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**Life in Puritan New England – What can we learn from their laws?** (1-2 class periods)

**We can** analyze laws from the 1600s  
**by** making observations and inferences about the text  
**so we can** build an understanding of what life was like in Puritan New England.

### **Common Core Standards for Informational Texts**

1. Quote accurately from the text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to grade topic or subject area.

### **MA Standards for History/Social Science**

4. The First 13 Colonies – describe regional differences in climate, types of farming, populations, and sources of labor shaped their economies and societies throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
5. Establishment of Slavery – describe the harsh conditions of the Middle Passage and slave life, and the response of slaves to their condition; describe the life of free African Americans in the colonies

### **Resources**

*Massachusetts Body of Liberties, 1641*, pg. 53, #91  
<http://www.mass.gov/anf/docs/lib/body-of-liberties-1641.pdf>

*The General Laws and Liberties of the Massachusetts Colony: Revised and Reprinted*. Right page. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Samuel Green, 1672. Law Library, Rare Book Collection, Library of Congress  
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel01.html#obj016>

*A History of US: Book Two – Making Thirteen Colonies (1600-1740) chapters 15-19* by Joy Hakim

### **Materials**

Copies of the document pages for each student – transcription & definition pages as required  
Post-Its for each group

## Procedure

Have students work in pairs or small groups.

### Day 1

1. Give students 2-3 minutes to brainstorm key words and phrases about the Puritans, based on the prior readings from *A History of US* and other background knowledge.

*option: make categories                      We know, We think we know, We wonder*  
*different color Post-Its or columns on the easel*

2. Have 1 student share a response & post on the easel. Continue until no new ideas are left.
3. Have a brief discussion about their ideas.
4. Share the objective and plan for the lesson.

**We can** analyze laws from the 1600s  
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5. Pass out Document 1 and the response page. Go over the directions then put the text under the ELMO. *Include the transcription and definitions pages as needed.*
6. Have students take turns reading each law aloud, then discuss what they thought of the text.
7. Read over the laws for the whole class, explaining vocabulary as needed. Clarify the fact that although it reads that the punishment *will be* death, it really meant that it *could be* – every child who was rude to a parent was not brought before a court and hanged.
8. Have each group fill in the top of the response page.
9. Model an observation / inference for students to copy, such as  
*they had a law against witches                      they believed in witchcraft and punished it severely*
10. Have each group discuss and complete the rest of the chart together. They do not need to have the exact same responses.
11. Discuss their observations and inferences.
12. If no one mentions the Bible references at the end of each law, ask the challenge question at the bottom of the response page. Give groups time to generate ideas, then discuss as a whole class. Have students record as a final observation & inference.

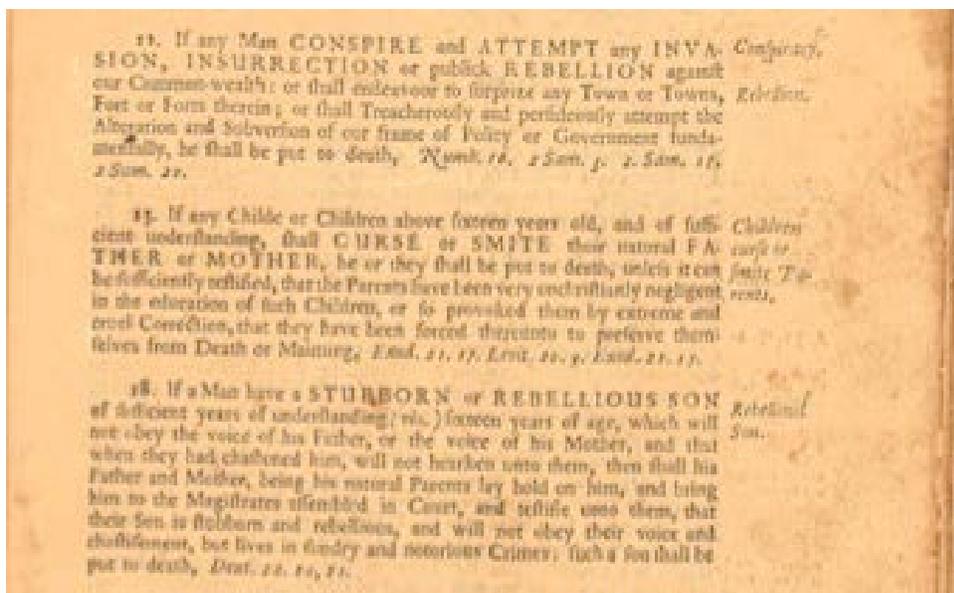
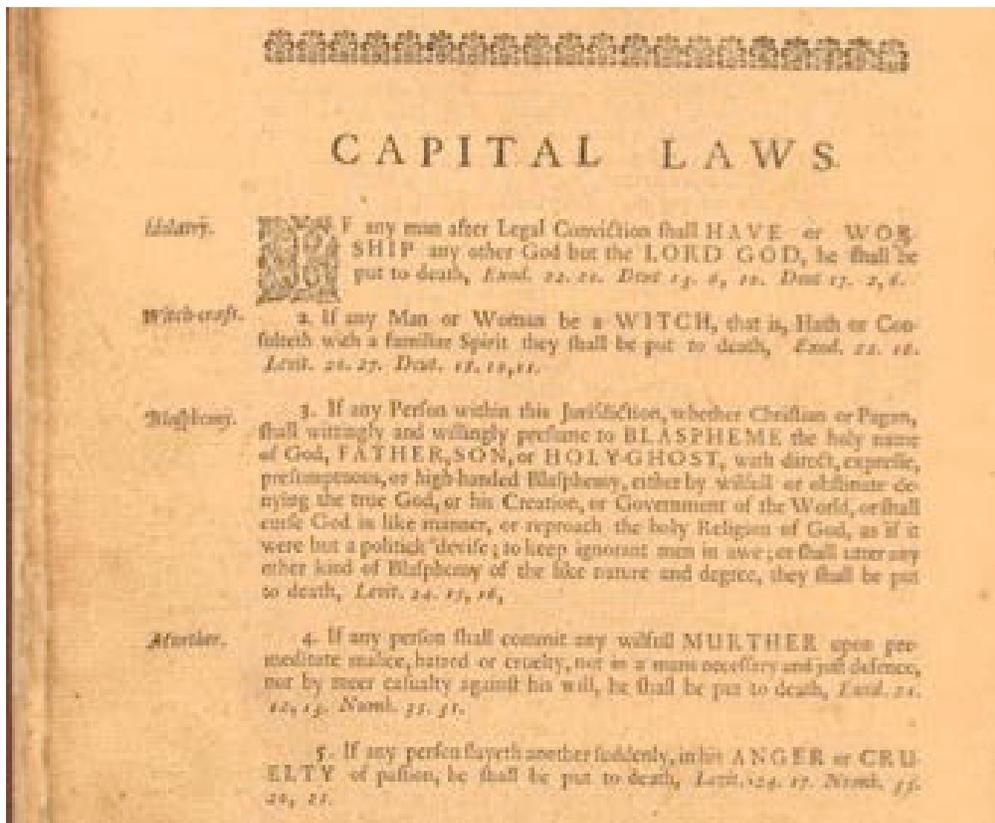
13. Have students fill in the POV section and share with group.
14. Look back at the brainstorming from the beginning of the lesson. Give them another 2-3 minutes to generate new Post-Its, then share as before.
15. Ask students what they think the biggest 'take away' about the Puritans would be based on these laws. Write key ideas on the easel.
16. Preview Day 2 lesson – will be looking at the 1641 MA law about slavery. Ask them to think about whether MA had slavery or not.

## Day 2

1. Have a student read the key ideas on the easel from yesterday. Remind them of the objective and explain what they will be doing today – a close reading of a law about slavery. Go over, again, the difference between 'enslaved' and 'indentured' workers.
2. Have students share their responses to the final question from yesterday. Discuss their reasons for saying 'yes' or 'no'.
3. Pass out the Document 2 page. Remind them that the writers and audience are the same as yesterday.
4. Have each group read the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence of the text and decide what they think it means. Was there slavery or not?
5. Read as a whole class, defining terms. Have groups share and fill in 2 observations/ inferences.
6. Repeat steps for the 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence, having students fill in the bottom of the chart. Link back to the references to specific Bible passages in the 1671 laws.
7. Have students fill in the POV section and share within table groups.
8. Discuss with whole class. Go back to the questions of whether there was slavery or not in MA.
9. Ask students what they think the biggest 'take away' about the Puritans would be based on this law. Write key ideas on the easel.

Document 1

The General Laws and Liberties of the Massachusetts Colony, 1671



## **Capital Laws – “translation” into modern English**

### **idolatry = worshiping idols**

1. If anyone worships any god but the Christian God, he will be killed

### **Witch-craft = casting spells and etc.                      anyone accused of witchcraft was thought to work with the Devil**

2. If anyone is a witch, including having a familiar, he/she will be put to death.  
*It was thought that witches had ‘familiar’ that helped them do spells & work with the Devil.*

### **Blasphemy = saying or doing something disrespectful of the Christian God**

3. If anyone, Christian or not, blasphemes on purpose – such as cursing or denying God, the Bible story of Creation – he shall be put to death.

### **Murder = killing someone**

4. & 5. If anyone deliberately murders someone (does it on purpose,) rather than in self-defense or accidentally, he/she will be put to death.  
It might have been planned ahead of time, out of hatred or cruelty.  
It might have happened suddenly, without planning, out of anger or cruelty.

### **Conspiracy & Rebellion = working against the government, the colony (rebellion) or just planning to (conspiracy)**

12. If anyone plans/tries to invade the colony or plans/tries to rebel against the colony, or even just a town or fort, or plans/tries to really change the government, he/she will be put to death.

### **Children curse or smite parents = swear at or hit**

13. If any child (over age 16, when he/she would be expected to understand that it is wrong) curses at or hits his/her mother or father, he/she will be put to death. If it can be shown that the parents were at fault because they didn’t teach the child proper behavior or because the parents were about to injure or kill the child, then the child will not be put to death.

### **Rebellious Son = in this case, not obeying the parent when told to do something**

18. If a boy (over age 16, when he would be expected to understand that it is wrong) continues to disobey his parents, even after they have talked with him and (maybe) punished him when he did it before, will be brought in front of someone in authority, like a judge. The parents will testify about what the son is like. A boy like that will be put to death.

## Capital Laws – Easy to Read

- idolatry** 1. If any man after Legal Conviction shall HAVE or WORSHIP any other God but the Lord God, he shall be put to death. *Exod. 22. 20 Deut. 13.6, 10 Deut. 17.2, 6*
- Witch-craft** 2. If any Man or Woman be a WITCH, that is, Hath or Consults with a familiar Spirit, they shall be put to death. *Exod. 22. 18 Levit. 20. 27 Deut. 18. 10, 11*
- Blasphemy** 3. If any Person within this Jurisdiction, whether Christian or Pagan, shall wittingly and willingly presume to BLASPHEME the holy name of God, FATHER, SON, or HOLY GHOST, with direct, express, presumptuous, or high-handed Blasphemy, either by wilfull or obstinate denying the true God, or his Creation, or Government of the World, or shall curse God in like manner, or reproach the holy Religion of God, as if it were but a politick device, to keep ignorant men in awe; or shall utter any other kind of Blasphemy of the like nature and degree, they shall be put to death. *Levit. 24. 15, 16*
- Murther (murder)** 4. If any person shall commit any wifull MURTHUR upon premeditate malice, hatred, or cruelty, not in a man's necessary and just defense, nor by mere casualty against his will, he shall be put to death. *Exod. 21. 12, 13 Numb. 35. 31*
5. If any person slays another suddenly, in his ANGER or CRUELTY of passion, he shall be put to death. *Levit. 24. 17 Numb. 35. 20, 21*
- Conspiracy** 12. If any Man CONSPIRE and ATTEMPT any INVASION, INSURRECTION or public REBELLION against our Commonwealth; or shall endeavor to surprise any Town or Towns, Forts or Forts therein; or shall Treacherously and perfidiously attempt the Alteration and Subversion of our frame of Politics or Government fundamentally, he shall be put to death.
- Rebellion** *Numb. 16. 2Sam. 3. 2Sam. 18. 2Sam. 20.*
- Children curse or smite Parents** 13. If any Child or Children above sixteen years old, and of sufficient understanding, shall CURSE or SMITE their natural FATHER or MOTHER, he or they shall be put to death, unless it can be sufficiently testified, that the Parents have been very unchristianly negligent in the education of such Children, or so provoked them by extreme and cruel Correction, that they have been forced thereunto to preserve themselves from Death or Maiming. *Exod. 21. 17 Levit. 20. 9 Exod. 21. 15*
- Rebellious Son** 18. If a Man have a STUBBORN or REBELLIOUS SON of sufficient years of understanding (16 years of age) which will not obey the voice of his Father, or the voice of his Mother, and that when they had chastened him, will not hearken unto them, then shall his Father and Mother, being his natural Parents lay hold on him, and bring him to the Magistrates assembled in Court, and testify unto them, that their Son is stubborn and rebellious, and will not obey their voice and chastisement, but lives in sundry and notorious Crimes; such a Son shall be put to death. *Deut. 22. 20, 21*

**Document 1**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

Name of document \_\_\_\_\_

Who would have written it? \_\_\_\_\_

Why/Who was the audience? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

<b><u>OBSERVATIONS</u></b>	<b><u>INFERENCES</u></b>
What is in the text? What do you notice about the text?	What does the text show you about life in MA in the 1600s?? What was important to people back then?

<b><u>My Point of View</u></b>	<b><u>Point of View of Someone in MA in the 1600s</u></b>
When I first read/heard them, I thought . . .	What <b>might</b> he/she have thought about these laws?

**CHALLENGE – What do the abbreviations and numbers at the end of each law mean?**

**Document 2**  
**Section 91 of the MA Body of Liberties, 1641**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

There shall never be any bond slavery, villeinage, or captivity amongst us unless it be lawful captives taken in just wars, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us.

And these shall have all the liberties and Christian usages which the law of God established in Israel concerning such persons cloth morally require. This exempts none from servitude who shall be judged thereto by authority.

<b><u>OBSERVATIONS</u></b> what it says	<b><u>INFERENCES</u></b> what it shows about that time & place
Who can/can't be enslaved? What else does it say about slavery?	What does it show about how people felt about slavery? What does it show about life at that time?

**My Point of View**      When I first read/heard this, I thought . . .