

Teachers Notes

The ideas in this study guide are intended as starting points for a cross curricular topic based on the film and they are aimed at children between the ages of 6 and 13 years. The activities seek to complement and extend the pleasure the children will have derived from the visit to the cinema whilst at the same time meeting some of the requirements of the National Curriculum.

The table on page 16, although by no means exhaustive, **it** is offered as a loose guide for planning and record keeping. The classroom tasks are primarily focused towards K52 but they are adaptable for the top part of KS1 (for example, work on Explorers) and where they match the areas of study for K53, (for example, the study of a past non-European society - indigenous peoples of North America) they have been differentiated accordingly.

The Film: Pocahontas Synopsis

'Pocahontas' is Walt Disney's first animated feature to be inspired by a real-life figure. It is based upon the historical facts and popular folklore surrounding a Native princess' first encounter with English explorers. In America, 1607, two cultures are on the verge of war. The Native Americans and the new English settlers are constantly clashing over land rights. Against this background, Captain John Smith, a fearless adventurer and Pocahontas, a beautiful, free-spirited daughter of the Chief of the Powhatan tribe, meet, become friends and fall in love. Their love actually brings the two sides together, differences are resolved and lasting peace is decided.

UK Release Date: 6th October 1995. Certificate: U. Running Time: 81 mins.

The Legend of Pocahontas

Before you see the film read the legend of Pocahontas below.

It is believed that Pocahontas was born in 1595, in Virginia, where she was the daughter of the powerful Powhatan Indian chief who ruled over about forty tribes from his capital Werowocomoco. Although few facts are known about her everyday life in the Mattaponi clan, she is said to have been fascinated by the European settlers. In 1607, John Smith, an English adventurer who had been captured by Powhatan, was to be clubbed to death. After pleading in vain with her father, it is thought that Pocahontas saved Smith's life by putting her own head over his as it was about to be crushed. It is from John Smith's own account that we know of the story. In 1613 she was kidnapped by a European settler - Captain Samuel Argall, and used as a hostage. However, Pocahontas became a Christian, taking the name Rebecca, and in 1614 she married the Englishman, John Rolfe, who had introduced the cultivation of the milder West Indian tobacco into Virginia. Two years later they went to England with their son, Thomas, where she went to the court of King James I. Unfortunately Pocahontas became ill and in 1617, just after she had begun her return voyage to America, she died. She was buried at Gravesend where her statue stands today.

- What is a legend?
- How does the word legend originate? (Use a big dictionary to help you to find out.)
- Go to the library and find as many books as you can which tell the legend of Pocahontas. You may need to refer to the encyclopaedias.
- How many different versions of the legend can you find? What are the main differences?
- Why do you think that different versions of the story exist?
- The legend of Pocahontas is as familiar to American schoolchildren as the legend of Robin Hood is to British boys and girls. See how many different versions of the Robin Hood legend you can find.
- Most cultures have legends. Have your class divide into groups of about five or six children. Each group should choose a different culture and find as many of its legends as it can. Ancient Greek, Roman, Aborigine, Arab, Norse, Native American are just a few cultures from which you could choose. Each child can then select a legend and write it in his or her own words and illustrate it. When these are complete, display the stories so that everyone can share them.
- What is the difference between a myth and a legend?
- Collect as many reviews of the film as you can. You should find these in magazines and newspapers. How do the film critics feel about the film's treatment of the legend? Do you think they are fair or unfair? Divide your class into those who think the film was a fair representation of the legend and those who think it was unfair. Bear in mind the fact that the film did not tell the whole story of Pocahontas' life. Take it in turn to put your arguments to the class. At the end of the discussion how many of the class members changed their original opinions?
- Write reviews of the film yourselves saying what you think about the way the Disney film represents the legend. Send these to the local newspaper and see if you can get them published.

Look at the pictures of either Pocahontas or of John Smith. Make a list of the ways these representations differ. Which do you think is the more accurate?



Engraving by Simon van de Passe, 'Pocahontas', 1616. (By permission of the Virginia Historical Society.)



Engraving by Simon van de Passe, 'Captain John Smith', 1616. (By permission of the Virginia Historical Society.)



Exploration

In the film 'Pocahontas' we are shown how British and other European explorers felt they had a right to claim for themselves, and for the countries that had sponsored their voyage, and land they reached.

Look at this time-line of some of the journeys of explorers and settlers who reached the country we now know as America. Add John Smith's voyage to the time-line.

Vikings sited in America in about 1000	Christopher Columbus 1492	Cabot 1497	Amerigo Vespucci 1499	Jacques Cartier 1534	Humphrey Gilbert 1583	Walter Raleigh 1584	Sir Francis Drake 1585	Plymouth Pilgrims 1620
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- Go to a library and look in some reference books to find out more about these voyages of discovery and the first colonies of people who settled in America.
- Use a data base to record details of their journeys, routes that they took, names of their ships, places where they landed and so on.
- Make up five questions for a friend to answer using the data base.

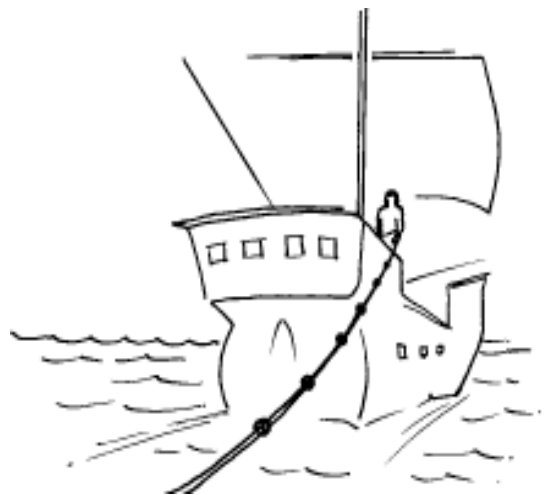
Finding the Way

Early explorers knew little about where they were going as there were no accurate maps or reliable navigational instruments. However, sailors were aware of the dangers they could meet and tales of sea monsters frightened them.

Speed

Sailors could find out how fast they were travelling by dropping into the sea one end of a long rope that had been tied to a log. The log just floated where it had been dropped as the ship traveled. The rope had knots tied into it at regular intervals. The sailors counted how many knots were let out in a certain amount of time. A ship's speed is still calculated in knots.

- What problems are there in counting this way?
- Without using a standard measuring tool (for example a tape measure), use a stopwatch and anything you need to find out and record how fast you can walk in ten seconds.
- At this rate how far could you travel in a minute? Show how you calculated this.





Time

Clocks, in those days, were worked by a pendulum.

- How would this affect time keeping on a ship?
- Sailors often used an hourglass to measure time. It took one hour for the sand to go from the top to the bottom.
- Think of another way of calculating time without using a modern clock and describe it.
- What are the problems of this way of time keeping?

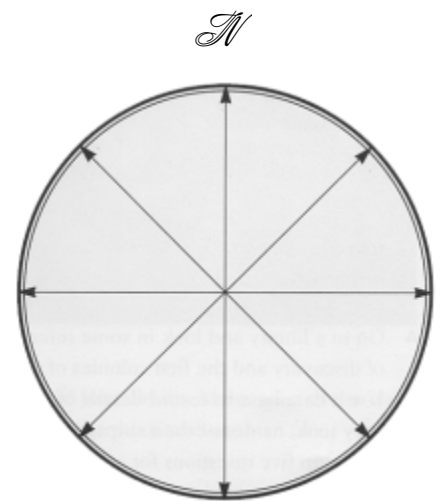
Direction

As you saw in the film, explorers of this era did have compasses to show direction. A compass works because it has a carefully balanced magnet inside which turns easily.

- In which direction does the magnet point on a compass?
- Label the points of the compass for yourself.

Make your own compass. You will need a bowl of water, a big needle, a flat piece of wood or cork and a magnet. After making sure that the needle sticks to the magnet, rub the needle against it. The needle now will have been turned into another small magnet. Place your cork or wood onto the water.

- Before doing it, say what you think will happen when you put the needle on top of the cork.
- Do it. What did happen?
- How can you check that your compass is working properly?



Use a modern compass to help you to answer these questions.

1. If you face North and turn 135° clockwise, in which direction are you now facing?
2. If you face East and turn 90° clockwise, in which direction are you now facing?
3. Walk onto the playground and face North East. What can you see directly in front of you?
4. Stand in the middle of the playground. In which direction will you have to travel to get back into your classroom?

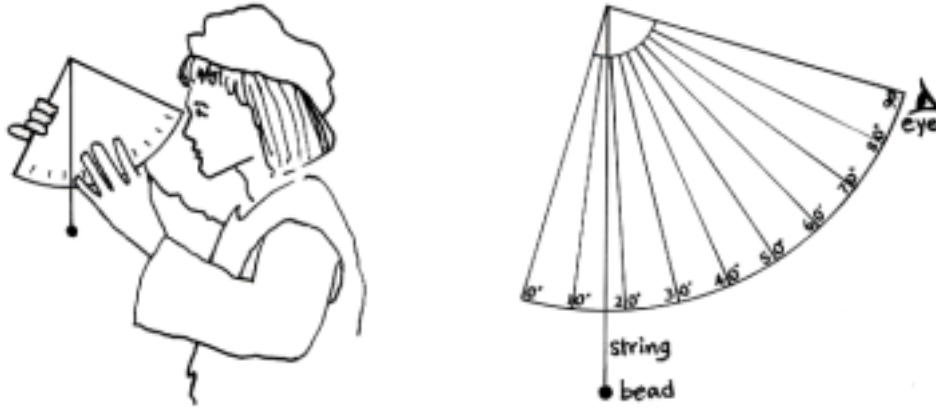


Position

Since early times people have drawn imaginary lines over the world to help locate places. Complete this sentence:

The lines across the world which are drawn level with the equator are called lines of _____ and the lines which go through the North and South Poles are called lines of _____.

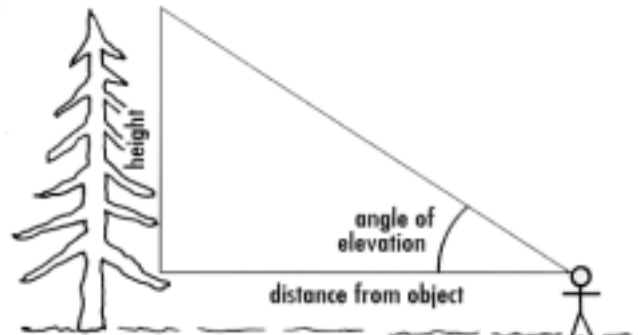
The Quadrant



The quadrant was like a modern clinometer. It helped early explorers to find at which line of latitude they were. Latitude could be judged by measuring the height of the Sun above the horizon at noon. The Pole Star could be used at night.

On a piece of paper draw a circle which has a radius of about 18cm. Fold it in half and then in half again so that a right angle is formed. Mount this quarter circle on thick card and then cut it out. Use a protractor and a ruler to mark the degrees 00 to 900 around the circumference. Cut a length of string, a little longer than your shape and attach it to the corner of the right angle. Put a heavy bead or button on the end of your string. Hold the quadrant to your eye and point it at a tall tree or building. Put your finger on the string so that you can read the angle of elevation.

- Measure and record the angles of elevation of three tall things that are ten metres away from you.
- Find a way of working out the heights of these things by using your measurements and the diagram opposite.
- What would be the problem of using a quadrant on board ship?



Food and Health

The explorers who sailed on ships during these times had a hard life because it was difficult to keep food and water in good condition. Many sailors had a disease called scurvy, which caused them to be too weak to work properly.

- Use some library books to find out more about the diets and health problems of the early explorers.
- Create a sailors' menu.
- What were the problems with this diet?
- Make a list of some of the things we need to include in our diets today to be healthy.
- Should we stop eating and drinking some things?
- Create a balanced menu for a tasty lunch time meal.

Work

On board ship everyone had to do a job.

- Find out what the duties of the following were: Captain, carpenter, surgeon, cooper.

Even if they were ill or cold, sailors had to work hard. To make them work harder they were often whipped. Sometimes they died from these terrible whippings. There were lots of accidents on board ship - many sailors fell from the rigging to their deaths or fell overboard. Fights often broke out.

- Use some library books to find out all you can about the life of a mariner and write an account of a day in your life at sea.

Encounters

At the beginning of the film, we see John Smith setting sail in 1607, for Virginia, on the 'Susan Constant'. Here was founded the settlement of Jamestown. On board were many men each with his own ambitions, hopes and dreams.

All went well at first but the settlers failed to live in peace with the Native Americans. History books tell us that Smith was as eager as his fellow colonists to take advantage of the Native Americans but he realised the limits of the settlers' power and also the importance of the differences between European and Native American values and customs. It was necessary, he said, to dominate the "proud Savages" but avoid bloodshed.

The film, 'Pocahontas', tells the story of how John Smith and Pocahontas are said to have learnt how different kinds of people need to tolerate and understand one another.

- Working with a partner, each write down how you feel about the attitude of Governor John Ratcliffe towards the Powhatans and the land of Virginia. Compare your answers. Now have a whole class meeting to share your views.
- Find out as much as you can about the life of John Smith before and after his meeting with Pocahontas.
- Why were Virginia and Jamestown called by these names?

In the film we see how the European colonists ransacked the natural environment of Virginia and plundered the habitats of the people and the creatures.

- Find out about the ecosystems of this region of America.
- Draw a food chain to show the feeding relationships of the ecosystem and indicate on your diagram how the colonists would have destroyed the system.

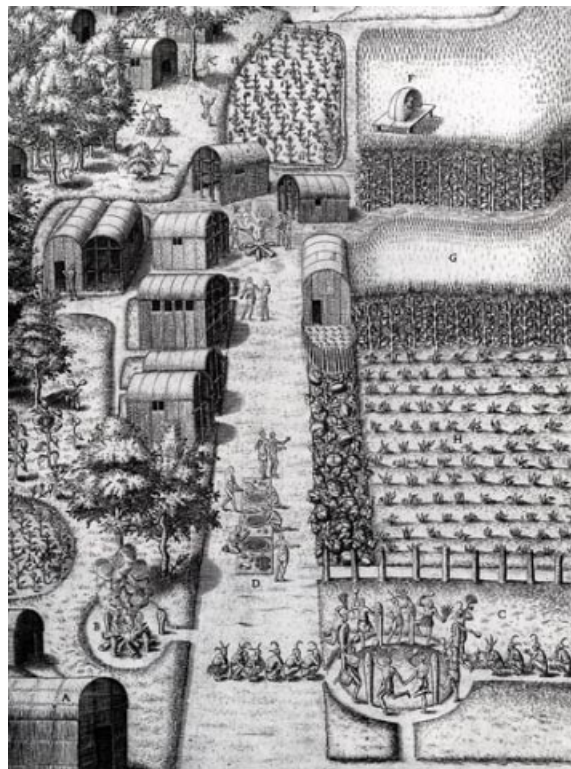
Native Americans

When John Smith and the other Europeans reached Virginia, the land was inhabited by Algonquian speaking Native Americans. Pocahontas was known amongst her own people as Matoaka, Pocahontas was just a nickname meaning 'little plaything'. As the Powhatans had no written language, we know about her only from what Europeans wrote. We are not sure about her early day to day life and so to shed light on what it may have been like, we need to find out about the history of the Native Americans.

- Go to the library and use these questions to help guide your research. If your time is limited it would be good to share the work with friends.
- From where did the first Native Americans come and how did they reach the land?
- 1. When the tribes spread throughout America, how did the different environments affect their ways of life?
- Pocahontas shows John Smith an ear of corn, thinking that it was the gold for which the British were searching. What did the Native Americans eat and how did they prepare it?
- Find out what kinds of games were played and try them out for yourselves.
- Some versions of the Pocahontas legend say she was married to a Native American named Kocoum and the film shows how she wore her mother's bridal necklace. Find out how Native Americans chose their life partners.
- In the film we see Pocahontas canoeing along the Chickahominy Rivet. How did the people make such boats and how did Native Americans transport things?
- Pocahontas tells Smith that she knows that every rock and tree and creature has a life, has a spirit, has a name'. Find out about the beliefs of the Native Americans and how their religion affected their ways of life. What did they do on special occasions?
- Find out how the Native Americans live today. How have they adapted to the modern world?

Some things to do and make:

- Build a model Powhatan village. You can use the picture as a guide.
- Use some face paints to draw onto your body the geometric tattoos which Pocahonras would probably have had around the tops of her arms.
- Make some models of the Native American canoes. Try several designs. Which float the best and why?



Engraving by Theodore de Bry, 1590. (By permission of The British Library.)

John Smith was one of the very few European settlers who learnt the Algonquian language. As the Native Americans separated into groups, their languages became different and eventually there were so many that lots of the tribes could not communicate with their neighbours. So some of them began to use sign language like this.



Indian – rub back of hand twice



Cheyenne – chop at left index finger



Comanche – imitate motion of snake



Crow – hold fist to forehead, palm out



Osage – move hands down back of head



Pawnee – make V sign and extend hand



Nez Percé – move finger under nose



Sioux – hand across neck as if cutting



alone – right hand to the right



buffalo



cannot – move finger along palm and down



horse



bad – make fist then open downwards



moon



opposite

Illustration by permission of Two-Can Publishing Ltd.

- Use reference books to find out about the sign language and draw the signs and display them around the classroom. Now divide into groups of four or five and devise some simple messages for your friends. When all of the groups are ready, meet together as a class and communicate your messages to everyone.
- What were the problems you found when you used the sign language?
- Compare the Native American sign language with that which is used today by hearing impaired people. What are the differences and what are the similarities?
- How do you think the Native American sign language evolved?
- Find out how the Native Americans counted.

Survival

Pocahontas says to Smith:

*“You think I’m an ignorant savage and you’ve been so many places, I guess it must be so,
But I still cannot see,
If the savage one is me,
How can there be so much that you don’t know
You think you own whatever land you land on
The earth is just a dead thing you can claim
You think the only people who are people
Are the people who think like you
But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger You learn things you never knew you never knew”*

In general the European colonists mishandled their relationships with the Native Americans. The Virginian settlement would not have survived if the Powhatans had not given the Europeans food in the first hard winters and showed them the ways of the forest and taught them about crops such as yams and corn. The settlers accepted this help and then stole whatever else they wanted. On the other hand it must be remembered that the Native Americans sometimes were very hard on the Europeans. Powhatan, Pocahontas’ father, whose other name was Wahusonacook, lived from 1550 until 1618 and in the years after John Smith left, his tribe destroyed every English settlement in Virginia except Jamestown, and killed 347 English settlers.

After Wahusonacook’s death, his brother Opechancano replaced him. In 1642, he broke the 1636 peace treaty in a surprise attack on the English, killing 500 people. However, by the mid-eighteenth century the Powhatan tribe identity was completely destroyed by the diseases which were introduced by the European colonists.

- Use some reference books and find out about some of the other people and events which make up the Native American history. For example: Sitting Bull, Geronimo, Custer’s Last Stand, Battle at Wounded Knee.
- When the Native Americans were forced to live on reservations how did this affect the way they lived?
- In traditional Western films and books, the ‘Indians have always been represented as the ‘baddies’ and the white people have been seen as the ‘goodies’. How do you feel about these representations after learning about the Native Americans and about the European colonists and explorers, and who do you think were ‘savages’? Filling in the chart on the next page could help you to make up your mind.

	Native Americans	Europeans
Good Aspects		
Bad Aspects		

- Can you think of things which are happening in the world today which show that humans have not learnt from history?
- What can we learn from the film 'Pocahontas' which we can use in our everyday life? Do we ever fail?

Characters and Representation

In a film every shot is very important so nothing is there by accident. What is more, the filmmakers have to tell quite complicated stories in a matter of about an hour and a half, holding our attention throughout. From the first time we see Lord Governor John Ratcliffe we have a good idea of what he is will be like and how he will behave.



- Look carefully at the picture and describe his appearance, for example he has a double chin and the colours of his clothing clash with his new surroundings. Ratcliffe is stereotypically evil and he carries the racism and greed of the film. Instead of adapting himself to the New World, he becomes even more aristocratic and European than ever. How does his appearance influence the way we react to him?
- As a class have a brainstorming session and write down the names of more villainous characters from other films you have seen. Choose two of them and describe in detail how they look, how they speak, how they dress and so on.
- Create for yourself a film hero or heroine. Draw them and then describe their personality.

- Is it fair to judge people by the way they look, speak and dress? Give some reasons for your answer.
- You are only allowed five minutes for this next activity. Everyone in the class will need to have a piece of paper and a pencil. Draw the following characters: a teacher, a Frenchman, a nurse, a doctor, a police officer, a fire fighter, an Australian, and American. After the time has elapsed compare your drawings. What did you discover?
- Are stereotypes useful or damaging images? Give a reason for your answer.
- Examine these pictures of Chief Powhatan and Captain John Smith. Work with a partner and, using the chart, spend some time recording the good and bad things about them. You may wish to write down the things they say or how they speak, their actions, what they look like or how they dress.



	Powhatan	John Smith
Good Aspects		
Bad Aspects		

- Do you think they were good men?
- What does the film want us to think?
- How do the filmmakers help us to make up our minds in other ways?
- Having learnt about the real John Smith and Chief Powhatan, do you think the representations are fair? Give some reasons for your decisions.
- How do the characters of Meeko, Flit and Percy help us to decide what Pocahontas and Ratcliffe are like?

Further Activities

The Spinning Arrow

Pocahontas has a strange dream about a spinning arrow which she believes is pointing her life in a different direction from that which her father has chosen for her. Grandmother Willow, a wise spirit of an ancient tree, says that to understand the dream, Pocahontas must listen with her heart.

- Make a list of some other famous stories concerning dreams, for example: 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' by Lewis Carroll and the story of Joseph from the Bible.
- Write a story about one of your dreams. It could be true or one you have made up.

Animation

'Pocahontas' is the 33rd full-length animated film made by Walt Disney Pictures. Find out all you can about Walt Disney.

- Make a list of all the animated films you have seen.
- Compare 'Pocahontas' with these other films; how is it similar and how is it different? These ideas may help you: What was the ending like? How did the animals behave? Was the story true or fictional?

Music

Remember, or if possible listen again to some of the music from the film. The song 'Steady as the Beating Drum' was influenced by authentic Algonquian music.

- How can you tell that it is Native American music?
- Choose one of the songs and use it as a basis for a dance drama.