

Examining an American Myth

The legend of Pocahontas has it that she risked her life to save Captain John Smith when her father, Chief Powhatan, seemed ready to have him beaten to death. But is this legend true? In this activity, find out what scientific evidence has revealed about this tale.

Procedure

- 1 You will be asked to choose one of the historical figures listed on this handout to track while watching the program. Create a chart that includes the name of your historical figure, any evidence archeologists and historians found related to the figure, and what conclusions were drawn based on that evidence. As you watch the program, take notes on the information outlined for your historical figure.
- 2 After the program ends, each of your team members should report to each other what they learned about the historical figures they were following in the film.
- 3 Each team member should read "The Legend of Pocahontas" handout. After reading Smith's original account of what happened, each team member should write a one-page paper summarizing the new story of Pocahontas. The paper should include what researchers now think happened at the meeting between John Smith and Chief Powhatan, what Pocahontas' role was between her tribe and the English colonists, what her relationship was with Smith, and what happened when she saw Smith the final time. Include information about any evidence that supports the new story.

Historical Figures

Captain John Smith:

Record information about who Smith was, what happened to him after he arrived in the New World, and his relationship with Pocahontas.



Pocahontas: Take notes on who Pocahontas was, what role she played between her tribe and the colonists, her relationship with Smith, and what role she may have played at the meeting between Smith and Chief Powhatan.



Chief Powhatan: Write down information about what the chief's role was, how he regarded the English settlers, what his relationship was with Pocahontas, and what his relationship was with Smith.

