**Reading Further - King Philip Decides on War**

Name/Class: Date:

**American Indians and English settlers had a complex relationship. At times, they worked together. At other times, they fought bitterly. As more English settlers arrived, they took lands on which American Indians lived. In 1675, one chief went to war to stop this. How did the English colonies in New England face this challenge?**

 In the darkness, the people watched as the shadow of Earth slowly moved over the moon. Soon, the great glowing disk was covered completely. Today, we call such an event a lunar eclipse. But the Wampanoag people living in 1675 saw it as a sign: it was time for war.

 The eclipse came at a key moment for Metacomet, the son of Massasoit, and his people. Wampanoag relations with the English settlers were badly strained.

It had not always been so. For many years, the Wampanoags had watched as settlers from England moved into their homeland. They had not only tolerated the newcomers but also assisted them. In fact, the settlement at Plymouth might never have survived without the Wampanoags’ help. In 1621, Massasoit had made peace agreements with the leaders of Plymouth Colony. His son, Metacomet, had even taken the English name of Philip. When Philip became the Wampanoag leader, he had hoped to work with the settlers to protect and provide for his people. He also wanted to prevent further English settlement and to organize the local tribes. But there had been trouble. In 1662, King Philip’s brother had died suddenly. King Philip believed that the English had killed him. Although the Wampanoags continued to work with the English, King Philip’s trust was shaken.

 Just a few weeks before the eclipse, the English had put two Wampanoag men to death after finding them guilty of murder. King Philip thought that the men were innocent. He believed that their trial under English laws had been unfair. An angry group of Wampanoag warriors struck back. They killed nine English settlers in a village called Swansea. King Philip and his people now faced a choice. They could seek peace with the English. Or they could go to war against them.

 As the Wampanoags pondered this decision on the night of June 26, 1675, the moon slipped into Earth’s shadow. The Wampanoags saw the sign. They knew that much bloodshed would follow. Even so, they decided to fight the English.

 King Philip made a fateful choice. The war he began changed the lives of thousands of people across New England. The battles to come were among the deadliest in American history.

 King Philip’s War, as it is now known, was a complex struggle. It was not just a war between English settlers and the Wampanoags. New England was home to many other American Indian groups. These included the Nipmucks, the Narragansetts, the Mohegans, and others. Each group faced a hard choice. As one Englishman noted, “Many of the Indians were in a kind of maze, not knowing well what to do.” Some would join King Philip. Others would side with the settlers.

 Why were American Indians undecided? Many groups shared King Philip’s anger at the English. But others had friendly ties with settlers. Some had become Christians.

American Indians had fought side by side with English soldiers before. In the Pequot War of 1637, some tribes had joined the English to defeat the Pequot tribe. This war showed that New England’s American Indians were not always friendly with each other. In 1675, deep rivalries still divided many groups. Some would settle old scores by joining the English.

 The English settlers were more united than the American Indians. When war broke out, they soon organized to meet King Philip’s challenge. Yet, as with the American Indians, old rivalries and conflicts caused trouble. Communities blamed each other for causing the war. They argued over who would lead and supply troops. Some feared that the war would be an excuse for a rival settlement to take disputed land. Such squabbles harmed English defenses.

 At first, the American Indians had success. They surprised the English by making hit-and-run raids. They would sneak up on a target, launch a surprise attack, and then disappear. The English had trouble adjusting to this type of warfare. They wanted to fight in the open.

 King Philip’s forces made great gains. Now that victory seemed possible, new **allies** joined him. Once-friendly tribes turned against the English. This made the English suspect even loyal American Indians. In one town, officials imprisoned a large group of Christian American Indians on an island in Boston Harbor. Elsewhere, officials tried to take weapons away from American Indians. English commanders refused to use American Indian soldiers in battle. Such treatment turned former friends into enemies.

 In the fall of 1675, the English were worried. The mighty Narragansett tribe had not yet joined the war. But the English feared that the tribe might join King Philip. To stop them, the English attacked a large Narragansett settlement. The Great Swamp Fight left many hundreds of Narragansett men, women, and children dead. More than 200 English fighters were also killed or wounded.

 *The Great Swamp Fight* was a terrible blow to the Narragansetts, but it did not stop the American Indian onslaught. Warriors still raided terrified English settlements. In the winter of 1676, villages just 10 miles from Boston came under attack.

As spring approached, the English were on the verge of defeat. Many of their villages lay in ashes, but their fortunes were about to change.

 The English did not know that King Philip was in trouble, too. After the Narragansetts’ defeat in the Great Swamp Fight, Philip needed more help. He took a large force to present-day New York. There, he hoped to win the support of the fierce Mohawk tribe. Instead, the Mohawks attacked him. His forces limped back to New England.

 At this time, the English made a key decision. They again made use of friendly American Indian soldiers, such as the Christians who had been held on the island, and they got results. Within months, combined English and American Indian troops were winning the war. King Philip’s forces were on the run.

 The end came for King Philip in August 1676. He was shot by an American Indian soldier who had joined with the English. By summer’s end, King Philip’s War was over.

 King Philip’s War took little more than a year. Yet its effects were long lasting. A dozen settlements had been destroyed. About 1,000 English settlers in the region, out of a total of about 52,000, had died. The damage to the American Indian population was even worse. Some experts think that as many as 3,000 out of a total of 20,000 American Indians in New England died. Many more were captured and sold as slaves.

When the war was over, New England was in ruins—but completely under English control. American Indians had played a big part in the survival of the first English settlements. Some had helped the English win King Philip’s War. But in 1676, American Indians were largely gone from the region. Only a few tribal communities were left.

The English, on the other hand, would recover. Their settlements would once again grow and prosper.