
have long forgotten the wound's
heat, the sudden fever of smallpox
the ache of starvation.
On these banks their winter camps
abandoned
moulder beneath roots of alder and vine.*

*And you came here believing
that this was a vacant country.*

—Cathy Czapla, “Abenaki Ghosts”



J. D. Kelly, *The Discovery of Lake Champlain, 1609*
National Archives of Canada, Neg. No. C6163

“We Were Always Here:” The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Objectives

Students will:

Standard 6.14

- ❖ Identify enduring elements of Western Abenaki culture

Students will also:

- ❖ Understand that the Abenaki did not disappear from Vermont

Contents:

Artifacts:

- ❖ Basket
- ❖ Book mark
- ❖ Splint
- ❖ Sweetgrass braid
- ❖ Tape: *Alnobak*
- ❖ Video

Images & Maps:

- ❖ Obomsawin Family Photographs
- ❖ Obomsawin Family Timeline
- ❖ Poster: *We Were Always Here*

Books:

- ❖ Reprint from *Visit'n*

Introduction

Much of the following information comes from Haviland and Power, pages 250 – 272, and John Moody’s essay in Always in Season: Folk Art and Traditional Culture in Vermont, published by the Vermont Folklife Center.

Disappearance?

History books have long claimed that the Abenaki “disappeared” from Vermont. While some Abenaki did leave Vermont for Canada, many others remained. As the Abenaki began to speak French or English and adopted European dress, historians of the nineteenth century assumed that the Abenaki had vanished. The Abenaki families who remained in Vermont survived in a variety of ways. Some lived a nomadic life and were called “gypsies.” Others remained on the outskirts of their communities and lived off the land as they had for centuries—hunting, fishing, and trapping. Rather than being identified as “Indians,” record-keepers called them hunters, traders, or woodworkers. Some families made baskets and miniatures which they traded with tourists, while others became guides and camp cooks for the tourist trade.

The Eugenics Survey

From the 1920s through the 1940s the Eugenics Survey of Vermont, headed by University of Vermont professor Henry F. Perkins, sought to “improve” Vermont by seeking out “genetically inferior peoples” such as Indians, illiterates, thieves, the insane, paupers, alcoholics, those with harelips, etc. These were people who seemed inferior due to economic or physical conditions. Eugenics was the term for the science of improving the genetic condition of the human race. Once families were identified as falling into specific categories, they were targeted for sterilization, institutionalization, or dispossession. Some children were removed from their parents. In 1931 Vermont passed a sterilization law that remained on the books until 1973.

As a result of this program, Abenaki had to hide their heritage even more. They were forced to deny their culture to their children and grandchildren, and it was not until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that they began to feel that it was safe to revive their culture.

For more information on the eugenics survey, see Kevin Dann, “From Degeneration to Regeneration: The Eugenics Survey of Vermont, 1925–1936,” in *Vermont History* (Vol. 59, #1): 5 – 29.

The Survival of Traditions

Over the years, Abenaki have had to adapt to European-American culture. Every culture borrows from others. However, just because Abenaki today drive cars, live in houses, and cook on modern stoves does not mean that they have given up traditional ways.

While Abenaki may hunt with guns today, they still hunt for the same wide variety of game as their ancestors. They still fish, gather wild plants for medicinal purposes, and grow some of their own food. Their immense knowledge of their environment has earned them recognition in the form of jobs such as land wardens and guides.

The family band, made up of the extended family such as parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, was the basic unit of Abenaki society. Today, this respect for family continues. Often extended family members live in the same household or neighborhood. Grandparents often care for their grandchildren, and grandchildren are taught to have respect for their elders. For instance, at Abenaki gatherings the elders are fed first followed by the children. Children are also raised through the guidance of their elders rather than in an authoritarian manner. They are constantly exposed to stories which teach important lessons.

Patterns of authority also remain much the same today. Family bands are headed by those who have become leaders through their wisdom, age, and force of personality. The leader acts as a persuader or moderator rather than as an authoritative figure.

The 1990 census recorded at least 2,000 Abenaki in Vermont with groups of 20 or more in Vergennes, Rutland, Bennington, Brattleboro, Springfield, Hartford, Montpelier, Barre, Johnson, Hardwick, Derby, St. Johnsbury, and the Swanton-Highgate-St. Albans area.

Some of today's Abenaki make their living by sharing their culture through teaching, storytelling, gathering/foraging, gardening/farming, making crafts, writing, or the arts.

Basketmaking is just one of several crafts that has been passed down through families to the present. In the nineteenth century, basketmaking provided a large portion of a family's income.

One such family, the Obomsawins of Thompson's Point, is featured in this kit. Simon Obomsawin and his family were involved in the tourist

trade and sold baskets to summer people. An interview with Simon's granddaughter and her family is included in the kit along with baskets made by his great-granddaughter, Jeanne Brink.

There are many excellent articles in *New Dawn* that focus on the contemporary Abenaki and the appeal for a sovereign Abenaki nation. See especially pages 193 – 199. An interview with Crystal Lampman, a young Abenaki living in Swanton today may be found in *New Dawn*, pages 186 – 187. Students might also revisit *Finding One's Way*.

Discussion

1. Begin a discussion of tradition by having students bring in objects from home that represent special family or personal traditions. This might include a recipe, a special toy, or house decoration. Discuss the traditions and what they mean to the family. How long has the tradition been in existence?
2. Discuss the traditions that have been kept by the Abenaki. Why have some traditions been lost?
3. Look at the poster "We Were Always Here." What does the caption mean?
4. Look at the basket, book mark, splint, sweetgrass braid, and Obomsawin family photographs. Why did the Obomsawins first use and make baskets? Why did they make them at the turn of the twentieth century? Why does Jeanne Brink make them today?
5. One tradition that remains important to the Abenaki today is the learning of lessons from stories. Listen to some of the stories on the audio-tapes. What lessons can be learned from them? Have students think about an important rule in their family, school, or community. Write stories that illustrate that rule and read the stories to the class. See if other students in the class can guess the lesson.

The Obomsawin Family: 1600 – 1989

by: Patricia Haller, *Burlington Free Press*

- Before 1600:** Up to 10,000 Abenaki and Mahican Indians live, hunt and fish in Vermont and New Hampshire. There are more than 20 Indian villages, including thriving settlements at Missisquoi (Swanton/Highgate), St. Albans, Milton and the Intervales of Burlington.
- 1600:** Europeans push into Abenaki lands. The Indians move north in an attempt to preserve their culture and avoid the disease and war the whites bring with them.
- 1689:** King William's War—the first of the so-called French and Indian Wars—begins. The struggle between the French and British for control over North America lasts until the French are defeated in 1750 and sign the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The Abenaki, who have a strong trade relationship with the French, side with France in the wars.
- 1723:** Greylock leads the Missisquoi Abenaki in raids against settlers at Rutland, Fort Dummer (Brattleboro) and in the Massachusetts towns of Northfield, Deerfield and Westfield.
- 1759:** Rogers' Rangers raid the Indian village of Odanak, Que., at the request of British commander Sir Jeffrey Amherst. Simon Obomsawin, along with many of his people, is killed.
- 1763:** The French and Indian Wars end and English settlers pour into the lands between Lake Champlain and the Connecticut River. The Abenaki fight back, harassing the settlers in an attempt to stop white expansion and keep their lands. More and more, however, they are forced northward to Canada.
- 1765:** Joseph Abomsawin signs an agreement to lease some of the Missisquoi lands to James Robertson for 91 years.
- 1775:** The Revolutionary War begins. Some Abenaki join the American fight for independence. Others side with the British.
- 1850:** Simon Obomsawin is born in Odanak. Like many Abenaki, he learns to make baskets, snowshoes and birch bark canoes, which the family sells to tourists at Cedar Beach in the summer.

- 1856:** Robertson's lease on the Missisquoi lands expires.
- 1886:** Elvine Obomsawin, Jeanne Brink's grandmother, is born in Odanak.
- 1890:** Simon Obomsawin becomes caretaker at Thompson's Point. After his wife dies, his four children are raised by their aunt in Odanak.
- 1925:** Daniel Royce buys a farm in Florida and sets off from Waterbury Center with his wife, Elvine Obomsawin, who is pregnant, and two small children in a horse and buggy. The couple runs out of money, and Elvine supports them by making and selling baskets along the way. Elvine gives birth to Nettie Royce, Jeanne Brink's mother, in Florida. A few years later, the family returns to Vermont.
- 1932:** Simon Obomsawin dies and two of his children—Marion and William—become caretakers at Thompson's Point. They continue to make and sell Abenaki baskets.
- 1944:** Jeanne Brink is born in Montpelier.
- 1957:** Elvine Obomsawin tells historian Gordon Day the story of Rogers' Raid on Odanak. The interview is one of several conversations with Elvine, Marion and William Obomsawin that Day records.
- 1959:** The caretaker's cottage at Thompson's Point, built for Simon Obomsawin in 1890, is destroyed by fire. William Obomsawin is killed, and his sister, Marion Obomsawin, is injured.
- 1962:** Elvine Obomsawin Royce returns to Odanak for the first time in nearly 60 years. She and Brink's mother, Nettie Royce DeForge, attend a ceremony dedicating a plaque to those killed by Rogers' Rangers in 1759.
- 1969:** Elvine Obomsawin Royce dies.
- 1986:** Jeanne Brink begins to study her family's heritage and learns to make Abenaki baskets.
- 1989:** Brink spends five months with Gordon Day in Ottawa, helping compile an Abenaki Dictionary. She begins to learn Abenaki and they write a textbook to help others learn the language.