

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH



BIOGRAPHY

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Captain John Smith was born in England around 1580. He trained to be a merchant, but then went into the army to serve on campaigns in foreign countries. But after he met with a captain planning to travel to North America, Smith joined the expedition.

The expedition set off in 1606, with the aim of making a profit from raw materials and goods after colonizing areas in North America. They arrived a year later, and set up the Jamestown colony on Chesapeake Bay, Virginia. The colonists struggled to survive because of disease, lack of food, and tensions with the Native Americans in the area.

Not long after the settlement was established, Smith was crucial in overruling its first leader and putting a new leader, John Ratcliffe, in place. Ratcliffe put Smith in charge of trading with Native Americans for food. As part of this, Smith explored and recorded the landscape of Virginia.

At one point, Smith was captured by a Native American chief that the English called Powhatan. The story goes that Powhatan was about to kill Smith, when Powhatan's young daughter, Pocahontas, stepped in to save him.

After this, relations with Native Americans improved for a while. Pocahontas went to the colony whenever food and goods were being delivered. But when the next winter was hard, and followed by a drought, relations broke down. Food was scarce, and the Native Americans refused to give theirs up without receiving anything in return. Smith responded by destroying Native American homes, and stealing their food.

Smith was badly injured in an attack on a Native American village, and he returned to England, where his leadership of the colony came under fire and was eventually removed. So Smith spent his time in England writing about what he had seen in Virginia. He later visited the area now covered by Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. He was the first to call the area 'New England', and to map it in detail. Smith died in London, England on June 21, 1631.

Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'recorded'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'recorded' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'recorded'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'recorded'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'recorded' means.

Try this for other words, too. 

Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: crucial	important

Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

Smith eventually returned to England, where he published accounts of his explorations in North America.

In 1607, Smith helped establish Jamestown in Virginia.

Smith was a merchant and soldier before joining colonizing expeditions.

But after a hard winter and drought, relations broke down again.

When Smith was captured by the chief Powhatan, Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, saved Smith's life.

John Smith was born in England around 1580.

After that, relations with Native Americans improved.

Smith's job was to trade with Native Americans for food.

Get to the facts

1 Which colony did John Smith help found?

2 Who did Smith put in charge of the colony?

3 Who did Smith trade with for food?

4 What was the name of Powhatan's daughter?

5 What did Smith call the area he had explored?

Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.

Pocahontas

Imagine you are John Smith about to be killed by Native Americans. But just in time, someone stops them. It is the chief's daughter, Pocahontas.. (now complete the story)

Below is a plain text version for printing:

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Finding key words:

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym).

For example:

Key word – crucial Synonym – important

Sequencing:

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Get to the facts:

- 1 Which colony did John Smith help found?
- 2 Who did Smith put in charge of the colony?
- 3 Who did Smith trade with for food?
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