

Unit 5, Lesson 3: A History Mystery - What Happened to the Lost Colony?

Lesson Overview

In this lesson students will analyze different accounts or theories that offer explanations of what happened to the “Lost Colony” of Roanoke to address the question: Why might there be different accounts of the same event? Students will also draw conclusions about the effects of the “Lost Colony.”

Delaware Standard(s)

- **History Standard One 4-5a [Chronology]:** Students will study historical events and persons within a given time frame in order to create a chronology and identify related cause-effect factors.
- **History Standard Two 4-5a [Analysis]:** Students will draw historical conclusions and construct historical accounts from primary and secondary source materials
- **History Standard Three 4-5a [Interpretation]:** Students will explain why historical accounts of the same event sometimes differ and relate this explanation to the evidence presented or the point-of-view of the author.

Big Ideas

- Effects, evidence

Essential Question

- Why might there be different accounts of the “Lost Colony?”

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that historical accounts of what happened to the “Lost Colony” may differ depending on the evidence that is presented.

Resources

- [Google Slides](#)
- [Resource 1: Roanoke: A History Mystery](#)
- [Resource 2: What happened to the Lost Colony? Theories 1-7](#)
- [Standing Survey signs](#)
- [Resource 3: Your Theory](#)
- [Resource 4: Creating and Analyzing a Timeline](#)

Procedures

1. Tell students that, today, they are going to assume roles as historians and try to solve one of the oldest and most famous mysteries in American history.
2. Distribute copies [Resource 1: Roanoke: A History Mystery](#) to students.

3. Tell students their challenge in this lesson will be to try and solve the mystery of what happened to a group of English colonists who set up a colony on an island called Roanoke just off the coast of present-day North Carolina.
4. **Read the story** aloud as students follow along. Pause and check for understanding at points that appear particularly important or challenging.
5. **Reread:** Ask students to go back into the reading and underline any clues (evidence) that might suggest a well-supported explanation of what happened to the “Lost Colony.”
6. **Whole Group Sharing:** Have students share the information that they underlined and encourage other students to underline information that they may have overlooked.
7. **Analyzing Theories:** Tell students that historians have come up with six theories that might explain what happened to the “Lost Colony.” You will present them one at a time. Place students in small groups. Distribute [Resource 2: What happened to the Lost Colony? Theories 1-7](#). Tell them to read **Theory 1** independently, draw a tentative conclusion about the strength or weakness of the theory, and explain reasons for their conclusions. Then, have them share their conclusions with others in the group and reach a group conclusion via consensus. There is a space at the bottom of the handout where students can identify who agreed or disagreed with the group conclusion.

You may want to offer whole group, guided modeling for Theory 1.

8. **Repeat** Procedure 7 above for Theories 2-6.
9. **Ask** students if they have any questions about their task (Check for their understanding).
10. **Standing Survey:** Post six [signs](#) with Theories 1-6 around the room. Invite students to stand under the theory that they think offers the most evidence or logic. Give them a few moments to develop an informal presentation. Allow one student in each theory group to explain and defend their theory.
11. **Optional Writing Exercise:** distribute copies of [Resource 3: Your Theory](#). Have students write explanations for the final conclusions relating to what happened to the “Lost Colony.” Emphasize that, in the end, we still don’t know.
12. Distribute copies of [Resource 4: Creating and Analyzing a Timeline](#). Read the instructions to the class then have them complete the timeline (see **Teacher’s Guide** below in shaded box) and answer the question at the bottom of the page.
13. **Debrief:** You read about the book *Utopia* and the effect it had on people in Europe, i.e., motivating them to migrate to America. Based on what you now know about the Roanoke colony, what effect do you think news of it had on the people in Europe? Would they think America offered a utopia?

Teacher's Guide - Creating and Analyzing a Timeline

1585	England first tried to set up a colony on Roanoke Island
1587 (July)	England tried a second time to set up another colony on Roanoke Island
1587 (August)	John White returned to England to get more supplies
1588	Spanish Armada (navy) invaded England
1590	John White returned to Roanoke and found no one
1607	England set up its first permanent colony at Jamestown, Virginia

Based on the information in the timeline, what might explain why England did not try to set up its colony in America until 1607?

[answer - it appeared too dangerous...people disappeared and were never heard from again]