

Colonial Cultures Clash
A Native & Colonist
Compare Life In The New World

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The Reader's Theater Script:

Narrator 1: What happens when different cultures meet?

Building a Nation, McMillan-McGraw Hill, 2007 (p.119)

In *A history of US: the first Americans, prehistory – 1600* by Joy Hakim, writes, “Do you see the people (living in North America)? They are hunters, farmers, traders, artists, teachers, and builders, and they have lived on this land for tens of thousands of years. They speak more than 250 different languages. If you look closely, you will see a few newcomers who are fishermen, pirates, explorers, slaves, priests, and soldiers. The newcomers have built tiny settlements in Florida, in New Mexico, and in New France (Canada).” (164) Then years later, “A business firm, the London Company, is getting ready to send some Englishmen to America. They are hoping to find gold-or anything else that will make money for them. Those Englishmen will start a colony, and that colony will grow into a nation. It will change the North American continent forever.” (165)

Narrator 2: And so it did change the North American continent forever. The following are short sketches of a Native American's viewpoint and a Colonist's viewpoint about a variety of trades and technologies they were familiar with during the 1600's – the 1700's. Let's listen in as these people talk about the way they lived back then.

Narrator 1: Here are a couple of ladies who are walking down the street carrying baskets of different sorts. “Ladies, Excuse me. Could you tell us something about the baskets you are carrying? What are they made of and what do you use them for?”

Baskets

Native – Our hand made baskets were made by the women in our tribe. They were used for carrying food and supplies of all sorts. Some foods were stored in covered baskets to keep mice from getting it. We could weave a basket so tightly it would hold liquid and we could put hot stones inside and cook our morning porridge! What beautiful decorative designs my mother could make on our baskets, too! Her designs and the quality of her basket weaving were the talk of our village making our family proud of our artwork.

Colonist – Well, we used baskets too! We carried things in them from one place to another. I wouldn't call them ‘works of art’ like yours, though. They were sturdy and tough to last, mostly made out of willow, but there were no woven designs like yours have. We just thought of them as a tool for carrying things - to get the job done, and since that's all they were needed for anyway - why all the fuss about making them fancy with designs?

(Show CW video of basket making)

Narrator 3: So, what were your homes like back then?

Home

Native – Our homes were made of bent saplings tied together with rope made from plant fibers as woven mats (*Wingamisk*), and they were “...designed to protect the inside living space from wind, sun, rain, and snow... Rain and snow slid off the curved roofs. The mats that covered our yi-haken (as our homes were called) were woven from reeds and plant. Small openings allowed fresh air to flow into the home in summer. In winter, extra mats were piled on top of the yi-haken to trap the warm air inside. With a small fire pit in its center, wood and corncobs fueled the fire. Fire is used for cooking and keeping warm in winter. Families gathered around the fire to eat, socialize & tell stories. An opening allowed some smoke to escape, but people were used to smoky air – in summer the smoke kept out the mosquitoes. Tools and weapons were stored in the homes on platforms. Food was kept inside to protect it from weather & animals. Sleeping platforms were built into the sides of the structure.” Soft furs of animals were our coverings to keep us warm (according to the text in *Life of a Powhatan* p.14-15).

Colonist – Can you believe these people sleep in mat-covered homes? I bet they could fall down if a big gust of wind came in from the ocean. They seem to be made out of the same kinds of materials we use to make our baskets out of to carry the fresh vegetables home from the outdoor market in the town square! Why yes, at first, I admit, our homes were crudely made – some homes were even made out of logs with thatched roofs. But, as time went by, we became more sophisticated and we wanted sturdier, well-built homes to last for our children to live in. Jamestown burned down because of fire, and we worried about our safety. So, we began to build our homes out of brick. All our homes in Williamsburg - and even our government building, the Capital, had brick fireplaces and chimneys because we had problems with some of the homes in town catching fire back in the old days. The brick mason in town could only make a certain number of bricks each year between May when the weather was warm enough to put bare feet into the damp clay and the first snow, so sometimes it was quite some time before you got your order of bricks delivered in his biggest wagon.

We liked to entertain our friends for parties and dances, so we hired local tradesmen to make fine furniture for the parlor rooms in our homes. In the bedrooms, we wanted to have our nice wooden beds to sleep on up off of the ground with curtains to keep out the cold drafts and we used nice, warm blankets made from wool or homemade quilts from old pieces of fabric stitched together to keep us warm.

Narrator 4: Looks like ‘partying’ is still a part of life these days – just like back then!
What kind of clothing did you wear?

Clothing

Colonist - We wore long dresses with lots of fabric from neck to toe made out of silk, flax, linen or wool because we didn’t want to have our skin tanned brown or shown off to the men – especially our elbows! Cotton fabrics were even more expensive because those cotton bolls had to be hand picked and that cost lots of money for the manpower to do that job. I love lace on my clothing, but these days, it is hard to come by and extremely expensive to import from England. So, as you can see, I have only a smattering of imported lace on this dress I’m wearing. Cloth itself is a high enough price. Now, I love a colorful gown to wear to parties, but my everyday attire is more practical for day-to-day activities and out of a darker cloth so it won’t show as much dirt. Under my outer dress of course, I wear lamb’s wool underwear, a petticoat, bodice, and stockings. On top of my outer clothing, I would normally wear an apron when I do my household chores – and this happens to be about ninety-nine percent of the time. Everything is fastened with buttons, ties, and laces. I’m not wearing a mop cap worn by most women today because I’ve done my hair up real special to talk with you. But, as you’ve probably noticed by now, the Natives in this area, why, they go around not wearing enough clothing to cover my hunting dog, Sparky. Used to be, when they came into town, I wouldn’t allow my children to go to the market. They needed some serious covering up! Yes, they did!

Native – One early Jamestown colonist with The Virginia Company of London described our clothing in a published document. What he said about us, “...for they are a rude, barbarous, and naked people...” (*Jamestown: Their Story*, p. 8) is degrading about our culture. We made our clothing natural materials. Deerskins & plant fibers were used for adult clothing – our children wore no clothing at all. Women, such as myself, “...wore plain dresses or skirts that hung from belts, similar to a male’s breechcloth. Women of higher status wore mantles that were decorated with shells, duck feathers and embroidery. Some women created intricate designs that were stitched into clothing.” (*Life of a Powhatan* p.20) How dare these people call us naked people – we had clothes on! Can you believe it? We wear NO coverings? We know better than to cover our entire bodies from head to toe with heavy fabrics and die of the heat like the silly English women! How can those women stand the summer weather with all that clothing covering them?

Narrator 4: Hey, what about your shoes, did you guys wear tennis shoes like we do?

Shoes

Native – No, there weren't any tennis shoes. But our moccasins were very comfortable. They were worn only when our people "...ventured into the forest." According to *Life of the Powhatan*. "Each moccasin was formed from one piece of strong animal hide. The seams were sewn together with sinew." Sinew was like the English 'thread' only it was made out of deer gut and we used it to sew our moccasins.

Colonist - Leather boots were worn by the many of the lesser sort in Williamsburg who could afford them, but many of the Gentry class ladies have beautifully handcrafted slippers made in Europe to match the fabric their dresses are made from. The shoes can be worn on either foot. All of our shoes have fashionable buckles for decoration, but the material they are made from varies depending upon the person's class. I have my freshly polished black boots on today.

Narrator 5: I think I'd rather wear the moccasins – they look a whole lot more comfortable than those shiny boots you've got on. The boots might be better in the rain though. I can see the natives might want to trade for some of those boots for wintertime. Now, speaking of winter, what kinds of things did you put on your heads? In winter nowadays, we wear some nice wool hats.

Head coverings

Native - Well! We certainly didn't have any wool at that time – in fact, we had never even had sheep to get wool. But, according to *Life of a Powhatan*, our hairstyles and headwear were important because they would show others who saw us our marriage status, age, and our job description. Hair was considered a head covering as well as more elaborate headpieces some of our people wore on their heads for ceremonies. If you saw a girl who had hair shaved off in the front and at the sides with the edges of shells - they were not of marrying age. Boys and men grew their hair long at the age of 12. Hunters & warriors shaved the right side of their heads to keep their hair from getting tangled while using bows to shoot arrows. During ceremonies, men and women wore beaded headbands that were adorned with feathers.

Colonist - Now, the colonists had lots of different ornamentation for their heads. Men, women, and children all wore hats and bonnets. But, the wealthier the person's station was in the community, the greater the need for a fashionable head covering. One of the most fashionable head coverings for men to wear is a wig called a 'peruke'. Wigs are heavy, hot, and very expensive. Wigs have to be properly maintained by a barber. Heated clay rollers called 'buckles' are used by the barber to put curl into the wigs. The wigs are also powdered white so the white hair shows up better at night in candle-lit rooms where we dine or dance with friends at parties. There are many different styles of wigs for men and each style has significance for the person who wears it. There are some irritating problems with the wigs, though – like lice & fleas! Some women in town could afford to have wigs made for them, but as you probably know already...anyone who wore a wig - had their head shaved – men & women alike had to have the wig fitted

snugly onto their head and the only way to do that was to have a bald head. Therefore, I opted for fashionable bonnets because of my lovely dark hair. Hats are fun, colorful, and can be changed with different ribbons to go with the many different dresses I have. I love the colorful bows and feathers, and the beads too! My husband always wears a tri-corner hat over his wig during the day when he goes out into town on top of his wig. But in our home, when Jacob takes off his hat & his wig, he just puts on a beautiful silk night cap over that bald head of his since he gets very cold reading by his candlelight near the fireplace if he doesn't have something on top to cover his bald head!

Narrator 6: Now that is something else! I've never seen men wearing wigs – powdered wigs too! And that was '**the fashion**' back then? Well, maybe at Halloween - I've seen some crazy wigs – even on guys – but nothing like the curly wigs those guys wore. Now, with all the fancy wigs and clothing people wore, how did you all travel around in those days, anyway?

Travel

Native – People in my tribe walked or traveled by dugout canoes called quintans over the many rivers to transport people and goods. (*Life of the Powhatan*, p.10) The canoes were heavy and slow, but they were effective transportation.

Colonist – When the colonists arrived, many walked everywhere, but some brought horses and wagons. Wheelwrights repaired the wheels when they broke. The wagons were used to transport goods, move people from one place to another, and for heavy work on the plantations. As people moved into town, they purchased fancier wagons with coverings to protect them from the weather. Most people used a wagon to bring their tobacco crops to the river to transport the large barrels called “hogsheads” to the nearest ports for shipping to England.

Narrator 7: Tobacco – getting more popular, is it? Well, who would have thought people would want to buy tobacco over corn and other foods that are for eating? Hummmm. I guess it is... **a new world!**