

# Teaching the Old New York Diorama



## Reconsidering the Old New York Diorama

The Museum unveiled the Old New York diorama in 1939, as part of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall. The purpose of this diorama was to celebrate Roosevelt's Dutch ancestry. The diorama depicts an encounter between Dutch and Lenape leaders in 1660. Many of the details related to the Dutch, such as the buildings and clothing, are shown accurately. But the depictions of the Native people, like many in popular culture, reflect common stereotypes and a fictional view of the past. So in 2018, the Museum added new text to the display to help visitors re-examine the encounter depicted in the Old New York diorama and to correct misrepresentations of the Native people and their relationship with colonists. This is part of a larger effort to acknowledge the ongoing impact of colonialism, as well as the urgent need to reconceive how diverse peoples and cultures are represented in the Museum.

# Activity Overview

In this activity, students view two different perspectives on the same historical event in order to explore how interpretation affects understanding of history. The activity has three components:

1. **BEFORE THE VISIT:** Students observe a map of New Amsterdam (lower Manhattan) in 1660 and then a photo of the Old New York diorama. Based on their observations, they infer what was happening in the diorama between Native people and Dutch colonists. In this exercise, students surface the point of view of the people who created the diorama in 1939.
2. **AT THE MUSEUM:** Students observe the Old New York diorama up close and read new text on display. This exercise helps students discover biases in the original representation of the encounter, of Native people, and of the relationship between the two groups.
3. **BACK IN THE CLASSROOM:** Students draw on the first two components of the activity to discuss perspective and bias.

## Materials

### FOR EDUCATORS:

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Annotated Map of New Amsterdam in 1660 .....	p. 6
Answers to Student Worksheets .....	pp. 7–8
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### FOR STUDENTS:

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## Before the Visit

Students observe a map of New Amsterdam (lower Manhattan) in 1660 and then a photo of the Old New York diorama. Based on their observations, they infer what was happening in the diorama between Native people and Dutch colonists. In this exercise, students surface the point of view of the people who created the diorama in 1939.

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**TIME** 30 minutes

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**PREPARATION** Watch the video “Behind the Updates to the Old New York Diorama” ([amnh.org/exhibitions/old-new-york-diorama](http://amnh.org/exhibitions/old-new-york-diorama)) and read label text provided.

Find a map to help orient students to the location of New York City today (e.g. satellite map of Manhattan or tri-state area).

Divide students into small groups of two or three. Students will work with the same partners before, during, and after their visit.

Project the map and diorama photo or distribute copies to each student group.

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**PROCEDURE** **Part 1: Observe a map of New Amsterdam in 1660** (10 minutes)

Using a present-day map, students are oriented to the location of New York City and lower Manhattan.

Students then observe the 1660 map of New Amsterdam together as a class, describing what they see and explaining their observations.

Suggested prompts:

- *What do you notice in this map?*
- *What do you see that makes you say that?*
- *What more can you find?*

At the end of discussion, students should understand that this is a map of New Amsterdam, which is currently lower Manhattan. They should be able to identify some of its features and structures, including houses, farms, a wall, a windmill, an ocean, and ships. (For support, refer to the annotated map on page 6.)

**Part 2: Observe a photograph of the Old New York diorama** (20 minutes)

Students observe the photograph of the Old New York diorama together as a class and share responses. They may perceive—or you may need to point out—that the area depicted in the diorama is on the map.

**INSTRUCTIONS**  
(CONTINUED)

Suggested prompts:

- *What do you see?*
- *Describe the people, places, and things in the diorama.*
  - Follow up students' comments by asking them to support their observations: e.g., if students say, "I see Native Americans," ask them: "What makes you think they are Native Americans?"

Students individually fill in the Before the Visit section of the student worksheet to note observations about the two groups of people in the diorama, as well as what they think is happening.

As a class, students share the observations from their worksheets. You may want to take notes on important points to revisit later on. Make sure students are familiar with the term **stereotype**—an oversimplified opinion about, prejudiced attitude toward, or uncritical judgment of a group of people—which they will encounter in the label copy and may find useful as they do this activity. Explain that Native Americans have been portrayed in stereotypical ways.

## At the Museum

Students observe the Old New York diorama up close and read new text on display. This exercise helps students discover biases in the original representation of the encounter, of Native people, and of the relationship between the two groups.

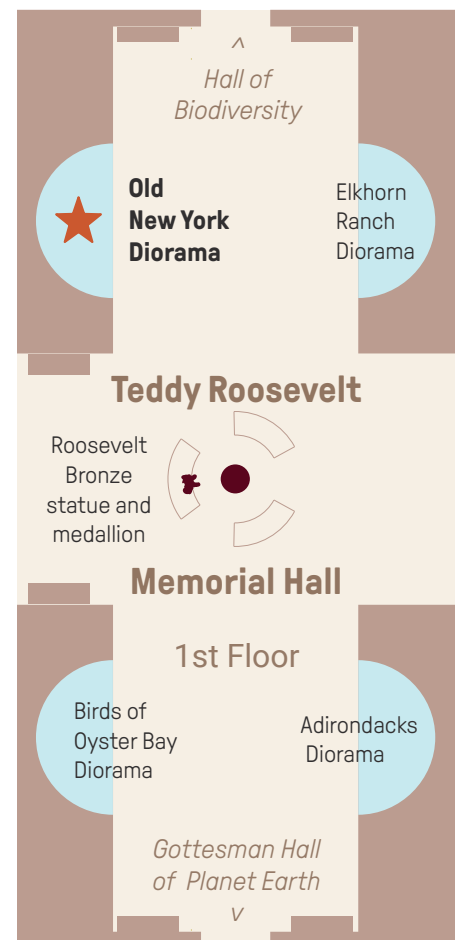
<b>LOCATION OF DIORAMA</b>	The Old New York diorama is located on the <b>first floor</b> of the Museum, near the Central Park West and 79th Street entrance.
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<b>TIME</b>	20 minutes
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<b>PROCEDURE</b>	In the same small groups, students observe the Old New York diorama and read the text on the glass and on the side panels.
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Students use the prompts on their worksheets to help them individually interpret the information.

Students then discuss their findings in their small groups.



## Back in the Classroom

Students draw on the Before the Visit and At the Museum components of the activity to discuss biases in the diorama.

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**TIME** 20 minutes

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**PROCEDURE** Students review their findings from the Museum.

Show students the “Behind the Updates to the Old New York Diorama” video. You may want to show the entire video or selected sections, as well as pause between sections for discussion. For segment overviews, vocabulary, and suggested discussion questions, see page 11.

As a class, students discuss the similarities and differences between (1) the story the diorama tells and (2) what the new text says.

Suggested prompts:

- *Why do you think the Museum made the decision to add the new text?*
- *What are the similarities and differences between (1) the story the diorama tells and (2) what the new text says?*
- *Why do you think the original diorama used stereotypical representations of Native people?*
- *How does knowing different historical perspectives affect your understanding of history?*



Wall

Canal

Dutch fort

Site of diorama

Windmill



RELIQUARY  
THE CASSELTOPIAN  
NEW AMSTERDAM  
IN  
1660  
NEW ENGLAND  
LITHO IN U.S.A.

# Student Worksheet

At the American Museum of Natural History, there are many different kinds of dioramas. Some dioramas are about the natural world. Other dioramas tell stories about people and culture. Observe the “Old New York” diorama, which was created in 1939.

## BEFORE YOUR VISIT

### 1. Based on what you see, what do you think is happening in the diorama?

*Answers will vary, but may include:*

- *Three Native American men are walking up to two Dutch colonist men.*
- *The Native Americans are holding items in their hands as if offering them to the Dutch men, one of whom is holding his hand out to take the items.*
- *In the background, Native Americans and colonists are walking up and down a hill leading to the ocean.*
- *In the distance various types of boats are visible: large colonial ships with sails and smaller Native American canoes.*

### 2. Observe the two groups of people in the photograph of the diorama. Who are they? What are they wearing? What are they holding? What else do you notice about them? Record your observations below.

#### \_\_\_\_\_ The Lenape \_\_\_\_\_

*Answers will vary, but may include:*

- *The Lenape men in front are wearing loincloths, jewelry, and feathers in their hair.*
- *They are not wearing shirts.*
- *One is holding a club, one is holding leaves, and one is holding wampum/a string of beads.*
- *The Lenape women in the background are shirtless as well, wearing long skirts and carrying large bundles.*

#### \_\_\_\_\_ Dutch Colonists \_\_\_\_\_

*Answers will vary, but may include:*

- *The Dutch colonists in front are dressed in heavy clothes, including shirts, pants, and leather shoes.*
- *One man is wearing a metal helmet and carrying a gun. The other is wearing a broad-brimmed hat and has one wooden leg.*

### 3. Which group appears more powerful in the diorama? Why? Find evidence in the diorama to support what you think.

*Answers will vary, but may include:*

- *The colonists seem more powerful because they have a gun and are standing next to a fort/stone wall that looks like it belongs to them.*
- *The Lenape seem less powerful because they are coming to give things to the colonists, who are ready to take them. The colonial ships in the background are larger and stronger looking than the Native American canoes that can also be seen.*

# Student Worksheet

## AT THE MUSEUM

4. **Observe** the Old New York diorama to find additional details about the people. **Write** new information about the two groups.

\_\_\_\_\_ **The Lenape** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Dutch Colonists** \_\_\_\_\_

*Answers will vary.*

*Answers will vary.*

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5. **Read** the text on the glass and on the side panels to find out how some depictions of the two groups were inaccurate. **Take notes** below about the inaccuracies. **Talk** to your partners about what you found.

*Answers will vary.*

*The following text panels are most accessible for this age group:*

- *Oratamin, sachem, and diplomat*
- *Wampum clothing*
- *Women in the background*
- *The Lenape people, then and now*

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# Diorama Text

## LEFT PANEL

### Why is this diorama here?

The Museum unveiled this diorama in 1939, as part of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall, where you stand now. The original purpose of this scene was to celebrate the Roosevelt family's Dutch ancestry.

Many of the details related to the Dutch, such as the buildings and clothing, are shown accurately. But the depictions of the Native people, like many in popular culture, reflect common stereotypes and a fictional view of the past. Callouts to the diorama at right now give more context to this scene.

[Map of New Amsterdam, showing location of diorama, plus map of Lenape sites on Manhattan island.]

### New Amsterdam

The Dutch arrived in North America in 1609 and soon after established the colony of New Netherland, which included the city of New Amsterdam on the island of Manhattan. By 1664, the English had taken over and the colony was renamed New York. Like the Dutch, the English wanted to control the region at the expense of the Lenape people.

## CALLOUTS ON GLASS

### Reconsidering this scene

This 1660 encounter between Dutch and Lenape leaders was intended to celebrate the Dutch founders of "Old New York." But the scene offers only stereotypical representations and ignores how complex and violent colonization was for Native people.

### Oratamin, sachem and diplomat

The original diorama label identified Stuyvesant but not Oratamin, a sachem (leader) of the Hackensack, a Munsee branch of the Lenape. Oratamin was a respected diplomat who conducted complex

negotiations between Native groups and the Dutch newcomers. This scene does not show a true negotiation but rather subjects bringing tribute to a ruler.

### Wampum

The casual presentation of this wampum belt, made from white and purple mollusk shells, does not fully capture the significance of wampum to the Lenape. The designs and colors of wampum belts have meaning, and record treaties, laws, important traditions and significant moments in history. Many Native nations throughout the Northeast used wampum.

### Tobacco

The cultivation and production of tobacco is an agricultural technology developed by Native people. Among the Lenape, kwushahteew (tobacco) is used as a sacrament and given as a diplomatic gift.

### Clothing

The Lenape would have dressed up for an important meeting. But here they are wearing very little clothing—a clichéd way to show Native people. In reality, these diplomats would have worn fine fur robes with adornments signifying their important role as leaders. The faces of the Lenape men appear almost the same, as though they had no individual identities.

### Pieter Stuyvesant

The Dutch leader Pieter Stuyvesant is shown in a position of power. Although this scene supposedly shows a peace negotiation, it depicts a one-way exchange. Stuyvesant's hand is outstretched, demanding tribute, while the soldier behind him displays a gun.

### Dutch windmill

Windmills are closely associated with Holland, and by including one in the scene, the designers wanted viewers to focus on the Dutch. The first windmills

were used as lumber mills. Timber was important to the Lenape as well. Indeed, in the Munsee language, “Manhattan” means “the place where we get bows,” after hickory trees on the island with wood well-suited for making bows.

### European ships, Native canoes

The numerous ships shown here communicate a sense of European power and wealth. Native people made enormous contributions and sacrifices to lay the foundation for colonial markets—and America itself. Yet this history is not always told. The small canoes were also vital to trade: they made it possible to access trade items found much further inland.

### Women in the background

These Lenape women are shown as subservient and only engaged in physical labor—and they would not have been dressed this way. In reality, women in Lenape society, both in the past and today, hold leadership roles, are knowledge keepers and help maintain cultural continuity. The female sachem (leader) Mamanuchqua was active in treaty negotiations during the mid-1600s.

### Who’s missing?

There are very few women shown in the scene, and others are missing as well. In 1660, Manhattan was home to immigrants from Holland, as well as France, England and other European countries. Jewish immigrants arrived from Brazil and elsewhere; enslaved and free Africans also lived in New Amsterdam.

## RIGHT PANEL

### The Lenape people, then and now

The Lenape people refer to themselves as Lenni-Lenape, and are a network of allied groups commonly called Delaware: the Unalachtigo, the Unami and the Minisink, later known as the Munsee. Before the arrival of Europeans, they lived across Lenapehoking—an expansive territory that included parts of present-day New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

Early exchanges with Europeans were sometimes peaceful and sealed with gifts. But this changed as colonizers began to drive the Lenape out of their homeland through a combination of violence,

introduced diseases, forced removal and pressures to assimilate. Yet the Lenape people and their culture have endured. Today the Lenape live in Kansas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Ontario, Canada.

### Wasalaangweew (Bright Star)

#### Molly Miller

“The early years of colonization caused much inter-generational trauma and the hiding of our culture. We now celebrate over 40 years of cultural reawakening and the 13th year of Lenape-Munsee language revitalization. Our knowledge of our history, culture and language are most important to our survival as a people.”

Wasalaangweew is an appointed Clan Mother of the Turtle Clan, an Elder, Teacher and Wisdom Keeper of the Stockbridge-Munsee, Mohican Nation of Wisconsin.

### Lenapehoking (Lenape homeland)

15,000–30,000 people (c. 1600)  
~12,000 square miles (~31,000 square km)

### Lenape Relocations (1700–2014)

Over several generations, Lenape people were repeatedly forced to relocate farther and farther west, despite resistance. Today some 16,000 Lenape live in Kansas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Ontario, Canada.

### [Key]

- Current settlements
- Former settlements
- ➔ Forced relocations

### Colonialism and cultural representation

The American Museum of Natural History and all of New York City are on original Lenape territory. In an effort to acknowledge the ongoing impact of colonialism, as well as the urgent need to reconceive how diverse peoples and cultures are represented in the Museum, we have undertaken a series of initiatives in our cultural halls. These initiatives, including re-examination of this diorama, will add a diversity of voices and perspectives to the Museum’s displays.

# Educator Notes for Video

## Behind the Updates to the Old New York Diorama

Show students the “Behind the Updates to the Old New York Diorama” video. You may want to show the entire video or selected sections, as well as pause between sections for discussion. Below are segment overviews, vocabulary, and suggested discussion questions.

🔗 [www.amnh.org/exhibitions/old-new-york-diorama](http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/old-new-york-diorama)

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- 0:00–0:52**
- **Segment Overview:** Bradley Pecore (visual historian) discusses the representation of all “Indians” as a homogeneous group, versus the reality that Native Americans have diverse cultures. The Native Americans portrayed in the diorama were portrayed as stereotypical “Indians,” but we know that they were members of the Munsee group, one of three allied groups that together make up the Lenape.
  - **Vocabulary:** “indigenous” (a region’s original inhabitants)
  - **Discussion Question:** In the video, Bradley says, referring to the Native Americans shown in the diorama, “...Those are not Indians. Those are a group of Hackensack of which we know are Munsee people.” Why is it important to identify them this way instead of just calling them “Indians?”
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- 0:52–1:18**
- **Segment Overview:** Lauri Halderman (vice president, Exhibitions Department) identifies the two most important people in the Diorama (Oratamin and Peter Stuyvesant). She discusses the stereotypical images of Native Americans that she grew up with in New England. She mentions that the Old New York Diorama opened in 1939, and that its representation of the scene is outdated to our perception now.
  - **Vocabulary:** “stereotype” (an oversimplified opinion about, prejudiced attitude toward, or uncritical judgement of a group of people)
  - **Discussion Question:** In the video, Lauri says, “This diorama was finished in 1939. I think our eyes are different today than they were in the 1930s.” What do you think she means by this?
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- 1:24–2:09**
- **Segment Overview:** Peter Whiteley (curator, Division of Anthropology) discusses why it is important to add to past, outdated representations of people. Bradley Pecore then talks about the fact that while representations of Native American culture are often set in the past, giving the impression that they are gone, the Lenape people still live in this region.
  - **Vocabulary:** “appropriation” (the act of taking something, usually without permission)
  - **Discussion Question:** In the video, Peter talks about including the perspectives of Native Americans when updating the diorama. Bradley talks about showing the public that Native peoples are living in this region today. Why are these things important?
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- 2:09–3:09**
- **Segment overview:** Peter and Bradley discuss why the diorama was updated instead of removed or replaced. They explain that leaving the diorama with the addition of the text acknowledges the history of Native American oppression, and encourages modern viewers to talk about it openly.
  - **Vocabulary:** “oppression” (the state of being kept down by unjust use of force or authority)
  - **Discussion Question:** Why did the Museum choose to add labels to the diorama rather than remove it or replace it with something else?



Site of diorama



REDRAFT  
THE CASTLEPLAN  
NEW AMSTERDAM  
in 1660  
JOHN WILHELMUS BAKKER  
1750-1915



1600 1600 1600 1600

# Student Worksheet

At the American Museum of Natural History, there are many different kinds of dioramas. Some dioramas are about the natural world. Other dioramas tell stories about people and culture. Observe the “Old New York” diorama, which was created in 1939.

## BEFORE YOUR VISIT

1. Based on what you see, what do you think is happening in the diorama?

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2. **Observe** the two groups of people in the photograph of the diorama. Who are they? What are they wearing? What are they holding? What else do you notice about them? **Record** your observations below.

\_\_\_\_\_ **The Lenape** \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_ **Dutch Colonists** \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Which group appears more powerful in the diorama? Why? Find evidence in the diorama to support what you think.

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# Student Worksheet

## AT THE MUSEUM

4. **Observe** the Old New York diorama to find additional details about the people. **Write** new information about the two groups.

\_\_\_\_\_ **The Lenape** \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_ **Dutch Colonists** \_\_\_\_\_

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5. **Read** the text on the glass and on the side panels to find out how some depictions of the two groups were inaccurate. **Take notes** below about the inaccuracies. **Talk** to your partners about what you found.

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