

CULTURES IN CONTACT



Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation

CULTURES IN CONTACT

Introduction

The Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation is an agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia that operates Jamestown Settlement and Yorktown Victory Center. Through these two museums the Foundation accomplishes its educational mission to commemorate the first permanent English settlement in the New World and the important role Virginia played in the formation of the United States of America.

This booklet is designed to provide teachers with information and activities that will help students participating in the Foundation's educational program, "**Cultures in Contact**," gain the most from their program. The goal of this program is to help students understand the early experiences of Native Americans and English settlers as they first met and interacted in Virginia in 1607. The booklet is divided into two parts. Part I provides background information for the teacher beginning with an essay describing these two cultures and followed by suggested teacher directions and answers to the activities. Part II includes a series of activities which can be reproduced for use with the classes. Suggestions are offered on how to best organize your unit of study to include the hands-on program, on-site visit, and classroom activities. During the hands-on portion of this program, your students will participate in role playing, examining period illustrations, and analyzing reproductions of artifacts worn and used by both peoples. The guided tour of Jamestown Settlement will provide experiences of the English and Powhatan Indians that will reinforce learning.

The program -objectives for '**Cultures in Contact**' are as follows:

1. Be able to name three things that each group wanted from the other and explain why they wanted them.
2. Be able to explain why the English and the Indians had a difficult time communicating with each other.
3. Be able to explain three things that each group might find unusual or different about the other.
4. Describe how you might have acted (differently) if you were an Englishman or, Indian at Jamestown in 1607.

Through these experiences and the information and activities provided in this booklet, students should be able to identify cultural differences and similarities and explain reasons why Englishmen and Indians may have acted the way they did during the first years at Jamestown. Most importantly, you will help them understand the experiences of meeting and relating to people of different cultures to broaden their understanding and acceptance of people who are not like themselves.

CULTURES IN CONTACT

Background Information

Two groups of people came in contact at Jamestown in 1607: Native Americans, called the Powhatan Indians, and the English settlers. Historians believe that Native Americans came to North America from Eurasia over 10,000 years ago when the water between what is now Alaska and the Eurasian continent was frozen over. By 1607 the Powhatan Indians, a group of Algonquian-speaking Eastern Woodland Indians, had been living in eastern Virginia for at least 300 years. Many of the English who settled in Jamestown were adventurers and explorers searching for sources of wealth such as gold and silver or for the legendary Northwest Passage to the rich trading centers of the Orient. Because the Powhatans had no written language, most of what we know about their culture has come from the writings of English-speaking men who spent time in Virginia during this early contact period.

The Powhatan Indians and the English were very different from each other in their dress and appearance. Jamestown settlers were most likely dressed in the English style of the period according to their status. Because they were also serving as soldiers, they probably wore caps, doublets or jerkins, slops, stockings and low heeled shoes, and each was likely armed with a sword, a matchlock gun and bandolier, armor of some type, and a helmet. English women were absent from first contact experiences as they did not arrive until the Second Supply in September 1608.

Compared to the English, Powhatan men and women would have appeared scantily clad, usually wearing only aprons of deerskin or grass around the waist. Capes or mantles of animal skins, furs or feathers were sometimes worn by the Powhatan hierarchy as symbols of prestige and wealth, and moccasins and leggings of deerskin were occasionally worn by hunters or travelers. Reddish colored paint, made of bloodroot, oils and animal fats served as face and shoulder paint as well as winter insulation and summer insect repellent. Hair was cut in a variety of fashions: men were shaved on the right, leaving the left side longer and often decorated with feathers or animal parts. Women's hair was kept in a variety of fashions, usually cut short before puberty and generally longer as adults. Both men and women wore necklaces and ear ornaments of shells, copper and freshwater pearls according to their status or wealth. Powhatan men and women also tattooed their bodies with geometric shapes and animal pictures.

The Powhatan Indians desired certain things from the English settlers. The Jamestown settlers found that the Powhatans wanted English metal objects such as knives, chisels and hatchets, cloth and wool blankets, glass beads, and

copper items. English weapons and lead musket balls were much sought-after items. **The English settlers desired certain things from the Powhatan Indians.** The English, who were sometimes starving, and having trouble adapting to their new environment, looked to the Indians for food and knowledge of the land. Corn, therefore, was probably one of the most sought-after Indian products. Without thinking, the English assumed that land used but not occupied by the Powhatan tribes was available, and they took possession of Indian land for many purposes. Settlers also wanted animal furs, especially beaver pelts, which were then exported to England for felt hat production.

The Powhatan Indians and the English spoke different languages which made communication and mutual understanding very difficult. The first Jamestown settlers were English-speaking people, many of whom probably had both spoken and written skills, and also brought with them the varied dialects from their English counties of origin. Later settlers were probably not as literate as the first group of Englishmen, which included many of the gentry class. These dialects would sound foreign to many English-speaking people today. The Powhatan Indians spoke a very different language called Algonquian, specifically from the Eastern Algonquian subgroup of languages which, like English, was spoken in at least two (possibly more) distinguishable dialects. Unlike the English, however, the Algonquianspeaking Native Americans used no written form of communication and were amazed at the English ability to send written messages. The captured John Smith sent a written request to James Fort with Indian messengers who, upon returning with the requested items, believed that Smith “could either divine or the paper could speak.”

Exchanging “hostages” was a method used by both groups to express good intentions or guarantee the good faith of the other group as well as a way to learn about the other’s culture. In 1609 John Smith left young Henry Spelman with Chief Powhatan to learn their language. Spelman lived with the Powhatans for about a year, learned much about his hosts and their language, and upon returning, served as an interpreter for the English. Spelman’s descriptions of the Indian culture serve as the only accounts written by an Englishman who actually lived with the Powhatans.

Clothing and language were not the only differences between the two groups. The Powhatans and English viewed many of each others’ actions and habits as different and unusual. Male and female **work roles** differed greatly between English and Powhatan cultures. The English was a patrilineal society in which family lineage was determined by the father’s side of the family. Although English men were accustomed to seeing women perform a great deal of domestic work, manual labor outside of the home was usually considered men’s work. Powhatan society was matrilineal: following family lineage through the mother’s side of the family. In addition to domestic work, women also performed

many of the necessary manual tasks in the Powhatan community, such as farming and house building. Consequently, the English viewed Powhatan men as lazy because they did not perform the same work that English men did at home. The English, of course, brought no women to Jamestown until 1608 which may have confused the Powhatan's view of the English culture.

Powhatan houses were primarily longhouses, made by bending saplings to create a frame and then attaching pieces of tree bark or grass mats to cover the frame. In most Powhatan tribes, women built these longhouses, called "yehakin" in Algonquian, some of which were large enough to house as many as twenty extended-family members. **Buildings at Jamestown** were apparently constructed in the manner most familiar to Englishmen. Houses were framed with wood timbers, and walled with wattle and daub, a stick and mud combination. Roofs were most likely thatched with reeds from nearby marshlands. Although the settler's houses were built like single family homes that had been constructed in England, they probably housed as many as six to ten men during the early settlement period.

Powhatan and English religious beliefs also differed in many ways. The Powhatans did not separate religion from other aspects of daily life such as medicine, work, eating or dancing. Powhatan priests, for example, also practiced medical healing, and the Powhatan sweat lodge was used both for personal hygiene and spiritual cleansing. Powhatans were polytheistic, and thus worshipped many gods including things that could hurt them like fire, water, lightning and thunder. They focused their worship on pleasing Oke or Okeus, the god they believed had evil powers, and commonly made offerings of items such as dried tobacco, deer meat, and puccoon or bloodroot. The English at Jamestown were primarily Anglican, a Protestant form of Christianity. The English, who worshiped only one god, viewed the Powhatans as savages, and expected them to convert willingly to Christianity once introduced to the power of the Christian god. Native Americans, because of their belief in many gods, generally did not find it difficult to accept belief in the Christian god without rejecting belief in their other gods, a characteristic that mystified and angered their would-be English saviors.

Medical practices of both cultures would seem primitive when compared to 20th-century medicine. Although some English and Indian medical practices were similar, such as the use of herbal remedies, purging, vomiting and cupping or blistering, the reasons behind them were quite different. The Powhatans saw health and religion as closely related parts of their lives. Sickness was the result of individual or tribal transgressions against the gods and the natural world. Minor ailments were treated with simple, natural remedies, but major illnesses were believed to be caused by some foreign substance introduced into the body by bad spirits. Powhatans believed that this foreign substance upset the internal balance

of the ailing person and could only be cured with the aid of the priest who used purges and magical remedies to rid the patient of the illness. The English, too, believed that illness was caused by an imbalance in the patient's body but did not call on their religious leaders to cure diseases. Many medical men of this period believed that illnesses were caused by an excess of one of the body's four humors: blood, phlegm, black bile or yellow bile. Healing was accomplished by attempting to restore a balance to the patient's body by removing the excess humoral liquid by bleeding, purging, vomiting, etc. Although herbal cures were well known in England, the settlers did not trust the herbal remedies used by the Powhatans, and viewed Powhatan healing practices with great suspicion. We have to wonder what the Powhatans may have thought of the English practice of bleeding.

Members of both cultures brought different diseases and immunities with them as they came in contact at Jamestown. Of the two, the Indians were the most susceptible to new diseases. Having lived in an environment free from many serious infectious diseases for hundreds of years, the Powhatans' bodies were not prepared to ward off new diseases brought by English settlers. Smallpox, measles and other respiratory diseases brought illness and death to the Powhatan people in untold numbers. After a death in a Powhatan family, female relatives remained at home mourning and wailing loudly with faces painted black, possibly to symbolize death or extreme sadness. The English, on the other hand, had already experienced most of the diseases present in Virginia, but still suffered from typhoid, dysentery and possibly malaria. These diseases killed hundreds of Englishmen, but were caused by unsanitary living conditions, brackish water and poor nutrition rather than from contact with the Powhatan Indians.

Apparently neither the Powhatans nor the English really understood each other's ideas of land use and ownership. Consequently, Powhatans in later years eagerly "sold" land to the English not fully understanding that they would lose all right to use of that land. When Powhatans continued to hunt on land sold to the English, the new English owners considered them trespassers and ordered them to leave. Additionally, when the English saw large tracts of unoccupied land throughout Virginia, they assumed that it was not in use and therefore available to be claimed. They did not always appreciate the Powhatan system of communal land allocation and the fact that open land was not unused but was considered community hunting and fishing territory, an important source of food for Indian families.

These different needs, understandings, and views of the other culture often resulted in fighting and violence. Both groups initiated violence at different times and did not always attempt a peaceful exchange before resorting to warfare. The first violent encounter for the Jamestown settlers was their hostile greeting from the Indians at Cape Henry in April 1607. The English later resorted to violence as a way to obtain Powhatan food, information or loyalty.

Both groups had certain advantages when violence erupted. The Powhatans were capable of organizing warriors for large scale attacks, although most assaults were ambushes conducted by only a few men. Powhatans would begin the attack by showering the enemy with arrows, and would then close to fight with war clubs. Each warrior tried to get within accurate shooting range without exposing himself to enemy fire, which meant moving fast and using whatever concealment was available. War cries and body paint may have been used to frighten the enemy or to get him to make the first move and expose himself to Powhatan arrow fire. Although the Powhatans had the advantage in terms of numbers, tactics and familiarity with the wooded landscape, the English brought with them superior technology and firepower. English ships, like the Susan Constant, carried cannon that not only killed but terrified many would-be Powhatan attackers. A settler was usually armed with a musket of some type, a sword, and often wore protective armor, a helmet and shield (or target). English military formations and tactics that worked well on the open European battlefields, did not work well in wooded Virginia. Weapons like the pike were not as useful as the musket and sword. Captain John Smith often found that a confident attitude and a few men armed with muskets could defeat or frighten away groups of Indian warriors of much greater numbers. Although the Indians succeeded in killing and wounding numerous Englishmen during early skirmishes, the settlers' superior technology and the Powhatans' fear of their unfamiliar power ultimately put the Powhatans on the losing side of most conflicts.

Descendants of both the Powhatan Indians and the English settlers still live in Virginia. The lifestyle of both groups has changed with advances in technology, but the lifestyle of the Powhatan Indians began changing immediately upon contact with the English settlers. The Powhatans found that they had to adopt many aspects of the dominant English culture in order to survive on the fringes of rapidly expanding English society. Powhatans began learning to speak English and eventually lost the Algonquian language skills over generations of contact with the English. Powhatans also began adopting aspects of the English material culture, using English cloth and tools in place of traditional materials and implements. During the 17th century many of the Powhatans who survived warfare with the English were killed by English diseases, especially smallpox. As black slaves were introduced to Virginia, the Indians were grouped with African-Americans and considered in the same social class. By the end of the 17th century there were probably about 1000 Powhatans living in Virginia. Today there are seven organized tribes which are recognized by the Commonwealth of Virginia as Powhatan Indians: the Mattaponi, the Upper Mattaponi, the Nansemond, the Chickahominy, the Pamunkey, the Rappahannock and the Eastern Chickahominy.

CULTURES IN CONTACT

Teacher Guide to Activities

ACTIVITY I: A worksheet, “Comparing Cultures” has been provided. This can be used effectively in many different forms and at various times. This could be made into an overhead worksheet to use and reuse with the class; as a design for a bulletin board that could be ongoing; as a pre-test for individual students to begin to identify bias; as a culminating activity; as a review after the hands-on program or guided tour; or in some other imaginative manner. The concept of the worksheet is central to the unit study.

ACTIVITY II: The basic research and historical background for the “Cultures in Contact” program is derived from anthropology. The next set of activities offers the opportunity to teach students about anthropology, the method of anthropologists, and ethnohistory. The first step in this direction is “Vocabulary.” The enclosed list covers terms appropriate to the fields of social science and an understanding of culture.

Once the students understand terminology, they are presented with a problem to solve using the methodology—“An Anthropologist Studies the Lunch Room.” This two-page activity requires each student be given observation time; encourages individual evaluation of methodology; and leads to class hypotheses.

ACTIVITY III: Students are given an anthropologist’s problem from the past—“How does the Ethnohistorian Use the Information From the Past . . . To know about Powhatan Indian Homes?” This activity can be done without completing Activity II, however, it has been inserted sequentially with the study of the field of anthropology.

SAMPLE ANSWERS:

The homes are round and covered with mats. There is a door opening at the flat end.

The longhouse is oval in shape. This shape does not conform to the squared corners and/or flat end of the John White drawing.

Longhouses are located near rivers; built like English arbors; covered with mats or bark; smoke hole at top.

The Powhatan Indians most likely built their homes with rounded ends. They probably would have learned to build a house that would be stable. The archaeological evidence supports the round ends.

John White was an English artist who may have been biased in how he saw the house — painting them like he thought they ought to be. “They are as warm as stoves but very smoky . . .” The fires burned constantly in the Powhatan yehakin; this helped to keep them dry. Our longhouses have fires burning only when an interpreter is present to attend the fire so that the houses do not stay as dry.

ACTIVITY IV: Language differences between the two cultures certainly contributed to misunderstandings. This activity teaches a few Powhatan words. Students are presented with “My Powhatan Dictionary.” The words come from those recorded phonetically by the English and are defined as the English recorders understood them. Because 17th-century English speakers had different dialects, accents, and limited standardized spelling and because the Powhatan language has been essentially lost, we cannot say exactly how these words are pronounced.

Students are provided with a worksheet using DeBry prints of John White drawings to identify the Powhatan words for various objects.

ANSWERS:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| A. Crenepo (A woman) | G. Mattassin (copper) |
| B. Nemarough (A man) | H. Pokatawer (fire) |
| C. Attawp (A bow) | I. Musses (pieces of wood) |
| D. Attonce (Arrow) | J. Hominy (hominy) |
| E. Apooke (Tobacco) | |
| F. Yehakin (House) | |

ACTIVITY V: (There is no activity sheet provided for this.) Shakespeare was writing and producing plays in London while the Jamestown settlers were struggling to survive in America. There is no doubt that Shakespeare heard of the Jamestown experience. In 1609, the “Third Supply” was organized to bring more settlers and supplies to the settlers. On the 2nd of June, nine vessels set sail for the New World. In 7 weeks, they had reached the area of the Bermudas when they encountered a hurricane. The Sea Venture — carrying such notable passengers as commander of the fleet, Sir George Somers; captain of the ship, Christopher Newport; a company of soldiers under the command of Captain George Yeardley; John Rolfe and his first wife — crash landed in Bermuda with all passengers saved. Shakespeare was inspired by the adventure of these castaways to write The Tempest. The story and language usage give interesting insight into 17th-century Englishmen. Reading excerpts from this play or another Shakespearean play would allow students to experience some of the 17th-century English language.

ACTIVITY VI: A good children’s book about the Sea Venture is A Lion to Guard Us by Clyde Robert Bulla. It includes some interesting interaction with the main character, an English girl, and the Powhatan Indians. This part of the book is pure fiction and might provide some good discussion on documented relationships between the English and Powhatans.

ACTIVITY VII: The map activity will focus attention on the dramatic changes in population distribution that occurred in Tidewater Virginia in a very short period of time. The Native American population was significantly reduced due to disease and warfare. The remaining Powhatan tribes first chose to retreat from the rivers and then, in 1644, were confined to reservations. Students should be able to hypothesize that Indian villages are located along the rivers; that English settlers caused Powhatan Indian villages to move away or that English settlers occupied abandoned Indian villages; over time, the number of Powhatan villages was greatly reduced; English settlement expanded.

ACTIVITY VIII: The pictures of the English pikeman and the Indian warrior offer visual evidence of important differences between these two cultures. These prints and the contrast of dress and clothing will be a significant part of the “Cultures in Contact” program. This activity may be best saved to use as a review and will be especially useful for students who may miss the program.

ACTIVITY IX: “Powhatan Indians and English Settlers” is a crossword review of many of the terms and concepts of this unit. Answers are at the bottom.

ACTIVITY X: Using the enclosed information entitled “Viewpoints of History,” have students make some hypotheses about the experiences of minorities in the early years of 17th-century Virginia. English women, Powhatan Indians, and now the African-American is introduced. Students can employ their ethnohistory skills to chart their knowledge of this new cultural element into Virginia. The absence of substantial information is one of the main points made by this lesson.

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD PUZZLE:

