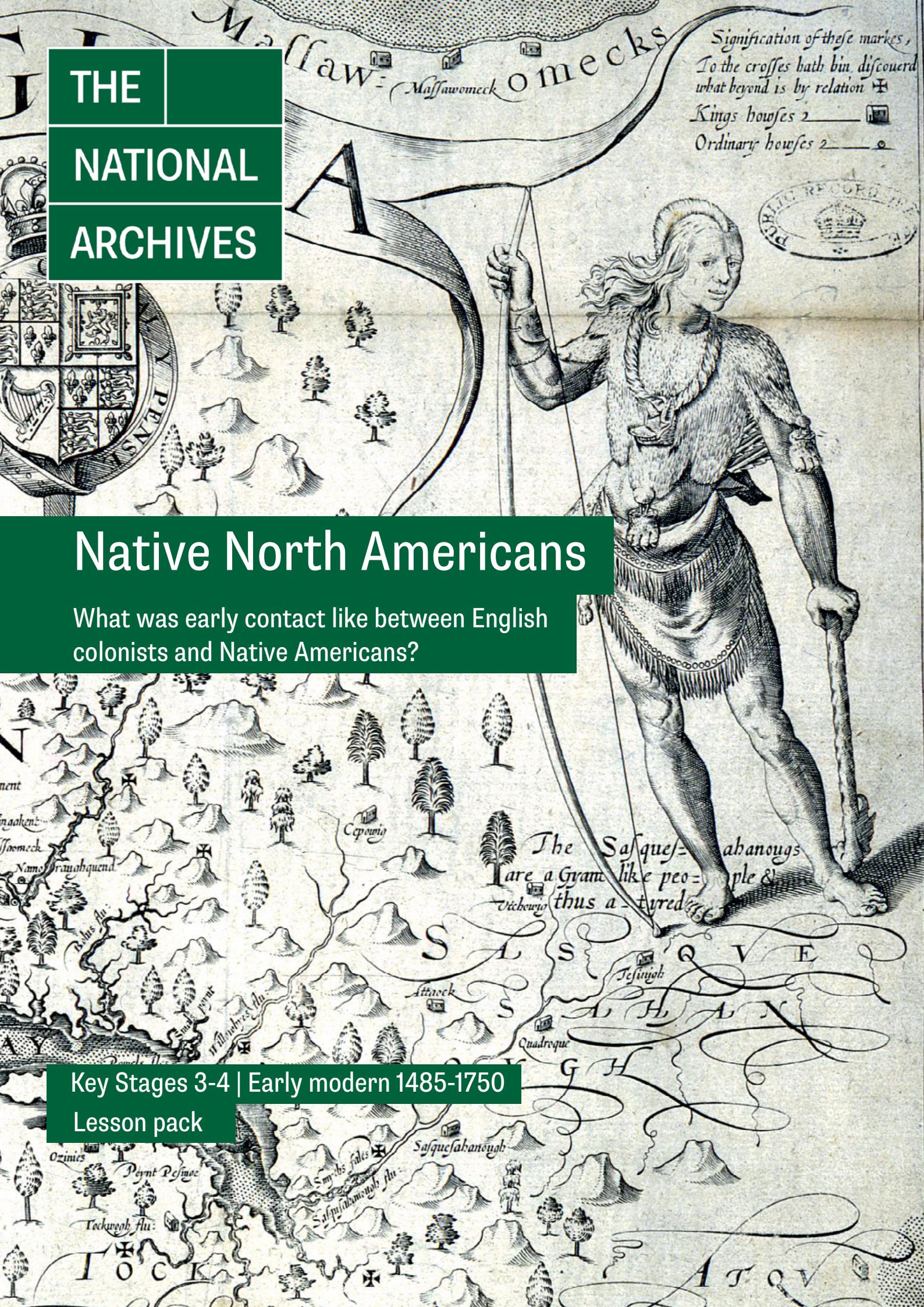


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Introduction

In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean, unlocking what Europeans quickly came to call the 'New World'. Columbus encountered land with around two million inhabitants that was previously unknown to Europeans. He thought he had found a new route to the East, so he mistakenly called these people 'Indians'. Over the next few centuries, European powers colonised the Americas, seeking new land and trade opportunities. Spanish and Portuguese colonised large parts of South America, and other European colonial powers, including English explorers, focused on establishing settlements in North America.

The first permanent English settlement called Jamestown (after James I of England) was established in 1607 in Virginia, North America. These first settlers – and those who sent them – were keen to find out about the area and see what they could gain. The settlers began to explore and they soon encountered the Native people of the Chesapeake Bay region. There were many tribes living there at the time, most belonging to three major chiefdoms: the Powhatan, the Piscataway, and the Nanticoke.

This lesson uses documents that describe what happened between early English settlers and Native Americans in Virginia. Investigate how the English described this early contact. How did Native Americans react to the arrival of Europeans? Were relations friendly and, if so, how and why did they change over time?

Suitable for:

KS 3 - 4

Time period:

Early modern
1485-1750

Connections to the Curriculum:

Key stage 3:

The development of Church, state and society in Britain 1509-1745: the first colony in America

Key stage 4:

AQA GCSE History
Thematic study:

Britain: Migration, empires and the people: c790 to the present day

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Teacher's Notes

This lesson asks pupils to investigate the early contact between Europeans and Native Americans. Using primary source diary extracts, pupils are able to understand and appreciate the first encounters between European settlers and the indigenous people of North America. Pupils are asked to explore the different aspects of these encounters and why they may have changed.

Some may want to extend this to a comparison between later feelings and actions taken against the Native Americans, examining European stereotypes of the Native Americans, for example the 'noble and ignoble savage'. To what extent were certain stereotypes already in place while the English settlers were writing these statements? How and why did they subsequently develop and shift?

It is important to explore also what is missing from these sources. Who wrote these journal extracts, and what might their goals be? What other sources should be consulted? It's especially noteworthy that these sources do not take into account the perspectives of the Native Americans themselves. Why might that be?

What are the limitations in using one perspective? The National Archives code for the document is CO, which stands for Colonial Office. You could discuss with students why the National Archives holds a collection of documents under this name.

The early period covered in this lesson was followed by centuries of colonisation marked by wars, broken treaties, and discriminatory policies that decimated the indigenous North American populations and still impact Native Americans today. Since these sources only show the perspectives of the English settlers, teachers may want to bring in other sources from Native American points of view. The [National Museum of the American Indian](#) is a good place to start.

Sources

Cover image: Virginia described by Captain John Smith and engraved by William Hole, [1612].
Catalogue ref: MPG 1/284

Teacher's Notes

Sources 1-7: America and West Indies, colonial papers, 1574 – 1621. Catalogue ref: CO1/1.

External links

[Virtual Jamestown¹](#)

A site giving a lot of information about the original settlement at Jamestown, including a 3D reconstruction of the settlement and information about the people who lived there.

[We Have a Story to Tell: Native Peoples of the Chesapeake Region²](#)

A teacher's resource provided by the National Museum of the American Indian. This guide offers contemporary Native perspectives about the historical experiences of the Native Americans of the Chesapeake, in particular, the Powhatan, Nanticoke, and Piscataway peoples.

[Native Knowledge 360° Education Initiative³](#)

Native Knowledge 360° is an initiative from the National Museum of the American Indian to provide educators and students with new perspectives on Native American history and cultures.

[American Indian Treaties⁴](#)

From The National Archives in the United States. Includes examples of and information on treaties between European settlers and Native American tribes.

[The road to Jamestown⁵](#)

A National Archives talk on the history of Jamestown.

¹ <https://www.virtualjamestown.org/>

² <https://americanindian.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/education/chesapeake.pdf>

³ <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360>

⁴ <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/treaties>

⁵ <https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/the-road-to-jamestown-part-1/>

Background

The first English explorers to North America arrived five years after Columbus in 1497, led by the Italian Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot). However, the English did not try to establish permanent settlements in the Americas until much later.

In 1585, English colonists attempted to settle at a place called Roanoke. The settlement lasted only for a short time. After initial friendly relations, hostilities developed as settlers became increasingly reliant on Native Americans for food and fighting eventually broke out between the two groups. The local chieftain was killed by the English and the colony was eventually abandoned.

On May 14, 1607, the first lasting English settlement in North America was established. The settlement was named 'Jamestown' after the current King of England, James I. Captain Newport led the expedition, staying until June 22nd, when he sailed back to England for supplies. The source material in this lesson comes from the first few months of the colony (CO 1/1).

After Captain Newport left for England, 104 settlers remained with Captain John Smith placed in charge. These settlers were unprepared, and did not plant the right crops or eat the right foods. They soon encountered starvation and famine, despite stealing food from the Native Americans. In the first three years, despite new arrivals, more than 80% of the settlers died from the combined effects of famine, disease, and warfare.

Throughout the period of European colonisation, millions of Native Americans were killed, either in fighting or by outbreaks of European diseases to which their bodies had no immunity, such as smallpox. It is estimated that between 80% and 95% of the Native American population died within the first 100-150 years of European contact with the Americas.

Those settlers that survived, together with new arrivals, began to cultivate the land, growing crops such as tobacco. As more settlers arrived, more Native American land was taken, and the Native Americans began to fight back.

Tasks

Source 1: Extract from 21 May 1607 from a journal of one of the settlers, likely Gabriel Archer, who is starting out on a journey of discovery with Captain Newport.

- What did the 'Dyscoverers' (explorers) take with them?
- Why might we today question the use of the term 'Dyscoverers' to describe the English settlers?
- How many people went on the exploration?
- Why do you think this journey of exploration was taking place?

Source 2: This is an extract from 23 May 1607 from the journal seen in Source 1.

- What was done to show respect for Captain Newport?
- What did the local Indigenous people give to the colonists? [3 things]
- What did the Captain get?
- How do you think these explorers felt about this encounter?
- Why do you think the settlers were treated like this?

Source 3: This extract from 24 May 1607 from Archer's journal describes how the English were missing two bullet-bags and their contents.

- When the loss was reported, how quick and effective was the Native Americans response?
- Why do you think the materials were taken by the Native Americans?
- How is the situation resolved?
- From the evidence so far, how would you describe the relationship between the Europeans and the Native Americans? Make sure you explain your ideas – use the questions below to help:
- Would you describe this as a friendly relationship?
- How well have problems been resolved?
- Are there any sign of nerves or worries? What about tensions or threats?

Tasks

Source 4: This extract from 24 May 1607 (Whitsunday) from Archer's journal describes how the colonists erected a cross in the name of King James, then misled their Native American guide about its meaning.

- Why did the British colonists raise the cross?
- Why is the cross inscribed with the names of King James and Captain Newport?
- In your own words, what were the colonists praying for?
- There is reference to two kings in this extract. Who are they? What may lead to conflict between them?
- Why do you think the colonists proclaimed King James I as 'king' here, close to their new settlement of Jamestown?
- Nauirans was a Native American Arrohattoc man who came with the British settlers as their guide. What do you think he starts to 'admire' or pay attention to when watching this scene?
- Why do you think the British settlers mislead Nauirans about the meaning behind the cross?
- The term 'savages' used to describe Native American Indians in this source is unacceptable today. What does use of this term suggest about the author's attitude towards the Native Americans?

Source 5: This extract from 25 May 1607 from Archer's journal describes the Native American inhabitants showing the settlers how they lived.

- What are the explorers shown how to do? [Think about what 'manner of setting' actually means]
- If the Native Americans are willing to do this, what does this suggest about them?
- How would you describe the role of food in the meetings between the Native Americans and the colonists?
- What hints does this extract give us about how this Native American community lived?

Tasks

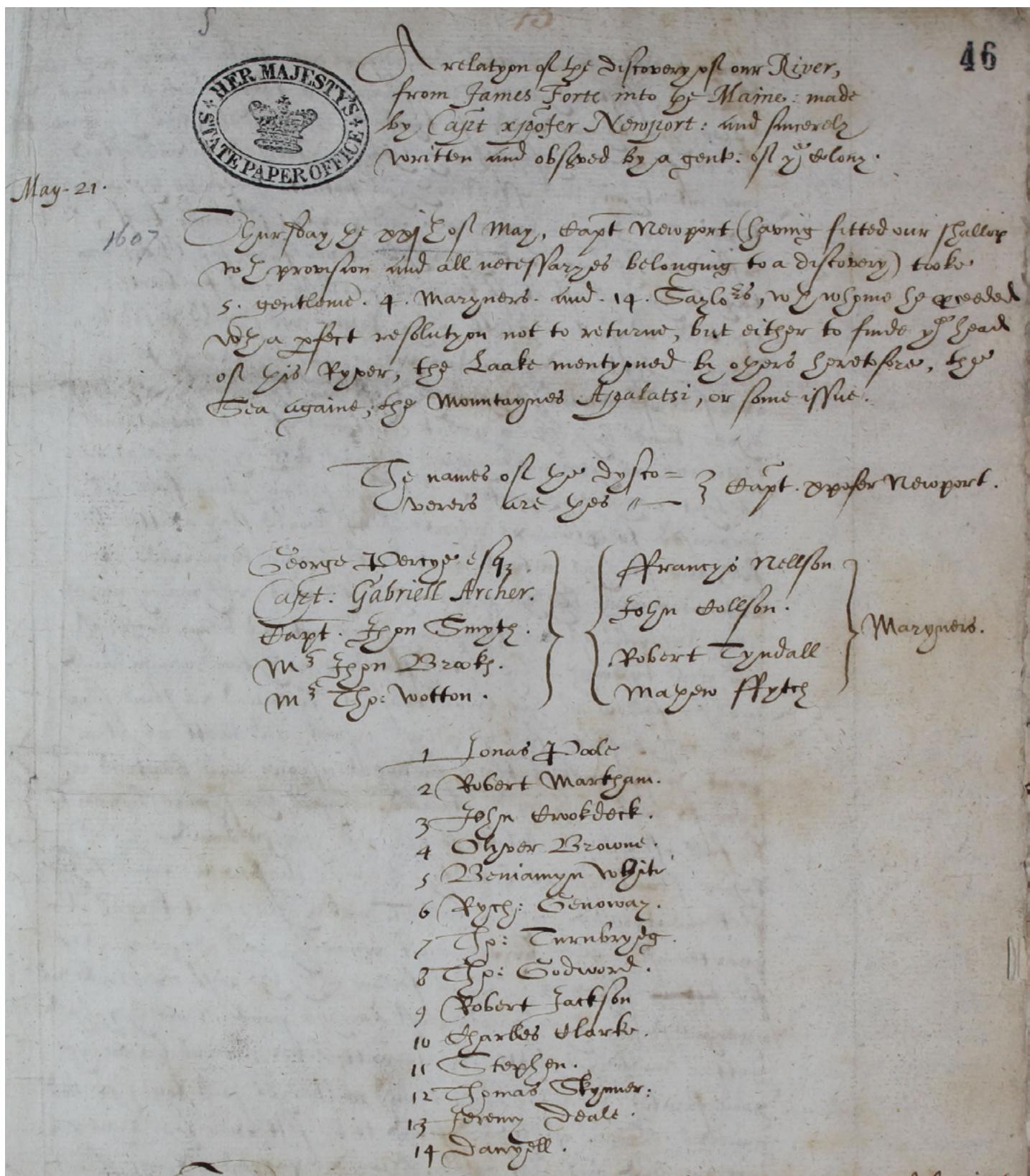
Source 6: This extract from May-June 1607 describes how the Native Americans appeared to the writer.

- Which aspects of the Native Americans' appearance seems to be most striking to the settler who wrote this passage? What does the author focus on, and why?
- Why do you think the author is giving such a detailed account of the Native Americans' appearances?
- How might the description differ if it was given by one of the Native Americans themselves?
- What does the extract suggest about the roles of men and women within the tribes?

Source 7: This extract from May-June 1607 describes how its author viewed the role of religion in the relationship with the Native Americans.

- What hints are given that suggest the religious beliefs of this particular Native American tribe?
- What are the religious beliefs of the author?
- Why do you think the colonists hope to convert the Native Americans to Christianity?
- Can you spot the words 'their fury'? Why do you think this is included?
- Has your view on the relationship between the English settlers and the Native Americans changed since Source 3? If so, how?

Source 1: Extract from 21 May 1607 from a journal of one of the settlers, likely Gabriel Archer. Catalogue Ref: CO 1/1



Transcript: Source 1

A relatyon of the Discovery of our River, from James Forte into the Maine: made by Capt. Christopher Newport: and sincerely written and observed by a gent of ye colony.

Thursday the xxith of May, Capt[ain] Newport (having fitted our shallup with provision and all neccessaryes belonging to a discovery) tooke 5 . gentleme[n]. 4 Maryners . and 14 Sal[ours], with whome he [proc]eded with a [per]fect resolutyon not to returne, but either to find ye head of this Ryver, the Laake mentyoned by others heretofore, the Sea againe, the Mountaynes Apalatsi, or some issue

The names of the Dyscoverers are thes : Capt[ain] Christopher Newport

George Percye esq.	Francys Nellson
Capt[ain] Gabriell Archer	John Collson.
Capt[ain] Ihon Smyth	Robert Tyndall
M[aster] Ihon Brookes	Marrhew Fytch
M[aster] Thomas Wotton	

Jonas Poole.
Robert Markham.
John Crookdeck.
Olyver Browne.
Beniamyn White.
Rych[ard] Genoway
Tho[mas] Turnbrydg
Tho[mas] Godword
Robert Jackson
Charles Clarke
Stephen
Thomas Slymer
Jeremy Deale
Danyell

Simplified transcript: Source 1

A relation of the discovery of our river, from James Fort into the Maine: made by Capt. Christopher Newport and sincerely written and observed by a gentleman of the colony.

On Thursday the 20th of May, Captain Newport (having fitted our shallop [small ship] with provisions [supplies] and all necessary supplies for an expedition, took with him 5 gentlemen, 4 mariners, and 14 sailors and proceeded with the aim to find the head of this river, the lake previously mentioned by others, the sea [coastline], the Apalatsi [Appalachian] Mountains...

The names of the discoverers are these: Captain Christopher Newport

George Percye esq. Francys Nellson

Capt[ain] Gabriell Archer John Collson.

Capt[ain] Ihon Smyth Robert Tyndall Mariners

M[aster] Ihon Brookes Marrhew Fytch

M[aster] Thomas Wotton

Jonas Poole.

Robert Markham.

John Crookdeck.

Olyver Browne.

Beniamyn White.

Rych[ard] Genoway

Tho[mas] Turnbrydg

Tho[mas] Godword

Robert Jackson

Charles Clarke

Stephen

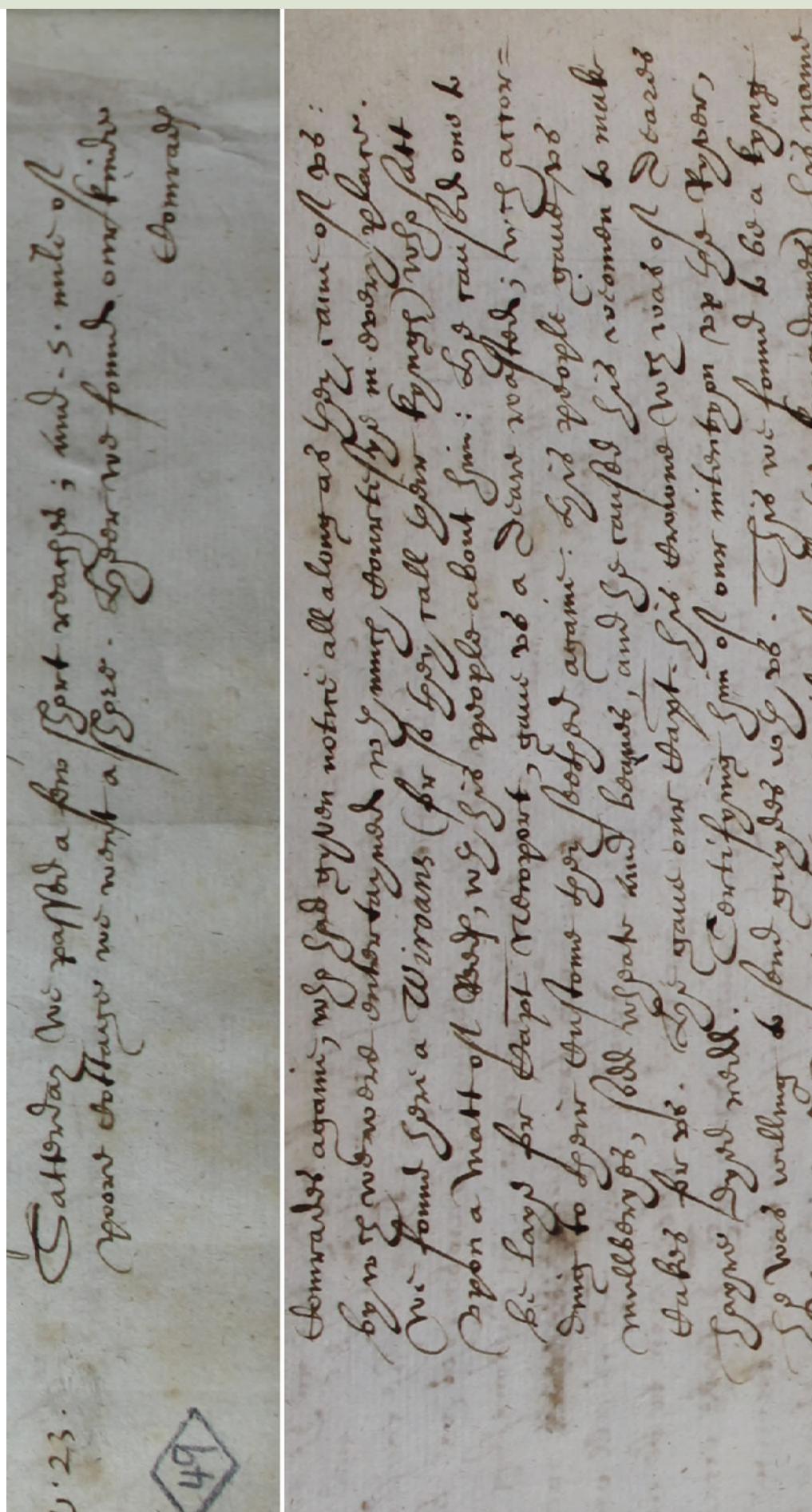
Thomas Slymer

Jeremy Deale

Danyell

Source 2: Extract from 23 May 1607 from Archer's journal.

Catalogue Ref: CO 1/1



Transcript: Source 2

Satterday we passed a few short reaches; and . 5. mile of Poore Cottage we went a shore.
Heer we found our kinde

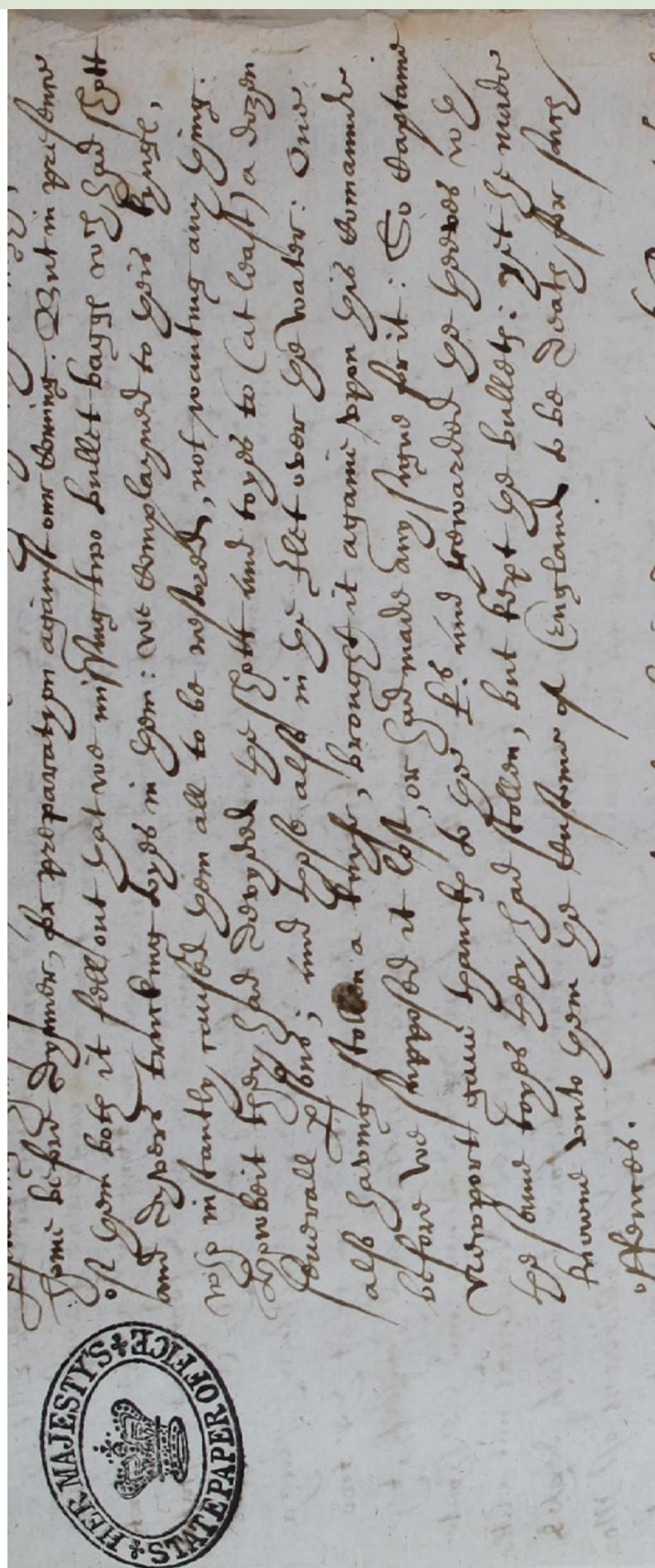
Comrades againe, who had gyven notice all along as they came of us: by which we were entartayned with much Courtesye in every place. We found here a Wiroans (for so they call their kynges) who satt vpon a matt of Reedes, with his people about him: He casued one to be layd for Captain Newport, gave vs a Deare roasted; which accor ding to their Custome they seethed againe: His people gaue Vs mullberyes, sodd wheate and beanies, and he caused his weomen to make Cakes for Vs. He gaue our Captaine his Crowne which was of Deares hayre dyed redl. Certifying him of our intentyon vp the Ryver, he was willing to send guydes with vs.

Simplified transcript

On Saturday we passed a few short stretches of river, and 5 miles from 'Poor Cottage' we went ashore. Here we found our kind friends again, who had given us notice while they came toward us, and who entertained us with much courtesy [respect] in every place. We found here a Wiroans (which is what they call their kings) who sat upon a mat of reeds with his people around him. He arranged for [a mat] to be laid for Captain Newport and gave us a roasted deer, which according to their custom they seethed [boiled] again. His people gave us mulberries, wheat and beans, and he had his women make cakes for us. He gave our Captain his crown, which was made out of deer hair dyed red. When we told him we were going up the river, he was willing to send guides with us.

Source 3: Extract from 24 May 1607 from Archer's journal.

Catalogue Ref: CO 1/1



Transcript: Source 3

But in presence of them both it fell out that we missing two bullett-bagges which had shott and Dyvers trucking toyes in them: we Complayned to theis kynges, who instantly caused them all to be restored, not wanting any thing. Howbeit they had Devyded the shott and toyes to (at least) a dozen seuerall persons; and those also in the llet over the water: One also having stollen a knyfe, brought it againe vpon this Comaunde before we supposed it lost, or had made made any signe for it: so Captaine Newport gaue thanckes to the Kinges and rewarded the theives with the same toyes they had stollen, but kept the bulletes: yet he made knowne vnto them the Custome of England to be Death for such offences.

Simplified transcript

But in presence of them both it turned out that we were missing two bullet-bags which had shot [bullets] and various trucking toys [goods to be used for trading with the Native Americans] inside them. We complained to their kings, who instantly caused them all to be returned, not wanting anything. However they had divided the shot and toys between at least a dozen people, as well as those in the inlet over the water. One also, having stolen a knife, brought it back to [the king's] command before we had thought it to be lost.. Captain Newport gave thanks to the kings and rewarded the thieves with the same toys they had stolen, but kept the bullets: however, he made it clear that they understood that the custom of England was death for such offences.

Source 4: Extract from 24 May 1607 (Whitsunday) from Archer's journal. Catalogue Ref: CO 1/1

and all of us communing & c
our family or saty / & our neigbor: So soon one of us little
fleets at the mouth of the pale & other wth a crew wth no English in ship =
by Jacobus Regt. 1607. and his name below: At Ge^co =
writing & wth the prayer of our syng and our own & psonal best
not in God his Artyon, and prothagment him syng, w^t a great & gentle
Panatah was now gone (and as we noted somwhat diffused
the syng Panatah w^t charpon) and abe Ge^c Galvagos
no gome importunity of proceeding up charpon) and abe Ge^c Galvagos
howne due Nauirans, w^t w^t being w^t a troupe w^t shone a
gent, began to admire; but our starayor told him that he, two
Arms of the shyp / & himself being Ponatah and him self, tog^r
hafting of it in Ge^c my self was to him & Louys, and Ge^c Gent
the ardent to Panatah. w^t general Navirans not a like.

Transcript: Source 4

'So upon one of the little iletts at the mouth of the falls he [Captain Newport] sett up a crosse with this inscription Jacobus Rex. 1607. and his owne name below: At the erecting thereof we prayed for our king and our owne prosperous succes in this his action, and proclaimed him king, with a greate showte. The king Pawatah [Powhatan] was now gone (and as we noted somewhat distasted with our importunity of proceeding up further) and all the savages likewise save Nauirans, who seeing us set up a crosse with such a shoute, began to admire; but our captayne told him that the two arms of the cross signified kyng Pawatah and himselfe, the fastening in the middle was their united league, and the shout and the reverence he did to Pawatah, which cheered Nauirans not a litle.'

Simplified transcript

'So on one of the small islands at the mouth of the falls, he [Captain Newport] set up a cross with the inscription 'Jacobus Rex. 1607' and his own name below. Once it had been erected, we prayed for our king and our own prosperous success in this [venture done in his name], and proclaimed him king, with a great shout. The king Pawatah [Powhatan] was now gone (and, as we noted, somewhat displeased with our insistence on proceeding up further), as were all the savages, except for Nauirans, who seeing us set up a cross with such a shout, began to admire [pay attention]. But our captain told him that the two arms of the cross signified king Powhatan and himself, the fastening in the middle represented their alliance, and the shout and the reverence was done for Powhatan, which cheered Nauirans quite a bit.'

Source 5: Extract from 25 May 1607 from Archer's journal.

Catalogue Ref: CO 1/1

But being nothing else then stones. Some off this islands last us to your
Spynes, & roots &c the ground of your houses do make of hitting it,
grate w^t Tobacco, wallnuty, mulberryes, strawberries, and Apples.
One / denord w^t the people called in your tongue Misacan, w^t the
bay Islands very bad rooming, it is like by reason of bloudwort. Our
gauge is a Plastic instrument by which you may
w^t any thing w^t dimensions, and laboured very much by plagues to
make w^t understand your language.

Transcript: Source 5

Some of his people led vs to their houses, showed vs the growing of their Corne & the maner of setting it, gave us Tobacco, Wallnutes, mullberyes, strawberryes, and Respises. One shewed vs the herbe called in their tongue wisacan, which they say heales poysoned woundes, it is like lyverwort or bloudwort. One gaue me a Roote wherewith they poison their Arrowes. they would shew vs any thing we Demaunded, and laboured very much by signes to make vs understand their Languadg.

Simplified transcript

Some of his people led us to their houses, showed us the growing of their corn & the manner of setting [planting] it, gave us tobacco, walnuts, mulberries, strawberries, and raspberries. One showed us the herb called in their language wisacan, which they say heals poisoned wounds, like liverwort or bloodwort. One gave me a root with which they poison their arrows. They would show us anything we demanded, and made a strong effort to use signs to make us understand their language.

Source 6: Extract from May-June 1607 from Archer's journal.

Catalogue Ref: CO 1/1

are hys to hab'e. They goe all naked save
their privyts, yet in wroile weather they
wearre deare fumbl, w^t & go bare on ~
loof: some gave leather stockings up to
their twishts, & sandalls on their feet, their
eyyre is blacke generally, w^t & they wearre
long on the left side, tyred up on a knott,
about w^t knott go rings and bost amoung
hem gave a kind of Coronet of dares ~
eyre wold red, some gave regnes of
long burnt copper about their necks, and
some regnes of pearl, the commonest
were long fingeres in the knott I found
not a gray eyre amoung hem all. their
/ Lynn.

Lynn is tawny not blacke, but w^t dyng
and paynting hem blude, in w^t they ~
delight greatly. The women are like the
men, onely hys difference; their eyre ~
growe long al over their face save clift ~
somwhat short afore, they do all the labo
and hys men chust and goo at their pleasure.

Transcript: Source 6

They goe all naked save their privytes, yet in coole weather they weare deare skinns, with the hayre on loose: some have leather stockinges vp to their twistes, & sandalls on their feet, their hayre is black generally, which they weare long on the left side, tyed vp on a knott, about which knott the kinges and best among them have a kind of Coronett of deares hayre coloured redd, some have chaines of long linckt copper about their neckesm and some chaines of pearle, the common sort stick long fethers in this knott, I found not a grey eye among them all. their

skynn is tawny not so borne, but with dying and paynting them selues, in which they - delight greatly. The wemen are like the men, onely this difference; their hayre - groweth long al over their heads save clipt - somewhat short afore, these do all the labour and the men hunt and goe at their plesure.

Simplified transcript

They go completely naked except for their privates [genitals], but in cool weather they wear deer skins with their hair loose: some have leather stockings up to their twistes [cloth covering their pelvis], & sandals on their feet. Their hair is black generally, which they wear long on the left side, tied up in a knot. Around the knot the kings and best among them have a kind of coronet [crown] of deer hair coloured red, some have chains of long linked copper around their necks and some chains of pearl. The common sort [most of them] stick long feathers in this knot [of hair]. I found none of them had grey eyes. Their skin is tawny [yellowish-brown] not by birth, but through dyeing and painting themselves, which delights them greatly. The women are like the men, with only this difference: their hair grows long all over their heads but is clipped somewhat short in the front. These [the women] do all the labour and the men hunt and go at their pleasure.

Source 7: Extract from May-June 1607 from Archer's journal.

Catalogue Ref: CO 1/1

In hundred. The women are very busily
in making gun broad and preparing meat.
I found her account after due to go into
the other world pointing eastward to St. Elizement,
and when they saw us at prayer they observed
us w^t great pleasure and respect, especially
those to whom I had imparted the meaning
of reverence. To conclude they are a very
witty and ingenious people, apt both to
understand and speak our language, &
that I hope in god as we have miraculously
provid^d us either from all danger & both
of sea land & our fury so well
make.

make us perfect of his glory well in subteling
them to true Christian faith by his owne
impeccable grace and knowledge of his divitie.

Transcript: Source 7

The wemen are very cleanly in making their bread and prepareing meat. I found they account after death to goe into an other world pointing eastward to the Element, and when they saw vs at prayer they observed vs with great silence and respect, especially those to whome I had imparted the meaning of our reverence. To conclude they are a very witty and ingenious people, apt both to vnderstand and speake our language, so that I hope in god as he hath miraculously preserved vs hither from all dangers both of sea and land & their fury so he will make vs authors of his holy will in converting them to our true Christian faith by his owne inspireing grace and knowledge of his deity.

Simplified transcript

The women are very skilled in making their bread and preparing meat. I found that they claim that after death one goes into another world pointing eastward to the element. When they saw us at prayer they observed us with great silence and respect, especially to those who I had told the meaning of our reverence [worship]. To conclude, they are a very witty and ingenious people, capable both of understanding and speaking our language, so that I hope in god, as he has miraculously preserved us so far from all dangers both of sea and land & their fury, so he will make us authors of his holy will in converting them to our true Christian faith by his own inspiring grace and knowledge of his deity [divinity].



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our Onsite Workshops are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our Online Workshops allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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