



Who am I?

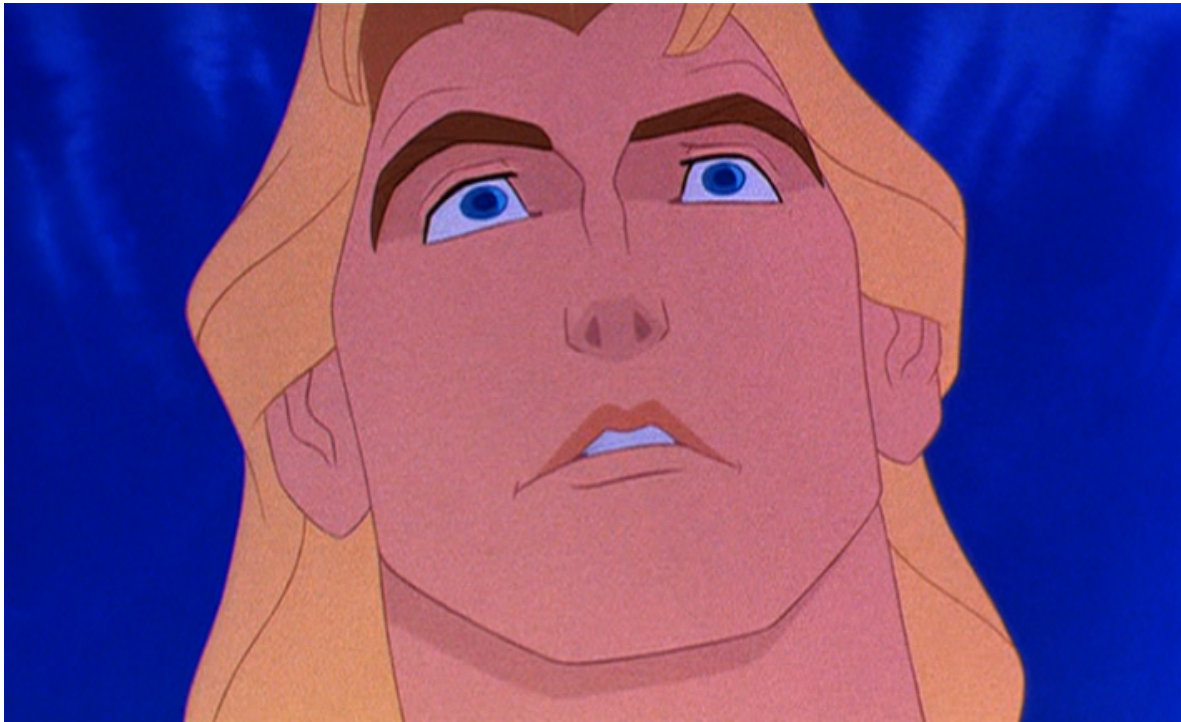
- * I was one of the most colorful characters in the early history of our country.
- * I survived more in my first 26 years of life than many people would survive in a lifetime.
- * I was alive during Shakespeare's lifetime.
- * I wrote in Early Modern English like Shakespeare did.
- * I was writing at nearly the same time that the KJV of the Bible was being translated.
- * I typify the Elizabethan Renaissance adventurer.
- * Even though I was really busy, I still found time to write the earliest significant accounts of VA and New England settlements.
- * I am the only writer in our textbook who did not come to stay in America.
- * One reason I wanted to come to the New World was to evangelize the savages.
- * Of the three phases of my life, only the second (middle) phase is connected to Jamestown.
- * I helped the early settlers survive the winter in Jamestown.
- * I wrote *A General History* in 1624 about my adventures in America.
- * *A General History* is probably my most famous work.
- * I am often criticized for being unreliable in my account of my kidnapping.
- * I was kidnapped by Indians and possibly saved by the daughter of the chief.
- * Who am I with the initials C. J. S.

Answer: Captain John Smith



Captain John Smith

1580-1631





Leviticus 24:17- If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death.

Question 1:

a. Although the material is obviously the report of an eyewitness, Smith writes about himself in the the third person. Since the third person tends to distance the reader from the material, Smith may have used it to give the impression of an objective or dispassionate historian.

Question 1:

b. The members of the Council seem to have taken exception with Smith for his failure to discover the head of the Chickahominy River and for being "too slow" in his "worthy" endeavors. Although we cannot be certain whether the criticism of Smith was justified, such references do show that not all of the colonists gave Smith the unconditional admiration he seems to have desired.

Question 1:

c. Smith's response to this criticism implies a somewhat supercilious attitude toward the Council members. Words and phrases like *idle exceptions*, *muttered*, and *taxed* convey the idea that Smith saw the Council members' criticism as not only unjustified but superfluous.

Question 1:

d. The background information in the headnote tells us of the disorganization of the settlers and of Smith's rescuing them through his leadership. His reference to the "comedies" seems to refer to the bumbling efforts of the colonists, implying that the settlers were like those bumbling characters in a comedy. The analogy is an odd one considering the severity of the colonists' circumstances. Even more odd is Smith's implication that the criticism he received concerning his endeavors was part of a "tragedy." The incongruity between these two references coupled with the use of third person reinforces the tone of superiority in Smith's writing.

Question 2:

2. The content and tone of the first sentence give us the impression of a somewhat defensive and proud individual. These characteristics could raise questions about Smith's ability to record events dispassionately. As we continue our reading of Smith's account, we find this idea of subjective reporting reinforced. We see that Smith does not merely record the material but consciously attempts to convey a sense of setting and of the drama of the actions.

Question 3:

In paragraph eight Smith asserts, "But almighty God (by his divine providence) had mollified the hearts of those stern barbarians with compassion." In the last sentence of the selection, Smith continues his theme: "Thus you may see what difficulties still crossed any good endeavour; and the good success of the business being thus oft brought to the very period of destruction, yet you see by what strange means God hath still delivered it."

Question: Present arguments for and against the truthfulness of the account of Pocahontas's saving Captain Smith's life.

Answer: The account may be questioned because it appears in the 1624 *A General History*, at a time when Smith needed money and Pocahontas was "in the news," but not in the 1608 *A True Relation*. Also, the language of the account is clearly dramatic. On the other hand, Smith's contemporaries do not contradict his testimony in other matters. There is evidence for the practice of sparing a prisoner's life because of the appeal of an Indian tribe member, and falsifying such a dangerous experience would work against Smith's purpose of encouraging colonization.

Question: Explain specific examples from *A General History* that suggest that the author's accounts may not be completely objective.

Answer:

Smith seems condescending and proud. He uses the term *comedies* to describe the fortunes of the colonists, as if their behavior is foolish and inferior. He describes criticism of himself as "some idle exceptions" and says that he is "taxed" by the council for not quickly enough discovering the head of the Chickahominy River, a project Smith ridicules with mock praise ("so worthy an attempt"). When Smith's smaller party leaves the main party with the barge, he charges those left behind not to go ashore until he returns. Their failure to follow this command, or in Smith's terms their "want of government," leads to the killing of George Cassen by the Indians.

The Pocahontas episode seems particularly dramatic rather than purely factual: "Pocahontas . . . , when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms, and laid her own upon his to save him from death." Smith also implies that because of his relationship to Pocahontas, he deserves credit for her bringing food which saves many of the colonists from starvation. Other examples are possible.