

Building Manhattan : Legends of the Land

This writing project will help to understand how legends grow from historical facts. It will address where legends come from and why people write them. After reading this lesson try writing a legend of your own.

Legend and History

Not all historical events are recorded as facts. Instead some are recorded as legends. Facts tell us specific objective information. Facts can answer who, what, when, where and why. But facts can't tell us the meaning of an event . Yet it is often it is the meaning of the event that is why it is remembered historically. Legends surround real events or real people, but they exaggerate and invent stories to point out lessons or ideas that are important to an event. Here's an example:

Peter Minuit purchased the island of Manhattan \$24 worth of glass beads.

Who: Peter Minuit

What: Purchase of Manhattan

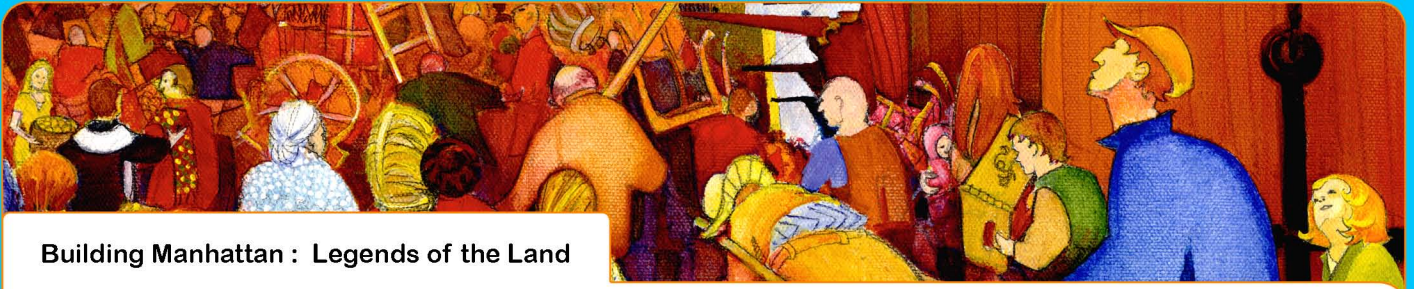
Where: Manhattan

When: 1626

Exaggeration: Manhattan was sold for 24\$ of glass beads.

Lesson: The Minuit paid very little to live on Manhattan.

This story of the purchase of Manhattan is a legend. It is mostly factual but with some exaggeration. However, the legend it tells us something important about the historical event. The price paid for Manhattan in this legend is an exaggeration. What the exaggeration tell us is that when Minuit took over Manhattan the Lenape were given very little in return for the land. Historically speaking Peter Minuit never actually directly purchased Manhattan. He acquired it through a treaty.



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American literature is full of legends, from Johnny Appleseed to Paul Bunyan. To learn more about culture and beliefs in historical context you can discuss legends and what they tell us about the about the people and events they describe.

Try writing a legend about an event that really happened in your town or state. Exaggerate the part of your story that explains the meaning or most important fact of an event.

Who: Farmer Byron

Where: Joseph County, Indiana

What: Trees in this county grow in perfectly strait rows.

When: 1900

Exaggeration: The trees were planted to attract animals to his hunting preserve.

Lesson: They trees in this county were all planted by hand.

Legend: The Legend of the Tree Grid of Joseph County

It is well known that the trees in Joseph County, Indiana all grow in perfectly strait rows. This is because in the early 1900's this land was the private hunting estate of farmer Byron. He planted all the trees by hand to attract animals to his hunting preserve. To this day they stand as though planted on a grid, every tree exactly 4 feet apart from the next.

