Bethany Sapigao

Mrs. Zierenberg-Senge

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Language Arts/Period 6

Caleb’s Crossing

The book *Caleb’s Crossing* by Geraldine Brooks retells the inspiring story of the Native Wampanoag, Caleb Cheeshahteaumuck. He was the son of the Wampanoag chief and lived in the island, Noepe. In the 1630s the Puritans started to arrive in the New World on a mission to convert the Native Americans from their traditional culture and religion to Christianity. In 1650 Caleb was converted to Christianity when he met a Puritan named Thomas Mayhew.

The natives in New England were strictly cultured and had very spiritual beliefs, so converting them would not be an easy task for the Puritans. But that was not the only problem they had to face, as they would also need to figure out how to communicate with the Wampanoag. The document, *Wampanoag Timeline,* by Jessie Little Doe Baird states the solution to their problems saying,“[In 1632] missionaries begin to arrive in Wampanoag territory. John Eliot arrives from Cambridge, England and begins to learn the language of the Wampanoag in an effort to translate religious materials.” Wôpanâak was the language that was spoken by the natives the Puritans encountered. John Eliot was the first to learn their language so the mission of converting them to Christianity would succeed. In 1640, Caleb met the Mayhew family and was later converted to their beliefs.

Caleb was not only converted to Christianity, but also learned the English language. Later on, Thomas Mayhew was impressed by Caleb’s ability to pick up their language so he schooled him in Latin and German as well. The native became well rehearsed in all languages and Mayhew had noticed it. Caleb learning many languages became commendable and Mayhew was proud of it.

According to *Harvard University*,“[Harvard was] established in 1636 by vote of the Great and General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.” Caleb would later attend the college, but would attend the Harvard Indian College. From the *Wampanoag Timeline*, Baird also states, “In 1655, Harvard Indian College opens for the purpose of educating Indian youth.” It was built specifically for the natives who considered English schooling. This would benefit the college and Caleb would be able to attend it along with his fellow friend, Joel Iacoombs.

Before they were to go on to Harvard they first went to a school that would help them get into the university as stated in the article in the *Peabody Museum* on the Harvard University website. Also according to that source it states that Caleb graduated Harvard at 20 years old, but Joel was never able to receive his diploma due to a shipwreck he experienced.

After many years, there were more natives inspired by their acts and decided to enroll in Harvard just as their ancestors had done. In the *Harvard Gazette* an article by Jon Chase states of an example of how inspiring Iacoombs and Cheshahteaumauck’s acts were saying, “Three hundred and forty-six years after Cheeshahteaumuck, Tiffany Smalley ’11 became the second Wampanoag to graduate from Harvard College. She and her fellow Native American Harvard alums, now numbering more than 1,000, have experienced a Harvard far different than the former Indian College.”

In conclusion, the Puritan’s acts of coming to the new world play a significant role in the lives of the Wampanoag natives. If the Puritans had not come, Caleb Cheeshahteaumauk would not have received schooling from Thomas Mayhew and ended up attending Harvard University. Caleb’s acts in attending the school has inspired thousands of Wampanoag and other natives.

Citations: [EARS NOTES](https://docs.google.com/document/d/10VwYnLCYtgcex5UMrNPLXWNmE3OxW5HQyBWCQ_Lk-Kc/edit?usp=sharing)

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