

WE ARE THE LAND



GUIDE

Context Statement:
Introduction, How to Use this Document, and
Where this Piece Came From



This is a guide created to support [We Are The Land](#). While there are a vast number of resources online, this document is designed to prompt inquiry as we bridge the gap between performance and audience. We encourage engagement with the stories offered in the performance, and invite you to lean into any perceived difference between your experience and knowledge, and what is presented onstage. There are empty spaces in our dominant curriculum. Many systems affect the lives of the Wampanoag everyday, impacting generations to come. *What does it mean to be Wampanoag?* While there are too many stories to include in this single resource guide, we encourage you to seek out additional sources of knowledge and continue learning.

At [ArtsEmerson](#), the mission is to engage all communities through stories that reveal and deepen our connection to each other. By cultivating diversity in the art and in the audience, we ignite public conversation around our most vexing societal challenges as a catalyst for overcoming them.

We Are The Land is the story of what it means to be Wampanoag. The Wampanoag, or Wôpanâak, are one of many nations who lived with the land and sea long before any Europeans arrived, and have survived until today. In this piece, you will hear directly from Native people telling their own stories and how those are infused with history, ancestral memory and preservation. This production premiered in Plymouth, UK last spring. Now, we welcome the Wampanoag home to the land they have stewarded for more than 10,000 years to tell their story.

“The audience can expect to be moved by, not only the actual sharing, the things they might see, but by the spiritual aspect too. There might be some moments where they relate and have similar experiences, but moments that are distinctly Wampanoag. We are all the same but we’re different. This piece is an invitation to lean in and learn something new or hear a voice you’ve never heard about.”

- **Siobhan Brown**, Citizen of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and Director of *We Are The Land*

“What would you say to a court [to] prove that you are English enough? After 400 years of colonization and erasure, is it too late to rectify? Would the price of justice be too costly? What is the true cost to allow injustice to continue?”

- **Hartman Deetz**, Citizen of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and Creative Director of *We Are The Land*

Engaging With The Production: Production History, References, Key Figures & Helpful Terms



Native People

There are over 574 federally recognized tribal nations operating within what we call the United States. This number does not include the tribes that are state recognized, but not yet recognized federally. What distinguishes being Indigenous/Native to the lands now known as the United States as different from a racial group, are that Native people are citizens of their own sovereign nations. Learn more about tribal sovereignty in this short video [here](#).

Tips for Engaging With and Learning About Indigenous Peoples:

- When possible, refer to Indigenous people by their tribal affiliation (ie Wampanoag, Cherokee, Choctaw, etc), rather than using the broader term of 'Indigenous,' 'Native,' or 'First Nations.' When you are not sure of tribal affiliation, the broader term is fine. Avoid using the word 'Indian' unless you have been explicitly told by a Native person to use it, as it historically has been used in derogatory ways, despite now having a context of reclamation by some Indigenous people.
- Additionally, the terms 'Indigenous,' 'Native,' and 'First Peoples' should always be capitalized.
- Do not engage Native people with questions about your own ancestry or proximity to Indigeneity, or you/your family's connection (or lack thereof) to colonists. The reason behind this is involved, but should you be curious about reading more, this [academic article](#) is considered foundational.
- Indigenous people often wear regalia for special events, including in *We Are the Land*. Unless you have a specific professional reason to, do not touch the regalia - and never refer to it as a costume.
- Not all Indigenous peoples live on reservations and have varying degrees of proximity

to ceremony, cultural practices, and history, as the forces of colonization and assimilation have been strong.

A Note on Aesthetic:

The performers in *We Are the Land* include professional, as well as non- professional, actors. They are the actual elders and leaders of the tribe. They are historians, communications professionals, artisans, and students. Success for this project does not look like a typical play on Broadway - it is the rare and pivotal storytelling of history by those who have been, and continue to be, erased from the dominant narrative of it.

Production History:

10 years in the making, *We Are The Land* now finds its way home for the Wampanoag to tell their story centerstage. For centuries, Wampanoag voices were silenced. As part of the [Plymouth 400](#) effort to commemorate the arrival of the Mayflower, the Wampanoag shared their story on stage for the first time in Plymouth, UK, where the Mayflower set sail some 400 years ago. *We Are The Land* was a legacy production of [Mayflower 400 UK](#), an honest, broad and inclusive commemoration of the ship's sailing from England to America and its challenging legacy. This production features generations of people from the [Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe](#), [Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe](#), [Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah](#), and [Nipmuc Nation](#), inviting listeners to hear their truth, centering the Wampanoag experience.

"As long as we are sharing the truth of our story, we are able to be that living example of what is possible when you stay centered on who you are. There is an important message in coming here that says not only are we still here, but what was there to begin with and who was there to begin with is of great value."

- **Siobhan Brown**, Citizen of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and Director of *We Are The Land*

Production Structure: Four Acts

The production leads audiences through four acts, centering Wampanoag Life from 1491 to Present Day.

Act I: 1491 - Prophecy and Maushop Legend

Act II: 1650s - Christianization and Pandemic

Act III: 1833 - The Woodlot Riot

Act IV: 1970-2023 - The Land Suit



Historical References, Key Figures & Terms:

The following historical references, key figures and terms are important to note when engaging with the content of this production.

- [The People Of First Light](#): The Wampanoag are known as “People of the First Light” or “People of the Dawn” because they are in the east and the first to see the sunrise.
- [“Life Givers”](#): Wampanoag women carry out many day-to-day activities and hold great responsibilities as men do. Women are revered as beautiful and powerful because they are the givers of sacred life.
- [Ancestral Memory](#): Feeling the effects of what has happened in the past including memories, experiences, and traumas passed on through DNA.
- [The Legend of Maushop \(Moshop\)](#): Maushop was one of the tall people and a protector of the Wampanoag. He teaches how to respect the land and provides premonition of the Europeans.
- [Ritual of Recognizing the Four Directions](#): Symbolizes directions of health and the cycles of life.
- [Three Sisters](#): Corn, beans and squash. When planted together, they nurture each other like a family.
- [Pandemic/The Great Dying](#): With the arrival of European ships to America came disease, killing many in the region where the Wampanoag lived as their lands were explored and colonized. Prior to 1492, Native peoples were largely isolated. Lack of immunity to foreign disease devastated the Wampanoag population.

- [John Sassamon](#): A Wampanoag man deeply involved with the creation and administration of the church in Eastern Massachusetts. He was a skilled linguist and interpreter, supporting the translation of the Christian Bible for Native peoples.
- [The Woodlot Riot](#): A non-violent revolt of the Mashpee People against European settlers in response to the deforestation and controlling of tribal lands, and the taking of valuable wood.
- [William Appess](#): An Pequot man, ordained Methodist minister, and leader of the Woodlot Riot.
- [Blind Joe Amos](#): The first ordained Mashpee Wampanoag minister. Wampanoag were not allowed inside the Old Meeting House. He preached his sermons outside under a large oak tree.
- [Title Insurance](#): Buyers need to obtain title insurance to purchase a home on Mashpee land. The origin of this process stems from fear that Wampanoag could take back the land. Even if you are Wampanoag, you are forced to get protection from your own people. This systemic oppression, disruption to identity and indignity are still apparent in systems today.
- [Indian Nonintercourse Act](#): Modified in 1984. Prohibits the transfer of legal title of real property from one person to another, or the granting of an encumbrance such as a mortgage or a lien of an Indian tribe's interests, in land unless negotiated in the presence of a federal commissioner and ratified by Congress (U.S. Dept. of Justice).
- [Indian Imprisonment Act](#): A 1675 law prohibiting any Indigenous person from entering the city of Boston. It was only repealed in 2004.

This resource guide was created in support of the production of We Are the Land during its presentation at [ArtsEmerson](#).