



BIO: Pocahontas Classroom Guide

The story of Pocahontas, a woman regarded as a princess by her Algonquin community, continues to capture the imagination shapes the story of the Jamestown colony, founded in 1607. A precocious and adventurous child, Indian ruler Powhatan held his daughter in special regard. Born as “Matoaka” and nicknamed Pocahontas or “playful one,” she became a vital ambassador between two worlds. Years before she met John Rolfe, Pocahontas stepped into history for the first time. Captain John Smith had been captured by some of Powhatan’s warriors and was about to be put to death when Pocahontas laid herself near his head, helping spare his life. These actions proved that Pocahontas was an important figure in her society, and she went on to play a pivotal role in the early colonies.

Understanding her value, the British kidnapped Pocahontas, hoping to use her as a bargaining chip. While in captivity, she learned English, was renamed “Rebecca” and was married to John Rolfe in 1614. The Virginia Company of London sent the Rolfes to England where Pocahontas was embraced by British royalty. Tragically, she never returned home from this journey; she became sick and died after boarding a ship to return to Virginia in 1617. Pocahontas was buried in Gravesend, England; Rolfe returned home but was killed in a massacre by Native Americans in 1622. This one hour program moves beyond the myths about Pocahontas to help students discover the key role she played in bridging two worlds.

Curriculum Links:

Biography: Pocahontas is appropriate for middle and high school students and would be useful for American history, social studies, Native American studies, and Media courses. Students will learn about the history of the Jamestown colony, the role of the Powhatan Confederacy, and have the opportunity to discuss myth v. reality in the telling of the Pocahontas story.

Pre-Viewing Activity:

Ask students to discuss what they already know about Pocahontas before showing the clip. You may also want to circulate images of her from popular culture sources for discussion.

Identification Terms: assimilation, exploit, Virginia Company, colony, conversion, settlement, mediator, Algonquin

Discussion Questions:

1. If you were Powhatan how would you have handled the arrival of the English?
2. What is the Native American meaning of the name Pocahontas? Was this her real name?
3. It was thought that Pocahontas was part of an elaborate plan to gain the trust of the John Smith and ultimately the English. Why would this arrangement have been beneficial to the Powhatan?

4. How would you describe the interactions between the Native Americans and the English? How did their relationships change over time?
5. What kinds of sources do historians use to learn about Jamestown and relations between Native Americans and the English?
6. What was significant about the marriage of John Rolfe and Pocahontas? What did it mean for Jamestown?
7. What are some of the myths you have heard about Pocahontas? How does her image in popular culture compare with what you learned about her in this documentary?
8. When did Pocahontas travel to England and why? How do you think this experience shaped her life?

Activities:

1. **Charting Time.** Jamestown was only one of several colonies in North America. In small groups, ask students to create an illustrated timeline of colonies in North America. Students may also want to create maps of early North America or colonial Virginia and pinpoint the location of Jamestown on these maps.
2. **The Powers of Powhatan.** In order to further understand the complexity of cultural encounters at the time of Jamestown's founding, ask students to break up into small groups and research various aspects of Native American life. Topics might include: division of labor, the structure of the Powhatan Confederacy, food and daily life, and Powhatan's leadership. Students can present their findings in poster-board or PowerPoint presentations. One student from each group can be selected report to the larger class.
3. **Portraits of Pocahontas.** Among the most important images of Pocahontas is an engraving of her by Dutch artist Simon Van de Passe created during her visit to England. Online or at the library, locate this image. Ask students to write a list of adjectives to describe Pocahontas before looking at the image. Then, ask them to create another list once they have examined a copy of Van de Passe's engraving. Reconvene and lead students in a discussion of the image and what it reveals about Pocahontas.
4. **A Princess Abroad.** Ask students to imagine that they were an embedded reporter sent to follow Pocahontas on her trip to England. Ask them to write a newspaper article describing her reception in England and her reaction to the trip.

Additional Resources:

Websites

Learn more about Pocahontas on Bio.com:

<http://www.biography.com/articles/Pocahontas-9443116>

The Jamestown Rediscovery Project:

<http://www.apva.org/history/index.html>

Virtual Jamestown:

<http://www.virtualjamestown.org/reference.html>

Powhatan Renape Nation site: <http://www.powhatan.org/>

Books

Bruchac, Joseph. *Pocahontas*. Harcourt. 2003.

Hakim, Joy. *Making Thirteen Colonies: 1600-1740*. (A History of US series: Book Two). Oxford University Press. 2003 edition.

Southern, Ed. *Jamestown Adventure: Accounts of the Virginia Colony, 1605-1614*. John F. Blair Press. 2004.