Contested Terrain: Petition Edition

Petition Guide

By playing *Contested Terrain: Petition Edition*, students will become familiar with the types of settlement tasks that were involved with the land petition process. Students might be surprised to learn that both Aboriginal and white settlers petitioned for land. **John Julian**, the Chief of the Mi'kmaq at Miramichi, filed the first Aboriginal land petition with the New Brunswick government in 1786. Although tension existed between these two groups, there were also examples of cooperation. In the early years, Aboriginal and white settlers shared resources, and this spirit of cooperation is reflected in the game. In fact, this board game has been based upon the wide range of experiences described in the petitions filed by both Aboriginal and white settlers. Teachers and students are encouraged to explore this collection of digitized petitions to discover New Brunswick's rich heritage.

The Role of Resources

Land settlement is the object of the *Contested Terrain: Petition Edition* game. Settlers were expected to complete settlement tasks before they could petition for land. To complete these tasks required access to certain resources. The main resources included Labour, Tools, Wood, Cattle, and Crops. With these resources, settlers could build a house, clear the land, and plant the land. In completing these tasks, settlers were following a set of rules known as the Royal Instructions. In theory, settlers were expected to clear paths along their property, providing the foundation for a road system that would connect not only neighbours but communities. Road building was never enforced and a proper road system was slow to develop in New Brunswick.

The last resource, Write/Scribe, relates to literacy. Petitions had to be written, and if a settler could not write, then someone else performed that task. In many cases, the clerk at the Crown Land Office wrote petitions for both Aboriginal and white settlers. There are two possible ways to determine if a clerk wrote a petition. Clerks usually had neat handwriting as it was their job to write official government documents. People who could not write made an "X" by their name. The clerk wrote "his mark" by the "X." People who could write often acted as scribe for their neighbours. For many years, **William Parks** wrote petitions for his Aboriginal neighbours.

Petitions

Even though most petitions followed a common format, they still provide interesting glimpses into the settlement experience. The following petitions contain different settlement stories, but many more can be found in this collection of petitions:

- **Francis Lazes**, an Aboriginal, asked the government in 1792 for land and tools.
- **Gervas Say** petitioned the government in 1792 on behalf of his Aboriginal neighbours. Mr. Say hoped that the government might donate corn, clothing, tools, and ammunition to them.
- **Jacob Silliker** bought land from the Julian Tribe in 1840. A year later he had cleared 2 acres of land, and had acquired some of the materials needed to build a house.

Curricular Connections

The game can be used to foster discussion on the wider issues of land rights and human rights, with both topics being sparked by notions of fairness. The game satisfies three Social Studies Strands: Time, Continuity, and Change; Culture and Diversity; and People, Place, and Environment.