

# ACCOUNTS OF COLONIAL LIFE

1624

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John Smith

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William Bradford

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The following two selections are examples of narrative writing. Both provide firsthand accounts of early colonial life in Jamestown and Plymouth and the difficulties colonists faced while adjusting to life with their new neighbors—the Native Americans. In the first account, John Smith describes in detail an early encounter with Native Americans in Virginia. In the second account, William Bradford, governor of Plymouth, describes an English attack on a Narragansett Indian.

## READING FOCUS:

How did the colonists interact with Native American people?

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The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles  
by John Smith

[The natives] were not sparing of their arrows, nor [of] the greatest passion they could express of their anger. Long they shot, we still riding at an anchor without [beyond] their reach making all the signs of friendship we could.

The next day they came unarmed, with every one a basket, dancing in a ring, to draw us on shore: but seeing there was nothing in them but villainy, we discharged a volley of muskets charged with pistol shot; whereat they all lay tumbling on the ground, creeping some one way, some another into a great cluster of reeds hard by; where their companies lay in ambush...

Early in the morning four savages came to us in their canoe, whom we used with such courtesy, not knowing what we were, nor had done, [they] having been in the bay afishing; [who] bade [asked] us stay and ere long they would return, which they did and some twenty more with them: with whom after a little conference, two or three thousand men, women, and children came clustering about us, everyone presenting us with something, which a little bead would so well requite [repay], that we became such friends they would contend [argue about] who should fetch us water, stay with us for hostage, conduct our men any whither [anywhere].

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### Of Plymouth Plantation by William Bradford

At length there came a Narragansett Indian by, who had been in the Bay a-trading, and had both cloth and beads about him... Peach called him to drink tobacco with them, and he came and sat down with them. Peach told the other he would kill him and take what he had from him, but they were something afraid... And when he saw his time, he took a rapier [sword] and ran him through the body once or twice and took from him... wampum and three coats of cloth and went their way, leaving him for dead. But he scrambled away when they were gone, and made shift to get home, but died within a few days after. By which means they were discovered.

The Government in the Bay... pressed by all means that justice might be done..., or else the country must rise and see justice done; otherwise it would raise a war. Yet some of the rude and ignorant sort murmured that any English should be put to death for the Indians... They all in the end freely confessed in effect all that the Indian accused them of... And so, upon the forementioned evidence, were cast by the jury and condemned, and executed for the same.

“The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles” from *Captain John Smith’s America*, ed. by John Lankford.

From *Of Plymouth Plantation* by William Bradford. Gothic Condensed.