

Captain John Smith's Voyages on the Chesapeake Bay

Lesson 1: Obtaining Food Along the Chesapeake Bay: the Ways of the Powhatan Tribe

Audience: 4th and 7th Grade (Social Studies)

Relevant Standards of Learning:

District of Columbia:

Grade 4 - US History and Geography - The Land and People Before European Exploration - 4.1. Students describe the different peoples, with different languages and ways of life, that eventually spread out over the North and South American continents and the Caribbean Basin, from Asia to North America.

Grade 4 - US History and Geography - Settling the Colonies to the 1700s - 4.6 Understand the major ways Native Americans and colonists used the land, adapted to it, and changed the environment.

Virginia:

Grades 4-12 - History and Social Science – Virginia Studies – VS.2 Virginia: the Land and Its First Inhabitants (demonstrate knowledge of the geography and early inhabitants of Virginia)

Grades 4- 12 - History and Social Science – United States History to 1877 – USI.3 Exploration to Revolution: Pre-Columbian Times to the 1770s (demonstrate knowledge of how early cultures developed in North America)

Maryland:

Grade 4 - Social Studies – 2.0 Content Standard – Peoples of the Nation and the World – Elements of Culture (describe the various cultures of early societies in MD)

Grade 4 - Social Studies – 3.0 Content Standard – Geography – Modifying and Adapting to the Environment (describe how people adapt to, modify, and impact the natural environment)

Goals:

Through class discussion and the study of text and images students will be introduced to different aspects of Native American life in the Chesapeake Bay at the time of John Smith's arrival. Particular emphasis will be placed on the anthropological and geographical aspects of obtaining and processing foods.

Objectives:

To interpret historical information via class discussion, drawings, and prose that indicate how Powhatan peoples utilized different ecological zones¹ in the Chesapeake Bay to obtain and process food.

To encourage students to use reasoning and research skills to demonstrate an understanding of how Powhatan peoples – expert naturalists - adapted to seasonal changes.

Outcomes:

Students will be able to explain how Powhatan people obtained food from nature in different ecological zones in different seasons. They will demonstrate their new knowledge through illustrations and prose. They will also be able to demonstrate how the Powhatan processed and consumed these foods, and how food-gathering activities were divided along gender lines.

Students will be able to use the landscape visualization tool to discover how the Powhatan people obtained, processed, and consumed a variety of food stuffs in the Chesapeake Bay around the time of Smith’s arrival.

Students will demonstrate reasoning skills like that of an anthropologist or a historian, to investigate, interpret, and make personal meanings of historical information and images.

Materials:

- Journal entries from Captain J. Smith and/or William Strachey.
- Theodore DeBry’s engraving of Native Americans fishing.
- Drawing paper, coloring markers and pencils.
- Access to the internet for the entire classroom.

Time: 1 – 2 lessons

Activity:

Lesson 1:

The final products of this activity will be (1) student-drawn illustrations of Powhatan people living along the eastern shore of Virginia (or western coast of the Chesapeake Bay), circa the time of John Smith’s voyages; and (2) journal entries written by students describing what is in their illustration.

To stir the imagination of the students, the teacher will begin the lesson by asking students to describe ways that people today learn about new people and places. For instance, the teacher might ask students to imagine a dream “spring break” vacation to China. How would they go about describing the people and landscapes to their friends who had never been there? What resources would they use to communicate this information? Possible responses will include the internet, TV, books, DVDs, movies, radio, magazines, newspapers, and other people. Now

¹ Teachers may substitute the word “habitats” for “ecological zones.”

imagine, says the teacher, that you are a 17th century British explorer. How would you describe the new cultures and landscapes you encounter to people back in Europe? What means would you have to communicate this information? Ideally, students would realize that there would be no way to instantaneously convey this information. Everything would have to be carried across the ocean by ship, delaying the communication by months. The teacher should help students realize that maps, drawings, prose, and oral descriptions were the only ways used by European explorers to describe foreign lands to people in Europe.

At this point, the teacher will explain to students that they will be working in groups to describe Native American life along the Chesapeake Bay using images and stories. The challenge will be to describe Powhatan life to people unfamiliar with these people and landscapes using the same communication tools available to Smith: drawing instruments, paper, and their creativity.

Given the wealth of information that survives on how Native Americans obtained food at the time of Smith's voyage, the teacher might explain this will be the focus of the lesson. One reason why we know so much about the Native Americans in this area and time period, is due to the detailed accounts and drawings created by Smith and others as they traveled around the Chesapeake region. We can trust these descriptions because they are corroborated from a variety of sources reporting similar information.

The teacher may choose at this point to pass around a photocopy of DeBry's engraving of Indians fishing. The class should be asked to comment on what they observe in the image. What are the people doing? Are they men or women? What kind of wildlife can be seen? Are there any man-made tools being used? The teacher might help the students conclude the following: the activities in the picture focus on different means of harvesting fish. For example, one man is using a rake presumably to collect oysters; a net sits in a canoe; a series of long wooden stakes and circular stakes depict a fishing weir²; another fellow uses a spear. Teacher should ask students to speculate on how each of these methods works, what they are trying to catch, what season or time of day the painting depicts. Aspects of this picture that might interest students include the fishing weir, which enabled the Powhatan to capture the fish by directing fish into pens that confused fish and trapped most of them. The students might be excited to learn about "fire fishing," the main focus of the engraving. The focal point is a fire in the canoe, with a number of fish piled up next to it. Apparently, it was common for Powhatan men to light fires in canoes at night, bang on the sides of these canoes, which attracted fish, even causing some to jump into the canoe. Once students can see how these old images conveyed so much information in just one frame, the teacher should point out that drawings/engravings/paintings of that era were designed specifically to communicate information.

² A fishing weir is a trap created by weaving together strips of wood to create a barrier that fish cannot get through.

(Option: students might look at John Smith's map to view what is the best source today, according to Henry M. Miller, for information about the settlement patterns of the Bay's Native Americans during Smith's voyages. Teachers may also want to look at an entry from Smith's journal that describes how Native Americans procure and process food. Excerpts from Smith's journal are available online.)

Lesson Two:

The teacher will remind students that the task today is to create images of Powhatan way of life along the Chesapeake Bay. Specifically, they will draw as accurately as possible the ways Powhatan people of the early 17th century used different ecological zones to survive along the Chesapeake Bay through the four seasons. Their classmates will examine the completed drawings and try to explain what the native people are doing, just like the class did with the DeBry engraving. Part of the exercise will include an entry from a journal that is meant to accompany the drawing. These "journal entries" will be read by the teacher to make sure the students were on track with their drawings, and to offer a way for students to demonstrate their knowledge in non-visual ways.

Students will break up into groups of four. Each student will be assigned a season and will be charged with creating a portrait of how a Powhatan tribe used resources along the Bay including rivers, marshes, swamps, forests, and of course the Bay in that particular season. The principal sources of information for students will be four pages from Henry M. Miller's essay "Living along the 'Great Shellfish Bay'" from the book Discovering the Chesapeake, and the Captain John Smith's Voyage of Exploration website (<http://johnsmith.psu.edu/>). Henry Miller's essay describes various foods obtained in different seasons during the four seasons by the Powhatan. The landscape visualization tool will provide illustrated information about the ecological zones, and how the Powhatan obtained different foods in them. The first chapters of Helen Rountree's book Powhatan Indians of Virginia, could be used for additional information about the seasons, ecological zones, and especially for methods to obtain the food.

To ensure that the students include enough illustrated information in each drawing and accompanying story, the teacher might tell students their drawings have to include at least three items from a supplied list of **foods, methods for obtaining or storing foods, and habitat features**. Teachers will need to create their own lists, using the texts supplied by Rountree, Miller, and the landscape visualization tool, but a sample list is provided below for the winter season (list taken from Miller, p. 118):

Food items: corn, beans, acorns, nuts, preserved deer, oysters, clams, shad, herring.

Habitat features: upper reaches of rivers and streams, mixed forests, and shallow bay waters.

Methods for obtaining or storing foods: gathering with baskets, spear fishing, weirs and nets.

Students might also be asked to show which activities were restricted to men, or women, or mixed gender groups. At the conclusion of each drawing, students will write a short journal entry about their drawing, as if they were seeing these people and landscapes themselves and describing them in a personal journal or to people back in their home country.

Extension and further ideas:

Teachers might allow for students to create collages, but this would depend on the teacher's willingness to bring in appropriate materials to cut and paste. Students might want to look at the landscape visualization tool for homework between lessons one and two.