

1. What initial challenges do the Jamestown settlers face—from without and within?

2. Do you think the Powhatan Indians were as peaceful in real life as they are depicted in the film? Why do you think the director chose to represent them this way?

3. How does the film exhibit the tense world of negotiation, dialogue, and commerce between the Powhatans and the English?

4. Why does the New World in America appear to be such a violent place?

5. Does the depiction of the Smith and Pocahontas relationship dismantle or reinforce the notion that they were romantically involved with one another?

6. What new life does Pocahontas adopt and why?

7. How does urban London contrast with Pocahontas’s original environment?

8. What becomes of Pocahontas? How do you interpret the film’s ending?

9. How does the title *The New World* have a double meaning?

10. Is *The New World* helpful or hurtful to our understandings of colonial North America?

Shape

Description automatically generated with medium confidence  
Subscribe and view additional content on our YouTube channel.

Accompanying primary sources:

***John Smith's 1616 Letter to Queen Anne of Great Britain:***

Most admired Queen,

The love I bear my God, my King and country, hath so oft emboldened me in the worst of extreme dangers, that now honesty doth constrain me to presume thus far beyond myself, to present your Majesty this short discourse: if ingratitude be a deadly poison to all honest virtues, I must be guilty of that crime if I should omit any means to be thankful.

So it is, that some ten years ago being in Virginia, and taken prisoner by the power of Powhatan their chief King, I received from this great Salvage exceeding great courtesy, especially from his son Nantaquaus, the most manliest, comeliest, boldest spirit, I ever saw in a Salvage, and his sister Pocahontas, the Kings most dear and well-beloved daughter, being but a child of twelve or thirteen years of age, whose compassionate pitiful heart, of my desperate estate, gave me much cause to respect her: I being the first Christian this proud King and his grim attendants ever saw: and thus enthralled in their barbarous power, I cannot say I felt the least occasion of want that was in the power of those my mortal foes to prevent, notwithstanding all their threats. After some six weeks fatting amongst those Salvage courtiers, at the minute of my execution, she hazarded the beating out of her own brains to save mine; and not only that, but so prevailed with her father, that I was safely conducted to Jamestown: where I found about eight and thirty miserable poor and sick creatures, to keep possession of all those large territories of Virginia; such was the weakness of this poor commonwealth, as had the salvages not fed us, we directly had starved. And this relief, most gracious Queen, was commonly brought us by this Lady Pocahontas.

Notwithstanding all these passages, when inconstant fortune turned our peace to war, this tender virgin would still not spare to dare to visit us, and by her our jars have been oft appeased, and our wants still supplied; were it the policy of her father thus to employ her, or the ordinance of God thus to make her his instrument, or her extraordinary affection to our nation, I know not: but of this I am sure; when her father with the utmost of his policy and power, sought to surprise me, having but eighteen with me, the dark night could not affright her from coming through the irksome woods, and with watered eyes gave me intelligence, with her best advice to escape his fury; which had he known, he had surely slain her.

Jamestown with her wild train she as freely frequented, as her fathers habitation; and during the time of two or three years, she next under God, was still the instrument to preserve this colony from death, famine and utter confusion; which if in those times, had once been dissolved, Virginia might have lain as it was at our first arrival to this day.

Since then, this business having been turned and varied by many accidents from that I left it at: it is most certain, after a long and troublesome war after my departure, betwixt her father and our colony; all which time she was not heard of.

About two years after she herself was taken prisoner, being so detained near two years longer, the colony by that means was relieved, peace concluded; and at last rejecting her barbarous condition, she was married to an English Gentleman, with whom at this present she is in England; the first Christian ever of that Nation, the first Virginian ever spoke English, or had a child in marriage by an Englishman: a matter surely, if my meaning be truly considered and well understood, worthy a Princes understanding.

Thus, most gracious Lady, I have related to your Majesty, what at your best leisure our approved Histories will account you at large, and done in the time of your Majesty's life; and however this might be presented you from a more worthy pen, it cannot from a more honest heart, as yet I never begged anything of the state, or any: and it is my want of ability and her exceeding desert; your birth, means, and authority; her birth, virtue, want and simplicity, doth make me thus bold, humbly to beseech your Majesty to take this knowledge of her, though it be from one so unworthy to be the reporter, as myself, her husbands estate not being able to make her fit to attend your Majesty. The most and least I can do, is to tell you this, because none so oft hath tried it as myself, and the rather being of so great a spirit, however her stature: if she should not be well received, seeing this Kingdom may rightly have a Kingdom by her means; her present love to us and Christianity might turn to such scorn and fury, as to divert all this good to the worst of evil; whereas finding so great a Queen should do her some honor more than she can imagine, for being so kind to your servants and subjects, would so ravish her with content, as endear her dearest blood to effect that, your Majesty and all the Kings honest subjects most earnestly desire.

And so I humbly kiss your gracious hands,

Captain John Smith, 1616

*This 1622 letter from Jamestown colonist Sebastian Brandt to Henry Hovener, a Dutch merchant living in London, provides a snapshot of the colony in flux. Brandt, who likely arrived in 1619 in a wave of 1,200 immigrants, writes of his wife’s and brother’s deaths the previous year almost in passing.*

Well beloved good friend Henry Hovener,

My comendations remembred, I hartely [wish] your welfare for god be thanked I am now in good health, but my brother and my wyfe are dead aboute a yeare pass’d And touchinge the busynesse that I came hither is nothing yett performed, by reason of my sicknesse & weaknesse I was not able to travell up and downe the hills and dales of these countries but doo nowe intend every daye to walke up and downe the hills for good Mineralls here is both golde silver and copper to be had and therefore I will doe my endeavour by the grace of god to effect what I am able to performe And I intreat you to beseeche the Right Hon: & Wor: Company in my behalfe to grant me my freedome to be sent either to me I dowbte not to doo well & good service in these countries humbly desyringe them also to provyde me some [appointed] fellowe & a strong boye to assiste me in my businesse, and that it may please the aforesaid Company to send me at my charge a bed wth a bolster and cover and some Linnen for shirtes and sheetes.

Sixe fallinge bands wth Last Size pairs of shoes twoo pairs of bootes three pairs of cullered stockings and garters wth three pairs of lether gloves some powder and shott twoo little runletts of oyle and vinnegar some spice & suger to comfort us here in our sicknesse abowte ffyftie pounds weight of holland and Englishe cheese together, Lykewyse some knyves, spoons, combes and all sorts of cullerd beads as you knowe the savage Indians use Allso one Rundlett wth all sortes of yron nayles great and small, three haire sives, two hatchetts wth twoo broad yrons and some Allum And send all these necessaries thinges in a dry fatt wth the first shippinge dyrected unto Mr. Pontes in James Towne here in Virginia And whatsoever this all costes I will not onely wth my moste humble service but allso wth some good Tobacco Bevor and Otterskins and other commodities here to be had recompence the Company for the same And yf you could send for my brother Phillipps Sonne in Darbesheere to come hether itt [were] a great commoditie ffor me or suche another used in minerall workes And thus I comitt you to the Almighty.

Sebastian Brandt

Virginia 13 January 1622.