

Captain John Smith's Voyages on the Chesapeake Bay

Lesson 3: Trading Post - Cultural Encounters between Native Americans and the English Colonists

Audience: 7th Grade (Social Studies)

Relevant Standards of Learning:

- Virginia: Grades 4-12 History and Social Science – Virginia Studies – VS.3 Colonization and Conflict: 1607 through the American Revolution
Grades 4- 12 History and Social Science – United States History to 1877 – USI.3 Exploration to Revolution: Pre-Columbian Times to the 1770s
- Maryland: Social Studies – 2.0 Content Standard – Peoples of the Nation and the World – Grades 4 to 7 – Elements of Culture; Cultural Diffusion; Movement of People, Goods and Ideas

Goal(s):

Students will gain a better appreciation of how Native American and European cultures interacted in 1608 through an interactive trading game that simulates conditions at that time.

Objectives:

Examine excerpts from John Smith's journal along with a series of engravings in order to "step into the shoes" of Smith, his men and the Native Americans during mock trading encounters.

To encourage students to use reasoning and research skills to demonstrate an understanding of how Native Americans and English colonists interacted.

Outcomes:

Students will be able to explain the value of material goods from the perspective of Europeans and Native Americans in 1608.

Materials:

- Trading Cards.
- "Quotes from John Smith" Handout.
- "Quantities of trade goods" Handout.
- Access to the Internet for the entire class.

Time: 1-2 Lessons

Background:

When Captain John Smith and the colonists arrived in Jamestown, they were not well prepared to survive in the New World. Many of the colonists were gentlemen from

England and did not expect to have to farm and labor to survive. The colony depended on The London Company - the investors supporting the colony - to send more ships with food and other supplies. Unfortunately for the colonists, getting supplies from England was not so easy. Supply ships were often delayed by months, leaving the colonists without the supplies they needed to survive. Smith and the colonists began trading with the Native Americans in order to re-supply and promote good relations. When Captain John Smith set off on his voyage of exploration throughout the Chesapeake, one of his important tasks was to establish trade relations with the local population. In his journal, Smith describes some of the many trade encounters he had with the Native Americans.

Through his many encounters, Smith attempted to set-up a trading system that would ensure the colonists the food and other supplies they needed to survive in exchange for the objects the Native Americans deemed valuable. Above all, Native Americans were fascinated with European objects that were new to them, such as guns and iron tools. In his journals, Smith also mentions that glass beads, particularly blue ones, were highly prized among the Native Americans. Copper ornaments were also popular, as war with neighboring tribes had cut off the Native Americans traditional source of copper. The English traded these objects for the items they needed most, corn and other foodstuffs.

Today, when the US sets up trade relationships with other countries, the purpose isn't just to facilitate exchange of goods and currency, but to establish political and social relationships as well. Similarly, both Smith and the Native Americans wanted more than just goods. They both had much to gain in setting up positive relationships. Powhatan quickly realized that the colonists had advanced weaponry, and as allies, could be enlisted to fight his enemies. While Smith probably never saw the Native groups as equal partners, he likely recognized that they had knowledge of the terrain and local animals and plants, not to mention goods and food that would help the colony survive and establish Smith as a crucial leader in Jamestown.

Introduction to Activity: Note to teacher - You may choose to read this out loud or provide students with a copy for their reference. It is not important for students to memorize the details of these encounters. Rather, the idea is for students to get the “flavor” of what a trade encounter was like.

During John Smith's second voyage, in the summer of 1608, he explored the most northern part of the Chesapeake Bay. As part of this voyage, he traveled to the Sassafrass River, which is northeast of modern day Baltimore. There, he and his crew first encountered a group of Native Americans called the Massawomeck. A few days later, Smith met the enemies of the Massawomeck, called the Tockwogh.

The excerpt below, taken from the “Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Water Trail, Statement of National Significance” by John S. Salmon, Project Historian, begins with Smith's encounter with the Massawomeck.

“As they approached the mouth, they saw seven or eight birch-bark canoes coming out, loaded with Massawomeck men. Smith hid his sick men—half the crew—under a

tarpaulin, placed sticks with their hats along the gunwales with two muskets between each hat, and hoped that the warriors would think he had more armed men than he actually had. The ruse seemed to work. The Massawomeck turned and landed on one riverbank while Smith anchored opposite them, and both sides stared at each other for a while. Finally, two canoeloads of Massawomeck ventured out, and Smith gave them metal bells that broke the tension. Everyone soon got down to business, and Smith traded into the evening for venison, bear meat, bearskins, fish, weapons, and shields. The Massawomeck told him that they had just come from a fight with the Tockwogh and showed him their wounds. The next morning, the Englishmen awoke to find them gone.”

After trading successfully with the Massawomeck, Smith and the shallop crew traveled up a river called the Sassafrass, on the northeastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay (for a map of the voyage, visit the Captain John Smith's Voyages of Exploration at <http://johnsmith.psu.edu>).

“On August 1, Smith slowly explored up the Sassafras River. Word of the strange craft quickly spread, and soon Tockwogh men arrived in canoes to surround and attack the Englishmen. Smith tried to persuade them of his friendly intentions in the Powhatan language but the Tockwogh spoke a different Algonquian language. Fortunately, one of them proved bilingual and he conveyed Smith's words to the others. When the Tockwogh spotted the Massawomeck weapons and shields, they assumed that Smith had taken them by force... They escorted the Englishmen seven miles upriver to their palisaded town, where Smith noticed that they had tools of iron and brass and asked where they had come from.”

The Tockwogh explained to Smith that they got the iron and brass tools from another group called the Susquehannock, who lived two days away. Smith wanted to meet the Susquehannock, so the Tockwogh left to invite them to come and trade with Smith. A few days later the Tockwogh and Susquehannock returned to the Sassafrass River with a canoe fleet of sixty men and many trade goods. The English and the Native Americans danced and feasted that night. In the morning they sang songs and exchanged gifts. Smith and the Susquehannock leaders also traded.

“On August 8, Smith departed Tockwogh. He and the Native people probably saw this week of close contact as mutually beneficial: the Susquehannock and Tockwogh had a new trading partner and ally against the Massawomeck, while Smith had learned of other tribes with whom the Susquehannock traded—a network that reached into Canada. He had also learned, from the local inhabitants as well as from his own observations, that the head of the Chesapeake Bay did not lead to the Northwest Passage. It was not what he had hoped to find, but it was useful information nonetheless. His men, by this time, probably were feeling better, too.”

Activity:

Note to teacher: you may want to have a class discussion about the goals of the trade encounters. The Native Americans and the colonists have vastly different views on the values of objects. For example, Native Americans lived by a “gift” economy, an elaborate system of establishing relationships, so glass beads did not have an economic value like money does for us; it was more gift for gift.

In this activity, students will be divided into groups of six. Three students will represent the shallop crew and three students will represent the Native Americans. Each group will receive a set of trading cards representing the items that the English and the Native Americans had available for trade. In each team of three students should decide what the goal of their trade encounter is. Are they trying to secure corn for the winter? Are they trying to establish peace with their neighbors?

Once students have decided their goal, they should begin to trade with the other team of three in their group. Please hand-out the list of how many of each item are available for trade.

On the back of each card that they trade, students should answer these four questions:

- Why was it valuable to the Native Americans?
- Why was it valuable to colonists?
- How many are you trading?
- What are you trading for?

At the end of the trade encounter, students will summarize why they traded as they did and their group leader will present their findings to the class.