

Fifth Grade

Did Pocahontas save John Smith's life?

Essential Question: How did beliefs of American Indians contrast with those of Europeans?








- The student will draw conclusions about significant beliefs, contributions, and ideas, analyzing the origins and context under which these competing ideas were reached and the multiple perspectives from which they come (3.2)

Skills:




- Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic
- Discuss the importance of considering the source of a document and the circumstances under which it was created
- Identify corroboration or points of agreement or disagreement across multiple sources
- Make a claim and support it with evidence & argument

Materials Needed:

- Clip from Walt Disney's *Pocahontas* movie (segment where Pocahontas saves John Smith - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5UcpNPLTDk>)
- Copies of Pocahontas Timeline (1 per student)
- Copies of John Smith documents & documents worksheet (1 per student)
- Copies of Historian Interpretations & documents worksheet (1 per student)

 engage	Ask students to discuss the following questions (in partners or small groups): 1) "What do you already know about Pocahontas?" 2) "How do you know what you know about Pocahontas?"
 explain	Explain to students that the focus of today's lesson is to answer the question, "Did Pocahontas save John Smith's life?"
 engage	Play clip from Disney movie showing Pocahontas saving John Smith. Ask students to respond to the following question prompt: "Do you believe the movie - is this what happened between Pocahontas and John Smith? Why or why not?" Direct students to write their answer as a claim and support with reasoning. <i>Note: They need to hang on to their claim until the end of the lesson when they reference it again.</i>
 explore	Distribute time line to students. Review important background information (e.g. English arrive in 1607; land in Jamestown; John Smith is taken prisoner by the Powhatan tribe; etc.). Ask students to make observations about the events listed.
 explain	Distribute John Smith document sheet and corresponding worksheet. Ask students to read through the documents and respond to the questions on the worksheet. As students are completing task, walk around the room formally assessing their level of understanding. May need to offer some individual or whole class guidance to complete worksheet or define words on documents.
 explain	Inform the students of the difference between primary and secondary sources. Model examples and then ask students to provide examples of each.
 explain	Distribute Historian Interpretation documents and corresponding document worksheet. Ask students to read through the documents and respond to the questions on the worksheet.

Blue Valley Social Studies

	<p>As students are completing the task, walk around the room formally assessing their level of understanding. May need to offer some individual or whole class guidance to complete worksheet or define words on documents.</p>
	<p>Follow up questions to debrief/discuss with students:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Which historian did you find more convincing; why? 2) What evidence did both historians use to support their argument? 3) Could there be a third interpretation? 4) What did the movie get right and what did it get wrong? 5) Why would Disney choose to make the movie the way they did; what are the consequences of their choices?
	<p>Inform the students of the purpose of activity – in order to interpret the past we have to look at multiple sources/perspectives. In history, most of the evidence as to what occurred is written in documents. When we read documents, we have to ask certain questions to evaluate their accuracy/validity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Who wrote the document? 2) Why did they write it? 3) What else was going on at the time? 4) Do other sources agree or disagree with this account?
	<p>Ask students to pull out their claim from the beginning of the lesson and make any necessary revisions to it.</p> <p>Ask students to discuss the question, “Did Pocahontas save John Smith’s life?” Encourage them to use evidence to support their answer.</p>

Source: Reisman, A. & Fogo, B. (2009) *Reading like a historian: Pocahontas lesson plan*, Stanford History Education Group. Retrieved, October 15, 2014 from http://sheg.stanford.edu/upload/V3LessonPlans/Pocahontas%20Lesson%20Plan%202014_1.pdf



John Smith Documents

Document A: “True Relation” (Modified)

Arriving in Werowocomoco, the emperor welcomed me with good words and great platters of food. He promised me his friendship and my freedom within four days...He asked me why we came and why we went further with our boat...He promised to give me what I wanted and to feed us if we made him hatchets and copper. I promised to do this. And so, with all this kindness, he sent me home.

Source: Smith’s own words, from **A True Relation** of such occurrences and accidents of note as hath happened in Virginia Since the First Planting of that Colony, *published in 1608.*

Document B: “General History” (Modified)

They brought me to Meronocomoco, where I saw Powhatan, their Emperor. Two great stones were brought before Powhatan. Then I was dragged by many hands, and they laid my head on stones, ready to beat out my brains. Pocahontas, the King’s dearest daughter took my head in her arms and laid down her own upon it to save me from death. Then the Emperor said I should live.

Two days later, Powhatan met me and said we were friends. He told me to bring him two guns and a grindstone and he would consider me his son.

Source: From Smith’s later version of the story in **General History** of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles, *published in 1624.*

John Smith Documents Worksheet

Did Pocahontas save John Smith's life?

True Relation says...

General History says...

Why would Smith add on to his earlier story?

Why might Smith lie or exaggerate and invent new information?

Why wouldn't Smith lie about the story?



Historian Interpretation Documents

Document A: Historian Interpretation (Modified)

Paul Lewis, Author: *The Great Rogue: A Biography of Captain John Smith* (1966).

In 1617, Pocahontas became a big media event in London. She was a “princess” (daughter of “king” Powhatan), and the first Indian woman to visit England. Because she converted to Christianity, people high in the church, as well as the King and Queen, paid attention to her.

While all this was going on, John Smith published a new version of *True Relation*, adding footnotes that say that Pocahontas threw herself on Smith to save him. Smith even takes credit for introducing Pocahontas to the English language and the Bible.

Then, in 1642, Smith expands his story in *General History*. He adds details to the story, and says that Pocahontas risked her life to save his. Why would a chief who had been so friendly before, suddenly decide to kill John Smith?

Source: Excerpt from The Great Rogue: A Biography of Captain John Smith, written by the historian Paul Lewis in 1966.

Document B: Historian Interpretation (Modified)

J.A. Leo Lemay, Author: *The American Dream of Captain John Smith* (1991).

John Smith had no reason to lie. In all of his other writings he is very accurate and observant. For 250 years after his captivity, no one questioned his story.

The reason the two versions differ is that their purpose is different. In *A True Relation*, Smith didn't want to brag about his adventures, he wanted to inform readers about the land and people of Virginia. In the *General History*, his goal was to promote settlement in Virginia (and added stories might get people interested).

There is no doubt the event happened. Smith may have misunderstood what the whole thing meant. I think it was probably a common ritual for the tribe, where a young woman in the tribe pretends to save a newcomer as a way of welcoming him to the tribe.

Source: Excerpt from The American Dream of Captain John Smith, written in 1991 by historian J.A. Leo Lemay.

Historian Interpretation Documents

Did Pocahontas save John Smith's life?

Paul Lewis says...

J.A. Leo Lemay says...

Which historian interpretation do you find more convincing? Why?