

Conflict and Culture

Rachel Meloon's Belt

After a period in which they traded peacefully and learned from each other, Indians and Europeans in New England became engaged in brutal conflicts occurring over a 90-year span of time. Between 1675 and 1763, more than 1,600 English settlers were captured by Indians and carried away to Canada to be enslaved, held for ransom, or sometimes adopted. Some adopted children grew up accepting Abenaki life and culture and were reluctant to return to their English life. Rachel Meloon was such a child.

During a raid on the New Hampshire town of Salisbury in 1754, Abenakis captured Nathaniel Meloon and his family, including nine-year old Rachel. Although her family was released four years later, Rachel chose to stay with her Abenaki family for five more years until she was 18. After returning home, she wove this belt of linen and decorated it with dyed porcupine quills, which were used by Abenakis to decorate baskets, clothes, and shoes. The belt (ca. 1770) was made for Rachel's neighbor Peter Kimball.



Looking Closely at Rachel's Belt

Can you find at least nine different square patterns? Choose two that you like and copy their patterns into the squares below — or onto your own paper if you prefer.

Do the patterns remind you of anything? Use your imagination. Write a sentence or two telling what you think they symbolize.

