

What makes this text complex?

Text summary

Full title of the text

Who Was Pocahontas?

Text Author

Erin Sawyer

Text description

This is a short informational text about the life of a young, Powhatan Native American, Pocahontas. Pocahontas and the Powhatan tribe lived in Jamestown, Virginia. In 1607, English settlers landed in Jamestown and soon met the members of the Powhatan tribe. The article discusses both positive and negative effects the two groups had on each other when they first met. Both groups initially traded resources with each other, but soon began having difficulties getting along. Their disagreements led to kidnapping each others' members and many arguments. Pocahontas was kidnapped by English settlers and forced to learn Christian beliefs. She eventually married an English settler and never returned to her life with the Powhatan tribe.

Quantitative features

Lexile and grade level

1010L at a 4th grade level

Text length

Five pages

Qualitative features

Meaning/Central Ideas/Purpose

Moderately Complex

In this text, the central idea is to inform us of the complexity of gathering information about historical events. The text shares the story of the relationship between English settlers and the Powhatan tribe in the 1600s. The events are easily identified in the context. Although the author finds various sources for her information, she points out that there are gaps in understanding and also wants to emphasize that it is important to analyze as many sources as possible, rather than assuming one source as fact. For students who are on-grade level, determining this will be moderately complex. Be sure to address the nature of this challenge for ELL and struggling readers by analyzing the sections of the text separately.

Text Structure/Organization

Moderately Complex

The chronological structure of the text aids in student understanding. However, the author consistently points out that history has multiple perspectives and it is important to understand that you cannot rely on one source. This point is emphasized with the author's addition of the sidebar on page 3 titled, "Using Diaries to Learn about History." This adds a layer of complexity to the text that is important to point out to students. In addition, the text is divided into four sections with headings that aid in following the chronology of the text.

Language Features

Moderately Complex

The language of the text is very complex. While there are many vocabulary words that can be determined in context, there are also many words that need much more teaching time to define.

Prior knowledge demands

Very Complex

In order to fully comprehend the text, it is important that the reader comes in with a lot of background knowledge; specifically about British colonies, Native Americans, and early English settlers in Virginia. Fourth grade students should have some academic background knowledge regarding Native Americans, but it is important to point out some of the key details. Students at this grade level may also have been exposed to the Disney movie "Pocahontas" which provides information that is inconsistent with the facts in this text.

Potential Reader/Task Challenges

A potential challenge for students at the fourth grade level may be the theme of kidnapping and holding a person captive. Pocahontas is kidnapped from her family and never returns. This concept may be hard for students to grasp emotionally at this age.

Critical vocabulary in this text

Vocabulary plays a critical role in text complexity and readers' ability to make meaning of complex text.

Resources :

- See "[Identifying and sorting vocabulary words](#)," also on page 49 of your TeachFest Guide
- Page 33 of Common Core State Standards [Appendix A](#).
- "[What words do I teach and how?](#)" (Short Article by David Liben, Student Achievement Partners)

| | Words that demand less teaching time (i.e., the definition is singular and concrete) | Words that demand more teaching time (i.e. there are multiple meanings and/or are part of a word family) |
|---|---|--|
| Words that can be determined in context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ settlers, village, supplies, symbol, persuade, goodwill, certain, uncertain, encourage, release, settlement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ captors, boldly, crop |
| Words that cannot be determined in context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Powhatan River, Native Americans, Jamestown, Chief, Christian, mission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ colony, massive, marshy, mischievous, maintain, accounts, tobacco, empire, faith |