



Section 3

PRIMARY SOURCE *from Travels and Works of
Captain John Smith*

Captain John Smith recorded his experiences in colonial Virginia, including this account of his capture by the Powhatan and his rescue by Chief Powhatan's daughter Pocahontas. As you read, keep in mind that Smith refers to himself in the third person and that only the most confusing of his 17th-century English spellings have been changed.

How Powhatan entertained him. At last they brought him [Smith] to *Meronocomoco* [5 Jan. 1608], where was *Powhatan* their Emperor. Here more than two hundred of those grim Courtiers stood wondering at him, as he had beene a monster; till *Powhatan* and his traine had put themselves in their greatest braveries [finest clothing]. Before a fire upon a seat like a bedsted, he sat covered with a great robe, made of *Rarowcun* [raccoon] skinnes, and all tailes hanging by. On either hand did sit a young wench [woman] of 16 or 18 yeares, and along on each side the house, two rowes of men, and behind them as many women, with all their heads and shoulders painted red: many of their heads bedecked with the white downe of Birds; but every one with something; and a great chaine of white beads about their necks.

How Pocahontas saved his life. At his entrance before the King, all the people gave a great shout. The Queen of *Appamatuck* was appointed to bring him water to wash his hands, and another brought him a bunch of feathers, in stead of a Towell to dry them: having feasted him after their best barbarous manner they could, a long consultation was held, but the conclusion was, two great stones were brought before *Powhatan*: then as many as could laid hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs, to beate out his braines, *Pocahontas* the Kings dearest daughter, when no intreaty could prevaile, got his head under her arms, and laid her owne upon his to save him from death: whereat the Emperour was contented he should live to make him hatchets, and her bells, beads, and copper; for they thought him aswell [as capable] of all occupations as themselves. For the King himselfe will make his owne robes, shooes, bowes, arrowes, pots; plant, hunt, or doe any thing so well as the rest. . . .

How Powhatan sent him to James Towne. Two dayes after [7 Jan. 1608], *Powhatan* having disguised himselfe in the most fearfullest manner he could, caused Captain *Smith* to be brought forth to a great house in the woods, and there upon a mat by the fire to be left alone. Not long after from behinde a mat that divided the house, was made the most dolefullest noise he ever heard; then *Powhatan* more like a devill then a man, with some two hundred more as blacke as himselfe, came unto him and told him now they were friends, and presently he should goe to *James* towne, to send him two great gunnes, and a grindstone, for which he would give him the Country of *Capahowosick*, and for ever esteeme him as his sonne *Nantaquoud*.

So to *James* towne with 12 guides *Powhatan* sent him. That night [7 Jan. 1608] they quarterd in the woods, he still expecting (as he had done all this long time of his imprisonment) every houre to be put to one death or other: for all their feasting. But almightie God (by his divine providence) had mollified the hearts of those sterne *Barbarians* with compassion. The next morning [8 Jan.] betimes they came to the Fort.

from Edward Arber, ed., re-edited with an introduction by A. G. Bradley, *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith, 1580–1631* (Edinburgh, Scotland: 1910).

Discussion Questions

1. How was Smith treated by the Powhatan people?
2. According to Smith, why did Chief Powhatan decide to spare Smith's life?
3. Why do you think that the English and the Powhatan people had such an uneasy relationship? Cite possible reasons based on Smith's account and on your textbook.