

Unit 5, Lesson 5: History Mystery: Did Pocahontas Save John Smith?

Lesson Overview

In this lesson students will use primary and secondary sources to draw conclusions about whether Pocahontas actually saved John Smith's life.

Delaware Standard(s)

- **History Standard Two 4-5a [Analysis]:** Students will draw historical conclusions and construct historical accounts from primary and secondary source materials.
- **History Standard Two 4-5b [Analysis]:** Students will examine historical materials relating to a particular region, society, or theme; chronologically arrange them; and analyze change over time.
- **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

- Competing accounts, chronology

Essential Question

- Did Pocahontas really save John Smith? (**Do not display this question until students complete Procedure 4**)

Enduring Understandings

- Students will understand that one reason why accounts of the same events sometimes differ because those creating accounts base them on different evidence
- Students will understand that smart people examine evidence before drawing conclusions (e.g., from movies)

Resources

- [Google Slides](#)
- [Resource 1: An Artist's Drawing of the History of Jamestown](#)
- [Resource 2: Historians' Disagreement](#)
- [Resource 3: John Smith's Accounts of His Experiences in Jamestown](#)
- [Resource 4: Timeline of Pocahontas and John Smith's Lives](#)
- [Resource 5: You Decide - Should We Believe the Movie Pocahontas?](#)

Procedures

1. **Introduce the Lesson:** Tell students that, in preparing for today's class, you came across some information about the history of Jamestown that has you confused. You want them to help you figure things out.

2. **Draw Conclusion from a Secondary Source:** Project or distribute copies of [Resource 1](#). Have students work with a partner or small group to address the questions that appear under the image on Resource 1:

- What do you think is happening in this scene?
- What evidence from the drawing supports your conclusion?

Add the following:

- When did the artist create this image?
- Do you think the event that it illustrates occurred before or after the artist drew it?
- Do you think the artist was there to witness the event?
- Should we conclude that it actually happened the way the artist drew it? Explain.

3. **History From Hollywood:** Tell them that you saw a movie recently entitled *Pocahontas*. Ask, did any of you see it? Then say, I am going to show you one of my favorite scenes from the movie and it is the part that will help explain the image you just analyzed as well as my confusion.

Show the scene where John Smith is saved by Pocahontas (available on YouTube [here](#) – 2:51 seconds - but other clips available as well)

Ask, how does this scene from the movie provide clues to what the image that you analyzed earlier on Resource 1 is supposed to illustrate?

4. **Reveal the Confusion - Historians' Disagreement:** Project or distribute copies of [Resource 2](#). Read the conclusions of Historians A and B aloud as students follow along. Then ask,

- A. Are you confused as well? Why?
- B. Why does it appear that the historians disagree? [[they are using different evidence to support their conclusions](#)]
- C. How might we figure out which historian we should believe? [[hopefully they might say something like "is it possible to see what John Smith wrote in his two books?"](#)]

5. **Corroborating Claims and Drawing Conclusions from Primary Sources:** Distribute copies of [Resource 3](#). Have students do a Think-Pair-Share as they read the two accounts then answer the questions in the Check for Understanding.

Note: the titles of John Smith's two books are modified to make them easier to read and comprehend for fourth grade students.

Explain to students that they will be expected to identify sources from which information comes. These questions offer practice in doing it.

They should also ask about whether there is evidence that supports what people, books, or movies claim happened in the past. Otherwise, they can be led to believe everything they read, hear, or see.

Ask, based on the information that you have read and seen so far, do you think Pocahontas actually did save John Smith way back when Jamestown was started?

6. **Drawing Conclusions from Secondary Sources - a Timeline:** Explain to students that they are also expected to be able to create timelines and draw conclusions from them. This activity will give them practice doing this. Distribute copies of [Resource 4](#). Have students read about the events and dates on the timeline, then answer the two questions at the bottom of the page.

Review answers.

7. **ReadiWrite Conclusions:** Explain that, now that they have examined lots of evidence, you want them to draw a conclusion and support it with information that they have learned. Distribute copies of [Resource 5](#). Have students read the two conclusions and arguments supporting each, then explain their own conclusions - did Pocahontas actually save John Smith in the colony of Jamestown?

- A. Read: Have students read the two conclusions.
- B. Discuss: Have students discuss their conclusions with a partner or small group.
- C. Write: Have students write their conclusions in the space provided at the bottom of the page.

8. **Debrief:** Conduct an informal survey - how many do or don't believe that Pocahontas saved John Smith's life. Invite volunteers with competing conclusions to share their conclusions and explain their evidence.

Resources to Consider:

- PBS World Explorer Video: John Smith [here](#) (4:44) - **Recommended**
- Smithsonian Video - Pocahontas: Beyond the Myth [here](#) (51 minutes)
- For teachers: Overview of the arguments for and against the claim that Pocahontas saved John Smith's life [here](#)