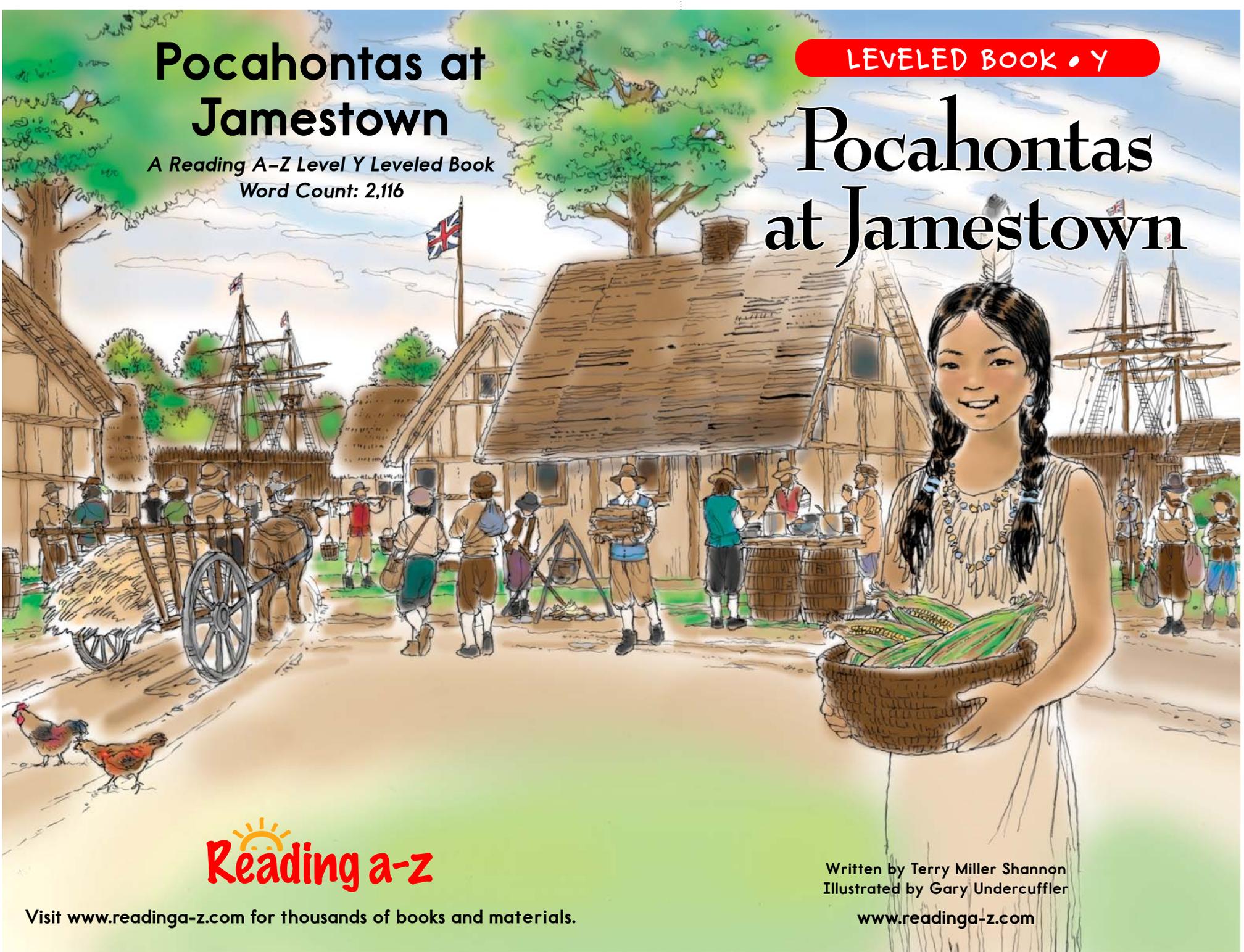


# Pocahontas at Jamestown

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book  
Word Count: 2,116

LEVELED BOOK • Y

# Pocahontas at Jamestown



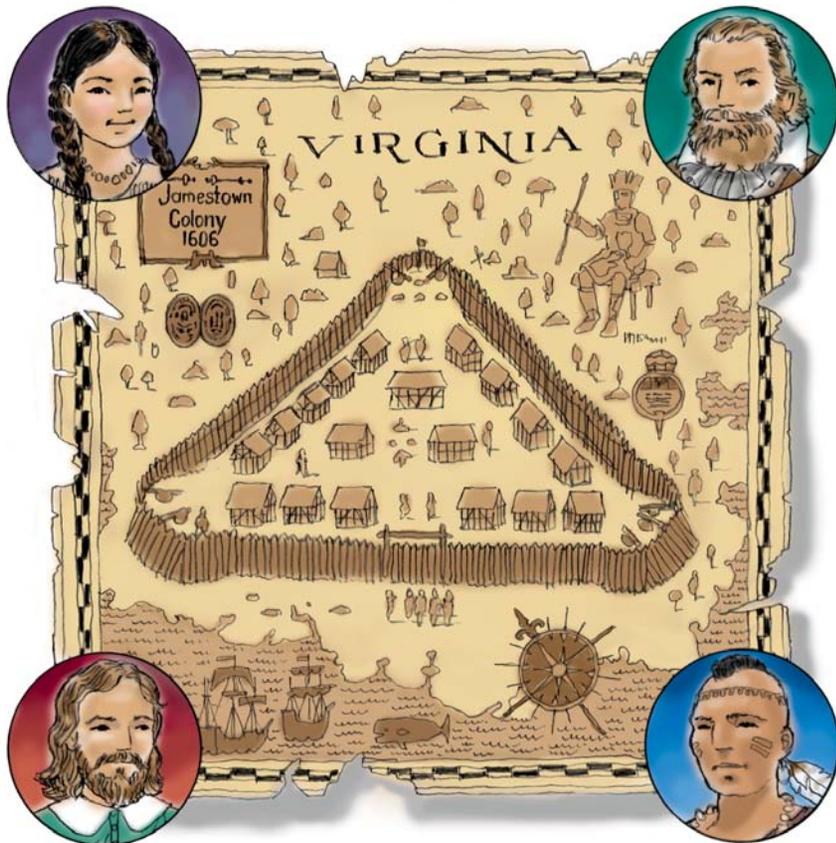
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Written by Terry Miller Shannon  
Illustrated by Gary Undercuffler

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Page 3: A hand-tinted portrait of Pocahontas, Rebecca Rolfe, wife of colonist John Rolfe, shown with their son, Thomas. This portrait remained in the Rolfe family for many generations and is thought to have been done at the time of their visit to England.

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Level Y Leveled Book  
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## Correlation

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### Truth or Fiction?

Captain John Smith was one of the leaders of the new colony called Jamestown, which was founded in 1607 on the coast of what is now the state of Virginia.

Years after he had returned to England, Capt. Smith liked to tell stories about what life had been like in Jamestown. In one of his stories, he claimed to have been captured by a group of local warriors, led by Chief Powhatan, the chief of all the tribes in the Chesapeake Bay region. As the warriors stood all around him, with their clubs raised, Smith was sure he was about to be killed.

Just then, a little Indian princess named Pocahontas ran in and knelt alongside Smith. She begged the Chief, her father, to spare the life of this stranger. Her plea saved Smith’s life.

The only problem with this dramatic story is that it does not seem to be true. Experts disagree about whether Smith’s life would have been threatened—or wonder if he made up the whole story. He may have made up the story, but Pocahontas was a real person.

## Who Was Pocahontas?

Pocahontas was a young woman who lived more than 400 years ago, but people are still fascinated by her today. Pocahontas didn't write about her feelings or thoughts so we know little about her everyday life. What we do know about her we've learned from word-of-mouth retellings of stories and the written records of historical events that took place around her at the time.



Pocahontas as imagined for the 1995 Disney animated movie.

Some of those stories and records have been changed by people who wanted certain events to sound more exciting. These changes mean that many movies, poems, and stories about Pocahontas are fictional and **contradict** each other.

The real Pocahontas was born around 1595. She was the daughter of Powhatan, the powerful chief of the Powhatan **Confederacy**, a large group of **Algonquian** tribes.

Pocahontas had several names. "Pocahontas," a nickname that means "playful one," gives us a hint as to her personality.



This detailed map, drawn by Capt. John Smith in 1606, shows the location of Jamestown and the territory of each of the Powhatan Confederacy tribes.

These member tribes had lived in the low-lying coastal regions of modern-day Virginia for hundreds of years. There were once more than thirty tribes and around 25,000 members in the Powhatan Confederacy.

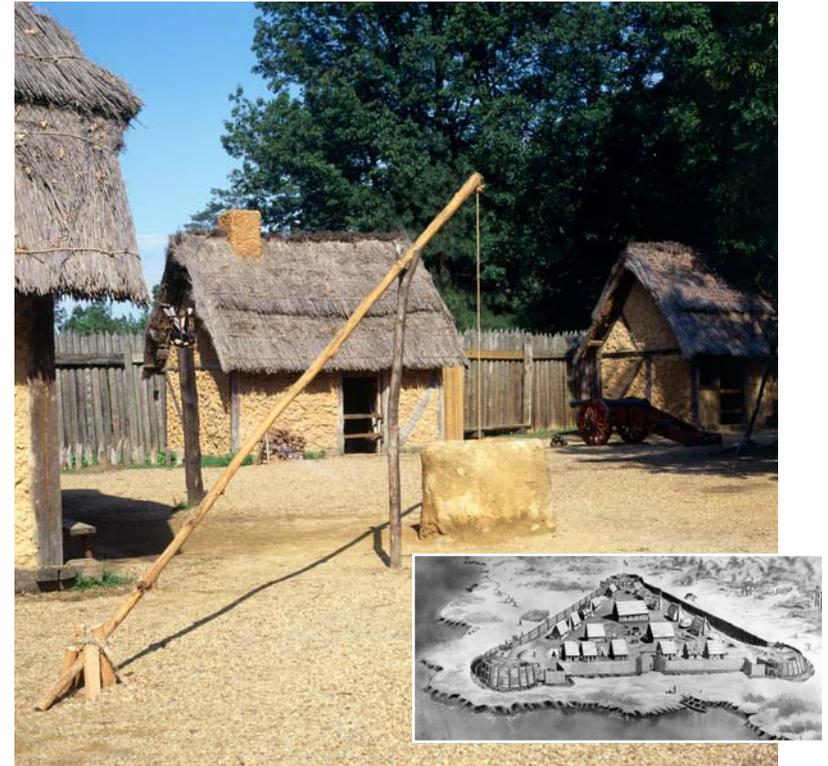
Several English colonists wrote about the Powhatans. They described strong, tall people who were uneasy with the newcomers but who also wanted to trade with them. The Powhatans built wooden homes, carved canoes from local trees, and used rock and bone to make tools. The men hunted and fished, and the women farmed.

## Newcomers

Pocahontas was 11 or 12 on May 14, 1607, when the original group of 104 English men and boys arrived in the area and created the **settlement** called Jamestown. It was the first permanent English **colony** in America. Jamestown was named for King James I of England, who granted a **charter** to the Virginia Company of London in 1606. The charter gave the company the right to explore and settle anywhere from modern-day New York State to North Carolina. The company's **investors** hoped to find gold and silver in the New World. They also hoped to find a shortcut river route to the Pacific Ocean in order to trade more easily with the countries of Asia.

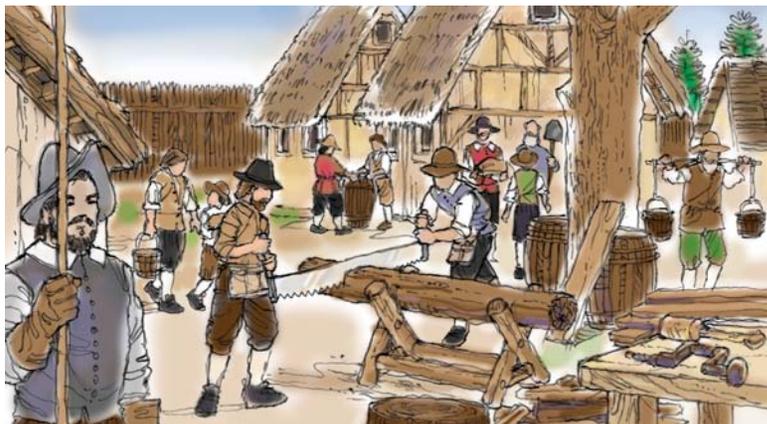


Before Jamestown, the English had not successfully established colonies in North America. Spain had already founded many colonies in the Americas. The English settlers in Jamestown knew they were in danger from the Spanish navy. They feared the Spanish king might order their settlement destroyed if he learned of it.



A section of the recreated Jamestown fort, showing the well and typical houses. Inset: a drawing of the original triangular shape of the fort.

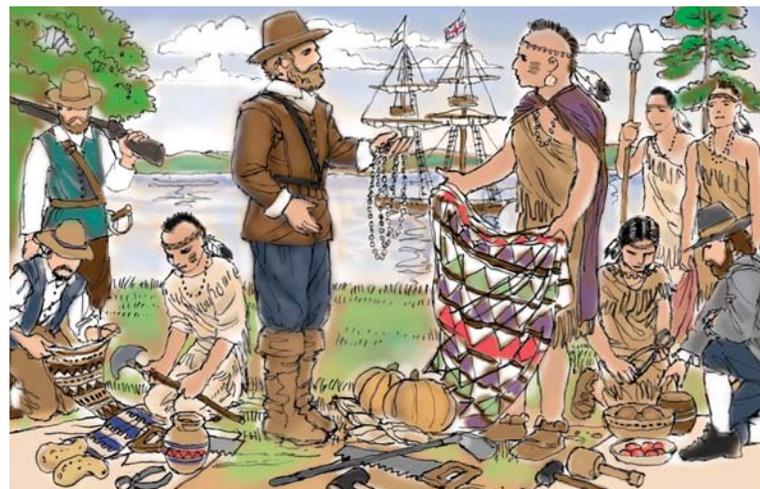
The site chosen for the Jamestown colony was on a peninsula in the James River. Today, this peninsula has become an island. The settlers chose this site to build their settlement for several reasons: it was close to deep water for easy access to supply ships, no one lived on it, and its shape made it easy to defend. However, the confident colonists came to regret their choice. The land was marshy and the water they drank from the river was muddy and salty.



These first settlers had little practical experience with farming, food storage, and organized **labor**. Most of the adult men were business leaders—not workers. The unskilled group did not collect and store enough food. In August 1607, bad drinking water, disease-carrying mosquitoes, and lack of food caused the settlers to become sick. Many died. At times, there were only 5 men well enough to bury the dead. By the end of the first year, only 38 of the original 104 settlers had survived.

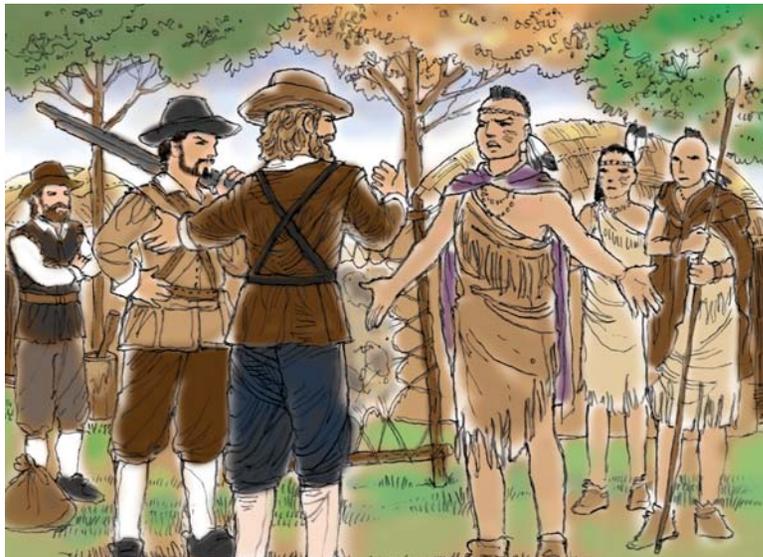
Gradually, the English colonists and the tribes began to trade with each other. The Powhatans offered food in exchange for the settlers' tools and other goods. Their relationship was an uneasy one. Although the Powhatans sometimes offered gifts of food, they also sometimes attacked colonists found outside the fort.

Some experts believe Pocahontas first met Captain John Smith in December 1607, when Chief Powhatan's men captured him. Did Pocahontas save Smith's life? Experts today doubt it. Many believe that the ceremony Smith later described was a traditional one to welcome a newcomer to the tribe—and that Smith's life was never in danger. If this is true, Pocahontas's actions may have been an expected part of the ceremony. Other experts think that, because Smith did not describe Pocahontas as his rescuer until 1624, he might have made up the story. In 1608, Capt. Smith wrote a letter that told of meeting Powhatan but he did not mention Pocahontas. Whatever the truth might have been, Powhatan and Smith eventually established a friendly relationship.



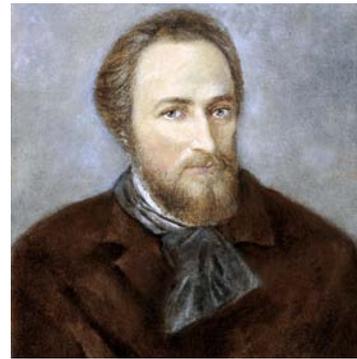
At some point, Pocahontas became a familiar face in the settlement and became Smith's friend. She sometimes brought gifts of food from her father to the colonists. One time, Chief Powhatan sent her to Jamestown to ask the English to release Native American captives. When John Smith wrote of this incident later, he made it sound as if it were his idea to release the captives to Pocahontas.

However, this period of friendly trading didn't last. The struggling, unhealthy English colonists were desperate for food. They wanted corn, but a terrible drought had reduced Powhatan crops, and the tribes had nothing extra to trade. The angry colonists began threatening the Powhatans.



## Kidnapped

After the summer of 1608, Jamestown settlers and Powhatans were more like enemies than friends. Chief Powhatan had moved away from the area and Pocahontas rarely visited the settlement. Some experts believe she may have saved the lives of colonists in a trading party in January 1609 when she warned them of an ambush planned by her father.

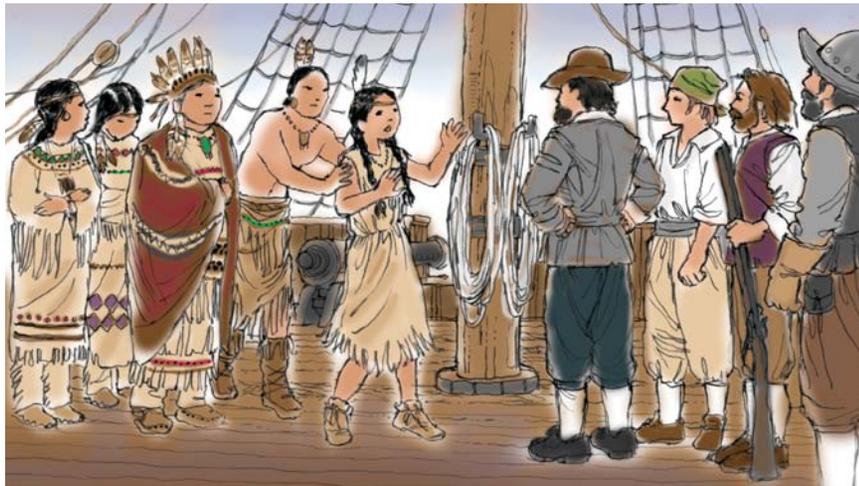


Baron De La Warr brought life-saving supplies to the colony. The state of Delaware is named after him.

The arrival of new officers and additional colonists who were also inexperienced and also required food and shelter caused further conflicts. By October 1609, Capt. Smith had lost his leadership role, been injured, and returned home to England for treatment.

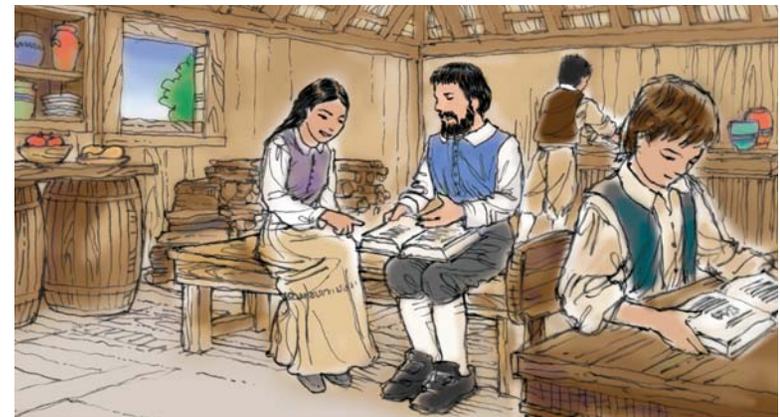
After Smith left, Jamestown settlers became increasingly discouraged. By 1610, they had had enough of illness, hunger, and death—and those who remained decided to go home to England. However, as they were sailing away from the coast, they met a supply ship carrying the colony's new governor, Baron De La Warr. The weary settlers returned to Jamestown.

Under their new leadership, the expanding group of English settlers began to establish more colonies beyond Jamestown—which increased tensions with the Powhatans. An Englishman named Captain Samuel Argall learned that Pocahontas was visiting a nearby town. Argall decided to kidnap Pocahontas and use her to trade for the release of English prisoners held by Chief Powhatan. Capt. Argall persuaded a local chief to join forces with him against Powhatan. This chief and his wives managed to lure Pocahontas onto Argall’s ship. Argall then sailed to Jamestown, where he sent word to Powhatan that he had captured Pocahontas. Argall said he would set her free if Powhatan would release English prisoners and also return English weapons and tools that Powhatan’s warriors had taken.



At first, Argall’s plan seemed to work. After Powhatan heard of the kidnapping and Argall’s **ransom** demand, the chief freed seven English prisoners. However, he didn’t return the stolen weapons and tools. After time passed without a solution, Powhatan finally refused to **negotiate** anymore. In March 1614, the English finally demanded that Powhatan pay the ransom, but by that time everything had changed in Pocahontas’s life.

During the long negotiations between Argall and Powhatan, Pocahontas stayed at an English settlement called Henricus. According to English writers, she was treated with respect, although she remained a prisoner. While there, she was taught her captors’ religion. The Anglican Church baptized Pocahontas and gave her the baptismal name “Rebecca.”



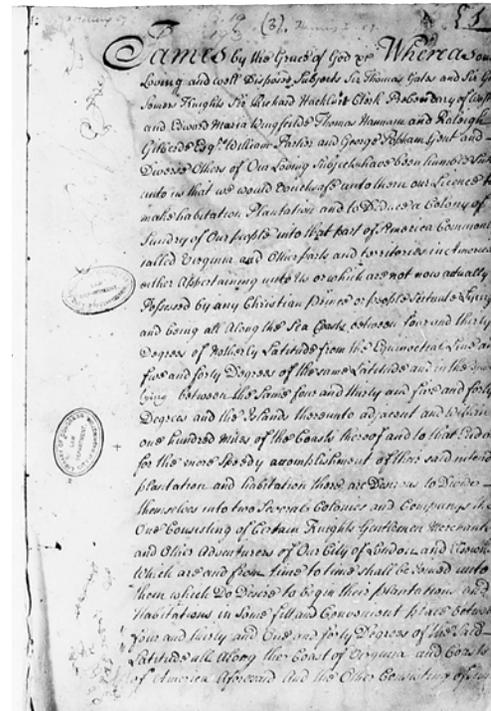


### Love, Peace, Prosperity

As the many months passed, Pocahontas fell in love with an English man. John Rolfe was a 28-year-old planter who was well thought of in the colony. Rolfe had begun to raise tobacco as a major crop in 1611. His farming and storage methods were quite successful, and Jamestown finally became profitable. More settlers, including many English women, arrived to create new businesses, start families, and expand the colonies.

When Rolfe asked Pocahontas to marry him, Virginia governor Thomas Dale and Chief Powhatan both agreed to their marriage. One of Pocahontas's uncles was a witness at their wedding, which took place in the Jamestown church around April 5, 1614. The following year, Pocahontas gave birth to a son, Thomas.

There was another very important outcome of the marriage: the “Peace of Pocahontas.” The union of the native Powhatan woman and the English man helped to calm the ongoing conflicts between the tribes and the colonists. People saw Pocahontas as the **symbol** of these peaceful times.



A copy of the 1606 charter of the Virginia Company of London, stating its authority to establish the new colony

The Virginia Company in London saw the marriage as an opportunity to promote their business. The company had once paid for the settling of Jamestown. Now, they hoped to raise more money by using Rebecca Rolfe as a symbol of their success.

They believed that people in England would be interested in the favorite daughter of a powerful chief, who now belonged to England's church and had married an English man.

## In London's Society

The Virginia Company sent a group to England in the spring of 1616 with the goal of raising support for their settlements.

Pocahontas and her family were on the ship, along with Virginia Governor Thomas Dale, and some young Powhatan women. Chief Powhatan sent his brother-in-law, Uttamatomakkin, to observe.



After docking in September 1616, the group toured throughout England before finally arriving in London. The Virginia Company provided the visiting Pocahontas with clothing and lodging during her stay. An artist created a portrait of Pocahontas for the Virginia Company to use as publicity for her visit. London **society**, as well as important investors, met Pocahontas—who enchanted them.

Chief Powhatan asked Uttamatomakkin to tell him about the king of England and whether previous reports he had heard about England were true: that there were almost no trees in England! An earlier visitor who had only seen London and the Thames River had mistakenly informed Powhatan that the English had no trees.



King James I (left) and Queen Anne of England

The ladies and gentlemen of English high society were always hoping to find unique people to entertain them. Pocahontas caused a great sensation. After Pocahontas and Uttamatomakkin met King James I, he invited them to attend his Twelfth Night formal costume ball, which was held on the last night of the Christmas holiday season. The two guests were seated among the most important members of the audience to watch a play at the king's ball.

One of Pocahontas's old friends lived in England: Captain John Smith. Smith had never forgotten the courageous Powhatan girl. He wrote a letter to Queen Anne, telling her all the things Pocahontas had done to help the Jamestown settlers.

But Smith didn't arrange to visit his former friend until after Pocahontas had already been in England for several months. When he wrote about the meeting in 1624, he said he'd been too busy to visit her earlier.

Evidently Pocahontas was visibly upset when she finally met with Smith again. It may have been that she believed Smith had died in 1609 when he left Virginia to sail home to England. Or she might have questioned why Capt. Smith had not come to see her earlier. Either way, it took her several minutes to become calm enough to speak with Smith.

When Pocahontas finally did talk to Captain Smith, she reminded him how her father had welcomed him, a stranger in their world, as a son. Smith had even called Powhatan "Father." Pocahontas told Smith that he had not treated her father and her people well. She said since she was now a stranger in Smith's land, she should be allowed to call Smith "Father." Smith refused. According to Smith's 1624 writings, she told him that "your countrymen will lie much." It would be their last meeting.



After five months in England, Pocahontas and her family were ready to sail home, but they were delayed by stormy weather. Two months past their planned departure date, they began their trip by sailing down the Thames River. They hadn't traveled far when Pocahontas became ill.





Pocahontas was taken ashore at Gravesend. She was only around twenty-one years old, but she did not recover. Before she died, she tried to comfort her husband by saying “. . . all must die. 'Tis enough that the child liveth.”

No one knows what illness ended Pocahontas’s life. Some experts believe she suffered from a lung disease. Others believe she had dysentery, a contagious infection of the intestines.

Pocahontas was buried on March 21, 1617, at St. George’s Church in Gravesend. John Rolfe left England and sailed back to Virginia. He left his son, who was also ill, behind with relatives.

Within a year of his daughter’s death, Powhatan also died. With Pocahontas and Chief Powhatan gone, everything changed. It was the end of the peace between the Algonquian tribes and English settlers.

## A Mysterious and Legendary Life

Pocahontas is one of the most famous women of early American history yet we know little about her life. We do know that Pocahontas helped the Jamestown settlers survive. She brought them food when they were starving. She may also have saved the lives of some colonists by warning them of Chief Powhatan’s ambush



plans. She cultivated peace between the English newcomers and the Native Americans through both her early friendship with John Smith and her marriage to an English man.

Pocahontas continues to fascinate many people. Books, plays, poems, paintings, and movies have featured her. While many stories of Pocahontas contradict one another, most people agree that she played an important role in early American history.

Statue of Pocahontas outside St. George’s Church in Gravesend, Kent, England

**1596: (approximately): Pocahontas is born near present-day Jamestown, Virginia**

**1607: The English settle Jamestown; Pocahontas first sees English colonists**

**1608: Pocahontas travels to Jamestown with a group; the English release Powhatan captives**

**1609: John Smith sails home to England; many Jamestown settlers die**

**1610: Jamestown settlers are so discouraged that they sail for home but return when they meet a supply ship.**

**1611: John Rolfe begins raising tobacco, which proves very profitable for Jamestown**

**1613: Samuel Argall kidnaps Pocahontas**

**1614: Pocahontas and John Rolfe marry**

**1615: Thomas Rolfe is born to Pocahontas and John Rolfe**

**1616: Pocahontas visits England**

**1617: Pocahontas dies**



## Glossary

<b>Algonquian</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to any of a group of native North American tribes who speak a language that is part of the Algonquian family of languages (p. 5)
<b>charter</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an official document creating an organization and defining its rights and responsibilities (p. 7)
<b>colony</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an area or a country that is ruled by or belongs to another country (p. 7)
<b>confederacy</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of people, organizations, states, or countries that join together for a shared purpose (p. 5)
<b>contradict</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to state the opposite or challenge the truth of something; to disagree (p. 5)
<b>investors</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people, companies, or organizations that buy something or put money into a business hoping to make a profit (p. 7)
<b>labor</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	difficult physical work or the workers who do the work (p. 9)
<b>negotiate</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to try to reach a formal agreement through discussion (p. 14)
<b>ransom</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a payment demanded or paid in exchange for the release of someone or something from captivity (p. 14)
<b>settlement</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a new place where people live (p. 7)
<b>society</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a select group of rich, stylish, or influential people (p. 17)
<b>symbol</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an object, picture, or sign that represents an idea, letter, or word (p. 16)