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

The government published petition writing instructions in the provincial newspaper, The Royal Gazette. Even though petitions followed this format, they still provide interesting glimpses into the settlement experience. The following petitions reveal different land settlement issues or obstacles. Many other settlement stories can be found in this collection of petitions.

- **Francis Lazes**, an Aboriginal, asked the government in 1792 for land and tools.
- **Newell Mercure** was not satisfied with his land because there was no natural grass to enable him to keep a horse and a cow. He petitioned in 1824 asking for a grant of meadow land.
- **Thomas Ryan** had settled on the north side of the Richibucto River, clearing a considerable portion of land. Unfortunately he had settled on Aboriginal land and could not obtain a grant, so he petitioned in 1824 for a new tract of land on the south side of the same river.

Curricular Connections

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