

The Jamestown Colony

Read Aloud

In April 1607, 104 men and boys landed at Jamestown, Virginia, to set up another English colony. Fish filled the rivers. Deer wandered everywhere. One colonist wrote that the strawberries were “four times bigger and better than ours in England.” By September only 46 settlers were still alive. What happened to cloud the bright beginning of England’s first permanent colony in North America?

Focus Activity

READ TO LEARN

Who helped the colony of Jamestown survive?

VOCABULARY

- stock
- cash crop
- indentured servant
- House of Burgesses

PEOPLE

- Chief Powhatan
- John Smith
- Pocahontas
- John Rolfe
- Openchancanough

PLACES

- Chesapeake Bay
- Tsenacomacoh
- Jamestown

THE BIG PICTURE

The English had faced setbacks like those on Roanoke Island. But they still wanted to build colonies in North America. Explorers told stories about its rich land. They brought home fur and fish. In 1606 a group of London merchants asked King James I for a charter to start a colony in Virginia again. The king agreed.

The English settled around **Chesapeake Bay**. The bay was filled with fish and there was good hunting. The Native Americans who lived in eastern Virginia at that time called their homeland **Tsenacomacoh** (sen uh KAHM uh koh). At its center was Chesapeake Bay.

At first the English and the Native Americans lived peacefully together. But soon that changed.

THE POWHATAN

For over 1,000 years Native Americans had lived in the area the English now called Virginia. A group of Native Americans there, who spoke Algonkian, had joined together to form the Powhatan chiefdom. They united under one chief known as the Powhatan. The English also gave the name *Powhatan* to all the peoples the chief ruled.

Chief Powhatan ruled hundreds of villages in Tsenacomah. His people called him Wahunsonacock (wah hun SAHN uh kahk). They paid him tribute with deerskins, pearls, corn, and other valuables.

The Powhatan Chiefdom

By the early 1600s the Powhatan chiefdom included many other Native American groups. The map on this page shows where some of them lived. Their enemies lived on all sides. They spoke the languages of the Sioux and the Iroquois. Most probably, the people of the chiefdom had united in order to protect their hunting grounds, and because they shared the Algonkian language.

In addition to Chief Powhatan, each town and village had its own chief, or leader. Men or women could become these leaders. All this would change after the English arrived.

POWHATAN LANDS, About 1600



MAP WORK

Werowocomo (we roh WOH coh moh) was the capital of the Powhatan chiefdom.

1. Which peoples lived near the York River?
2. Which peoples lived directly south of Werowocomo?

The deerskin cloak, known as Powhatan's mantle, was taken to England in 1608. It is kept in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England.



THE ENGLISH

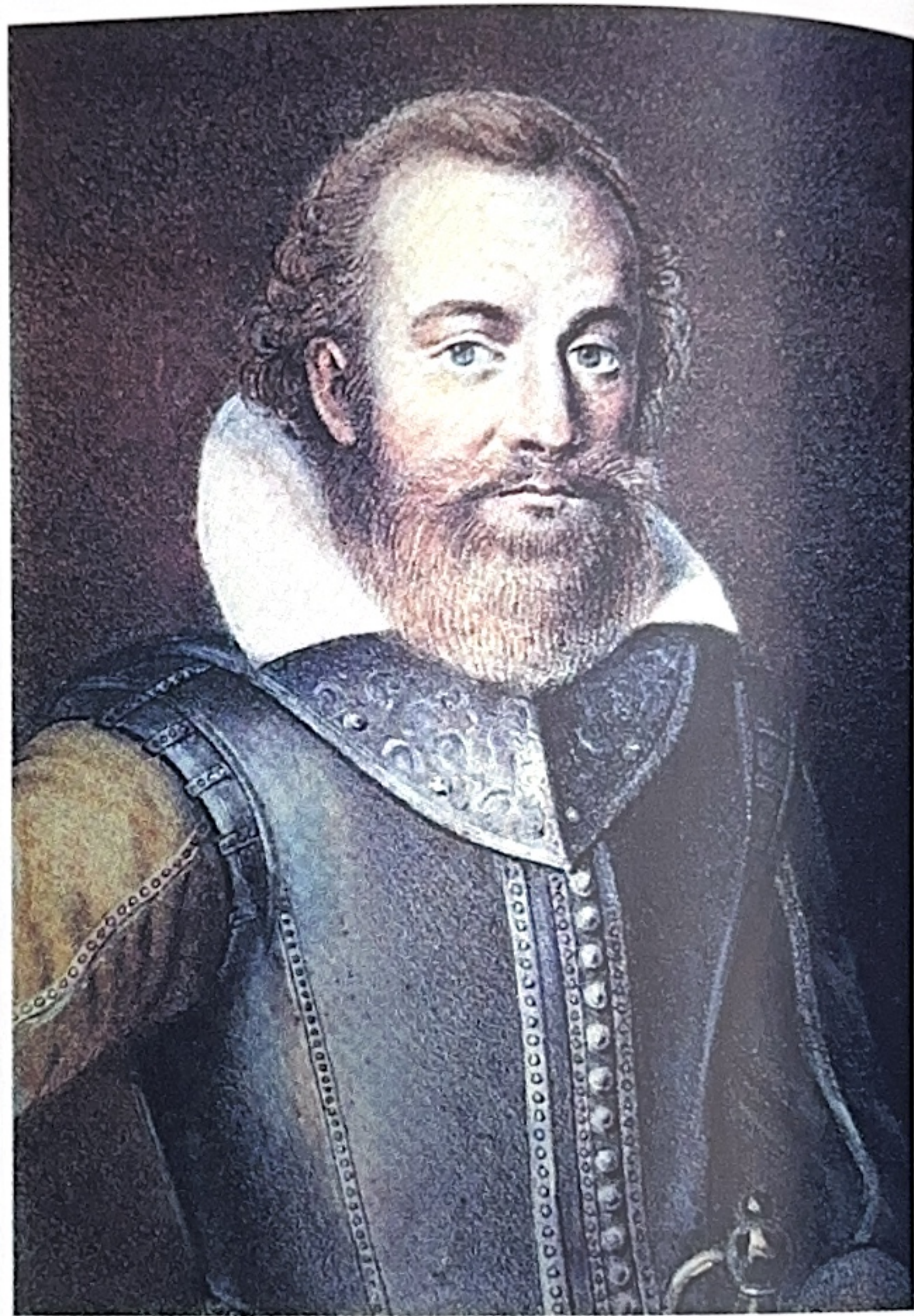
- ① Across the ocean from the Powhatan chiefdom, in England, merchants and landowners started the Virginia Company of London. They wanted to start a colony in Virginia. The merchants sold shares of ownership, or **stock**, in the company. Any profits the company made would be divided among the people who had bought stock.
- ② The Virginia Company offered to send colonists to North America. It gave the colonists tools, weapons, medicine, seeds, and other goods. The colonists had to repay the company with some of any gold they found or any crops they grew.

The Jamestown Colony

- ③ In 1607 three small ships entered Chesapeake Bay. The newcomers settled near a large river. They called it the James River, after England's King James I. They named their tiny settlement **Jamestown**. Unknown to them, this was the Tsenacomacoh homeland.
- ④ Jamestown was on the coast of Chesapeake Bay. It seemed safe from Spanish ships. But the water was salty and dangerous to drink. The swamps had disease-carrying mosquitoes. That summer almost half of the colonists died. By winter the survivors were desperate.

John Smith Leads the Colony

- ① Without the help of Captain **John Smith** the colonists might



John Smith stretched the truth about some events in Virginia. But his writings have proved to be a valuable source of information about colonial times.

have died. Smith was an adventurer and a strong leader.

- ② By 1608 Smith was disgusted with the colonists. They spent their time looking for gold instead of planting crops. Their only interest, he said, was to "dig gold, refine gold, load gold." So Smith declared, "He that will not work shall not eat." He forced colonists to build houses, plant crops, and raise livestock. Most of the men and boys had not worked in England. They were not used to such tasks. Smith's orders made him unpopular, but he kept the colonists alive.

③ Smith wrote a book about Virginia. He tells the story of how he was taken captive by Chief Powhatan and saved by the chief's daughter, **Pocahontas** (poh kuh HAHN tus). Read the excerpt from Smith's *A General History of Virginia*. Many believe it was not accurate.

[T]wo great stones were brought before Powhatan, then as many as could laid hands on [Smith], dragged him to [the stones], and thereon laid his head. And being ready with their clubs to beat out his brains, Pocahontas, [Powhatan]'s dearest daughter, . . . got his head in her arms and laid her own upon his to save him from death. Whereat [Powhatan] was contented he should live.

Trading with the Powhatan

④ Smith traded with the Powhatan people for food. Other times the colonists and the Native Americans

fought. Chief Powhatan told Smith:

Think you I am so simple not to know it is better . . . being your friend, than . . . being so hunted that . . . I can neither rest, eat, nor sleep . . . [E]very year our friendly trade shall furnish you with corn.

In 1609 Smith was hurt in a gunpowder explosion and returned to England. Without him, the colony again faced hard times. One colonist called the winter of 1609–1610 the starving time. “Our food was but a small can of barley shared among five men each day,” he wrote.



This engraving (left) shows Smith being saved by Pocahontas. It appeared in his book in 1624. Smith made a map of Virginia (above) during his first visit to North America in 1606.