



## **Death and Dying in Puritan New England: A Study Based on Early Gravestones, Vital Records, and other Primary Sources Relating to Cape Cod, Massachusetts**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 03.02.01  
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This curriculum unit uses several types of primary and secondary source material concerning the colonial period of New England to teach high school students about everyday life in early America. It describes a research program to investigate Puritan worldviews and beliefs about death and dying. The research program includes a study of New England gravestone carving and the use of imagery on the early gravestones found in Cape Cod, Massachusetts burying grounds. Using vital records of the colonial period for Cape Cod towns, connections are made between the information available from gravestones and human demographic trends in seventeenth century and eighteenth century Cape Cod. The source material used consists of:

1. Five hundred gravestones from seventeen of the earliest burying grounds at Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and a set of eight hundred color photographs of these gravestones;
2. An extensive database of vital statistics on Cape Cod colonists assembled from the gravestone texts;
3. A collection of published monographs on gravestone iconography that includes numerous photographs of gravestones from throughout New England;
4. Published vital records for each Cape Cod town, compiled by the towns and by the Society of Mayflower Descendants;
5. The sermons of Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Jonathan Edwards, three prominent religious and spiritual leaders of the New England colonial period.

(Recommended for Anatomy and Physiology, AP Environmental Science, grades 11-12.)

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