

John Smith – Discussion Questions and Talking Points

From D2L Posts:

1. Please try to summarize the “plot” of this selection for each other. What are the major events that happen during the course of this narrative?
2. What would you call this piece of writing? It is a narrative, which tells a story, but can you be more specific or precise than “narrative”?
3. Why is he so descriptive when writing about the “Salvages” (as he calls them)? What are the advantages and disadvantages to such description about the Native Americans?
4. Why does he keep changing his story? The way he told it, and wrote it (multiple times) were all different.
5. Why is Pocahontas only given about 3 sentences? She did save his life after all. Also, it seems like a love of humanity that made her so kind to him, but yet, it, and other places, hint at there being more than simply that.
6. How does he present himself? And why does he present himself in this way? And, why does he use 3rd person (he, we, us, etc.) instead of 1st person (I)? What are the advantages to presenting himself this way? Might there be any disadvantage to this choice?
7. Look at and try to decipher / paraphrase the poem at the very end of the selection. It’s probably important. How or why is it important?

Other Things:

1. Style – including syntax, diction, etc.
2. Point of view.
3. Smith’s accounts emphasize human qualities / traits that become commonly thought to be “typically American.” What are some of these “typically American” traits?
4. Writing as propaganda or advertisement.
5. Writing as travel narrative or exploration report.
6. Writing as captivity narrative.
7. Is there any way that John Smith’s narrative could be read or considered as a part or chapter of a novel? This is the argument made in Ed White’s article in *American Literature* entitled “Captaine Smith, Colonial Novelist” (75.3 [2003]: 487-513). What features of “novelistic” writing does Smith employ? How and/or why might Smith’s narrative be considered “novelistic”?
8. The myth of “Love in the Woods.”
9. The Mediterranean Courtly Love Triangle.
10. Smith dramatizes one resolution of his captivity. But aside from “Love in the Woods,” or the adoption of the captive into the community of the captor, in what *other* ways might a captivity conclude? In other words, what are the plot possibilities for this kind of narrative?
11. How does Smith present or reference God?
12. Leslie Fiedler, and others after him, emphasize that Smith not only gives us the first stirrings of the figure who will become “The Indian Princess,” familiar both to national symbolism and to commercial advertising, along with the American version of the literary figure we might call “the redemptive girl,” he also gives us the figure of the white woodsman as noble and benevolent and courageous. What kind of male paleface figure, do you think, is Smith trying to **rule out** by giving us this picture of himself instead?
13. How does Smith view Nature and the Land?
14. <http://www.powhatan.org/history.html>