

DBQ—Examining Primary Sources

“Letter to John Smith,” Powhatan (circa 1609)

I am now grown old, and soon must die; and the succession must descend, in order, to my brothers, *Opitchapan, Opekankanough, and Catataugh*, and then to my two sisters, and their two daughters. I wish their experience was equal to mine; and that your love to us might not be less than ours to you. Why should you take by force that from us which you can have by love? Why should you destroy us, who have provided you with food? What can you get by war? We can hide our provisions, and fly into the woods; and then you must consequently famish by wronging your friends. What is the cause of your jealousy? You see us unarmed, and willing to supply your wants, if you will come in a friendly manner, and not with swords and guns, as to invade an enemy. I am not so simple, as not to know it is better to eat good meat, live well, and sleep quietly with my women and children; to laugh and be merry with the English; and, being their friend, to have copper, hatchets, and whatever else I want, than to fly from all, to lie cold in the woods, feed upon acorns, roots, and such trash, and to be so hunted, that I cannot rest, eat, or sleep. In such circumstances, my men must watch, and if a twig should but break, all would cry out, “*Here comes Capt. Smith*”; and so, in this miserable manner, to end my miserable life; and, Capt. Smith, this *might* be soon your fate too, through your rashness and unadvisedness. I, therefore, exhort you to peaceable councils; and, above all, I insist that the guns and swords, the cause of all our jealousy and uneasiness, be removed and sent away.

1. Based on your knowledge of the Pocahontas story, describe the relationship between John Smith and Powhatan.
2. What advantage(s) did Native American Indians have over English settlers in Virginia?
3. What advantage(s) did English settlers have over Native American Indians in Virginia?
4. How likely was it that John Smith and the English would follow Powhatan’s directive that all guns and swords be removed from the Virginia Colony?