

Bacon's Rebellion

Overview

Students will explore the concept of rebellions and will focus on the first colonial rebellion occurring in America: Bacon's Rebellion. Students will culminate their understanding of Bacon's Rebellion in a creative writing, art, or drama activity.

Course

American History I

North Carolina Essential Standards for American History I

- AH1.H.1.3 - Use historical analysis.
- AH1.H.2.1 - Analyze key political, economic, and social turning points from colonization through Reconstruction in terms of causes and effects (e.g., conflicts, legislation, elections, innovations, leadership, movements, Supreme Court decisions, etc.)
- AH1.H.2.2 - Evaluate key turning points from colonization through Reconstruction in terms of their lasting impact (e.g., conflicts, legislation, elections, innovations, leadership, movements, Supreme Court decisions, etc.).

Essential Questions

- What sentiments brought about colonial rebellion?
- Can rebellions be prevented, or do they indicate necessary change?
- How can both sides of a rebellion be correct in their thinking?
- How might rebellions against the Native Americans have left the colonists at a disadvantage? The Natives disadvantaged?
- Were there any solutions (other than rebellion) that could have solved the problems faced by the colonists?

Materials

- Bacon's Rebellion, poem attached
- Performance Challenges, attached
- Classroom materials such as construction paper, scissors, and glue

Duration

60 minutes

Procedure

Introduction to Bacon's Rebellion

1. As a warm-up, project or handout the attached image of *Bacon's Rebellion* (without sharing the title) and ask students to examine it. Discuss:
 - What do you see in this image? (Students should simply note the physical attributes they see before beginning to interpret the painting.) What stands out to you the most?
 - In what time period might this be occurring? What evidence suggests this?
 - What do you think is happening in this image? What do you imagine the story is?
 - What might have happened before this painted moment? What do you predict will happen after?

2. After students have pondered, give them a piece of factual information by explaining that this image represents a **rebellion in Colonial America**. Discuss:
 - What is a rebellion? What comes to mind when you hear this word?
 - What components of a rebellion are represented in this image? (*fighting, weapons, a scuffle, etc.*)
 - What conditions bring about rebellion? Can rebellions be prevented? Explain.
 - What rebellions can you think of throughout history?

Exploring Bacon's Rebellion

3. Explain to students that they are looking at an image of **Bacon's Rebellion**, which was an uprising in 1676 in the Virginia Colony, led by Nathaniel Bacon. While the Revolutionary War might first come to mind when students consider rebellions, Bacon's Rebellion was actually the first rebellion in the American colonies in which discontented frontiersmen took part, occurring 100 years before the Revolutionary War era conflicts. Tell students they will be exploring the drama of this rebellion by reading a factual account as well as a poem.
4. Assign a reading on Bacon's Rebellion from students' textbooks, or use a reading from the internet, such as <https://www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/bacons-rebellion.htm>. Reading can be done individually, in partners, or as a class with the teacher pointing out key facts. Discuss:
 - Why is Bacon's Rebellion significant?
 - What other options do people have to express discontent, other than rebellion?
 - What is effective about rebellions? What can be ineffective about a rebellion?
 - Do you think this rebellion (directly or indirectly) influenced the American Revolution 100 years later? Explain.
 - Why do you think rebellions were so prominent throughout colonial history?
5. Once students have a basic understanding of Bacon's Rebellion, hand out attached poem and have a volunteer read it out loud. Afterwards, discuss:
 - What is the main conflict of the poem?
 - Based on the evidence in the poem, describe the relationship between Jamestown colonists and Natives.
 - Why might Natives have raided a colonist's home?
 - What mistake did the colonist make in retaliation for his raided home?
 - How would you characterize Nathaniel Bacon's personality? What evidence makes you think this?
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of governmental leadership in the poem. What is your opinion of Governor Berkeley?
 - What is justice? Was justice served?
 - How do you imagine this rebellion affected Jamestown in general and their relationship with local Natives?

A Creative Review of Bacon's Rebellion

6. As a culminating activity, assign one of the following:
 - **Performance Challenge:** Place students in small groups of 3-4 and explain that they will further explore Bacon's rebellion by preparing a performance. Assign each group one of the attached "Performance Challenge" slips and explain:
 - Using the poem and one another, each of your groups will have 10-15 minutes to develop your own portrayal and reenactment of Bacon's Rebellion. Your portrayal must be realistic and teach the class the facts of Bacon's Rebellion. Creativity is encouraged, but so is accuracy!
 - You can reference your book or the Internet for additional information, but your skit cannot be more than two minutes long.
 - Your performance must follow these rules:

- Every group member must play *at least* one part.
- Every group member must have some sort of costume and a prop identifying his/her role.
- You must adhere to your “performance challenge” throughout your performance.
- You will have 20 minutes to face your group’s challenge, to develop your skit, to create your costume elements and props, and to be ready to present.
- Review your expectations for group work behavior, and allow students to get started. Before beginning performances, review class expectations of being a respectful audience member. After each performance, encourage students to offer positive feedback to performers.
- **Creative Writing:** Return student attention to the image they viewed at the start of class. Number each person represented in the image, #1-6, then assign each student a number. Tell students that based upon the number they drew, they will assume the character of the person in the image labeled with the corresponding number and write a first-person response to what they are thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, etc. during the moment pictured, creating a first-hand account of Bacon’s Rebellion. Once student’s have had time to formulate and write down their thoughts, have 6 student volunteers who represent each figure to come to the front of the classroom and take the same position as the people in the image. In numerical order, have the students read their first-person monologues in dramatic fashion.
- **Art:** Return student attention to the image viewed at the start of class. Instruct them to create a “before” and “after” image to accompany it. Art can be hung around the room and students can participate in a gallery walk to view one another’s work.

Bacon's Rebellion



Source: http://www.wm.edu/niahd/journals/display_image.php?id=18281 (source link not working but can also be found elsewhere, like: <http://epicworldhistory.blogspot.com/2012/07/bacons-rebellion.html>)

Bacon's Rebellion

In the town of Jamestown, just some three hundred years ago,
A kind old governor by the name of Berkeley kept the colonists in tow.

His wife's cousin named Bacon was quite the wayward soul,
A troublemaker and a swindler, growing up was for him his father's goal.

The father pleaded with Berkeley, "Please take him off my hands,"
The Governor heeded and gave young Bacon some land.

Virginia land and crops were good, but sales were bad,
And Jamestown's colonists soon grew sad.

As the colonists began to see the Indians regularly,
They said to themselves, "Perhaps those Indians are causing our malady."

Then, in 1675, some Indians came too close and went too far in,
Raiding the home of a Virginia gentleman.

The plot thickened when the gentlemen's retaliation was tried,
Simply because the Virginia gentlemen raided the wrong tribe.

Berkeley ordered a meeting to bring the matter to a close;
Instead, many chiefs died, and the excitement rose.

Thus, while Berkeley pleaded with his colonists not to act,
Many, like his troublesome cousin Bacon, thought it part of their colonial pact.

"Kill the Indians, enemies of the land," they yelled;
Meanwhile, Berkeley hoped Bacon would not start setting off bells.

Alas, Bacon's troublesome nature proved most powerful,
And he chose to ignore the pleas of his cousin the governor.

That Bacon, he rode straight into the fire,
And seized him some Indians he felt had conspired.

Well Berkeley did scream with all of his height, and Bacon did bellow with all of his might,
And all the Virginia rebels, well, they just joined in the fight.

As was in his nature, Berkeley sought a compromise
Between his colonists and the Indians he thought wise.

He cleared the Indians out of powder and ammunition,
And started the Long Assembly, hoping it would be a tradition.

Indians Wars resulted, though Berkeley had done what he could,
And his attempts to regulate trade only upset people with goods.

Good old cousin Bacon was one of these angered folks,
And he joined together with a couple other blokes.

The blokes elected him "General" of their little assembly.
And they called themselves Indian Fighters, ready to attack many.

Bacon acted quickly and drove some Indians off their land,
Berkeley responded, tired of this cousin who was meant to act a man.

Though Berkeley's good nature thought Bacon wrong,
Many others believed his case against the Indians firm and strong.

So firm did those others see his position,
They elected him to the House of Burgesses to pursue his mission.

Still an outlaw when he arrived to his first meeting, Bacon was captures on the spot,
But because he was the governor's cousin, the capture was not long and hot.

Bacon apologized and was pardoned in seconds,
Which proved a mistake because he continued to heckle.

He moved out of that meeting room and gathered his men,
And surrounded the place, screaming, "Hey, next of kin!"

"I was what I want, and I want it right now,"
But Berkeley refused: "I'd rather grant it to my cow."

Bacon asked again, threatening loudly to give Berkeley the boot,
And Berkeley called his bluff, saying, "Here shoot me before God, fair mark shoot."

Bacon refused, still demanding hi Burgesses's position and his cut,
He wanted to lead forces against the Indians without the governor's *if, and, or but*.

Bringing his leadership to shambles, Berkeley finally said yes,
And told Bacon he could lead forces against the Indians with the best of the best.

So Bacon became leader of the Rebellion against the Indians,
And not only that, but he also ran Berkeley out of Jamestown.

Bacon led Jamestown, though not well, and had infinite support,
And even issues his "Declaration of the People" for continued rapport.

Bacon's declaration denounced Berkeley as corrupt,
And Berkeley's men quickly recaptured Jamestown in a method quite abrupt.

Bacon became so enraged and so desiring of power,
He burned Jamestown to the ground, thinking Berkeley would cower.

Instead, it was Bacon who lost his fortune and fame,
In fact, the lice took his life not long after he lost the game.

Berkeley quickly regained full control of Jamestown,
And hanged the rebels who then followed Bacon to the ground.

Thus our story begins and ends,
In the hands of two power-hungry cousins.

NOTE: This is not entirely accurate in its historical detail, though content relating to the rebellion is accurate.

Source: McCulley, Susan. "Bacon's Rebellion," *Colonial National Historical Park: Jamestown Briefs*. 1997, 10 April 2006. <https://www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/bacons-rebellion.htm>

Performance Challenges

Your group must mime your entire performance.

✂ _____

The only speaking member of your group will be the narrator

✂ _____

Your group may not have a narrator, only dialogue between characters.

✂ _____

Your group's costumes and props must be made of what your members are wearing or carrying at this moment.

✂ _____

Your group must tell the story only from Governor Berkeley's point of view.

✂ _____

Your group must tell the story only from Nathaniel Bacon's point of view

✂ _____

Your group must tell the story only from the Native American point of view.

✂ _____

Your group must compose and perform a song based on the story guide.