



## NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS Present:

### Pocahontas

Book by **Vera Morris**

Music and Lyrics by **Scott DeTurk**

Directed by **Paul Bower**

Choreography by **Josh Megill**

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors production of ***Pocahontas***. We are offering this study guide as a way to help you prepare your classes for our upcoming production and your experience at the theater. Included in this guide are a historical note about the story of Pocahontas, a synopsis of our story, a list of characters, a vocabulary list and lesson ideas, as well as some audience protocol reminders. You may like to prepare your class with a review of the history of the early American settlement of Jamestown, the relationship of the English and the Algonquins, and the relationship between Captain John Smith and Pocahontas. We always enjoy hearing from you and your students and look forward to receiving any pictures, stories, or comments about the production. Thank you for your interest and support of New Mexico Young Actors. We look forward to seeing you at the KiMo!

### HISTORICAL NOTE

The community of Jamestown, Virginia was founded in 1607, when three ships from England arrived at the mouth of the James River. The English colonists aboard those ships were sent on the expedition by the Virginia Company of London with the goals of finding gold and other treasures, as well as a route to the Pacific ocean. The early years of this first English settlement in what would become the United States were fraught with difficulties, including starvation, disease, and an acrimonious relationship with the native population of Algonquin Indians, also known as the Powhatan Confederacy under the leadership of the great Chief Powhatan. The colonists became desperate for food and trade with the Indians was difficult due to great mistrust between the two groups of people.

Captain John Smith was a member of the first group to arrive in Jamestown. He was accused of mutiny on the ocean crossing aboard the *Susan Constant*, but avoided execution due to his appointment to the governing council by the Virginia Company prior to the expedition's departure. John Smith was one of the few original settlers who seemed to understand the native population, being one of the first to establish trade with the locals and even learning some of the Algonquin language. On one of his explorations up the Chickahominy River in late 1607, he was taken captive and brought before Chief Powhatan. The Chief decided to execute John Smith and legend has it that, just before the blow fell, the Chief's favorite daughter, Pocahontas, rushed to Smith's aid and stopped the execution.

John Smith became the third president of the colony in September 1608, and returned to England in October 1609, after sustaining an injury. He wrote several books about his life of adventure. Pocahontas maintained a friendship with the settlers, providing them with supplies and acting as an ambassador between the English and the Algonquin. In 1613, she was taken hostage by the English, eventually converted to Christianity, and married an Englishman, John Rolfe. In 1616, she accompanied her husband and young son to England, where she was somewhat of a novelty due to her exotic appearance and background. In March, 1717, at the age of 21,

less than a year after her arrival in England, she died just as she commenced her return trip to Virginia. Pocahontas was buried in an unmarked plot in Gravesend, United Kingdom.

## ***POCAHONTAS SYNOPSIS***

Act I, Scenes 1 & 2: The Wordspinner introduces the story and sets us in the Algonquin village. Little Running Rabbit, Happy-She-Walks, and Brave Eagle are working and playing with Pocahontas, Chief Powhatan's favorite daughter. Powhatan enters to declare that the tribe has plenty of provision until the next harvest. Pocahontas states that such fortune has not smiled upon the English settlers, who are suffering with hunger. Powhatan declares that they have nothing in common with the newcomers and that the English should return to England. Scene 3: Esther Finley, a young English girl, is lost in the woods. The forest animals, Squirrel, Wolf, and Raven, share their concern with Pocahontas, who decides to help the English settlers find their lost girl. Scene 4: The girls of Jamestown are rejoicing in the warm spring weather. The other settlers are worried about the lack of provisions. Captain John Smith decides that he will go with Pocahontas to the Algonquin village with the hope of trading English gifts for food. Scenes 5 & 6: Pocahontas, Captain Smith, and an English boy, Jeremy, enter the Algonquin village with an attempt to trade with the Indians. Chief Powhatan refuses to help and sends the English away.

Act II, Scene 1: A distraught Pocahontas goes walking in the woods and falls asleep. The forest spirits, along with the Spirit of Mother Earth, weave a dream for Pocahontas in which she is encouraged to help the English in any way she can. Scene 2: Pocahontas and Esther return to the Jamestown settlement safely, unwittingly followed by Brave Eagle. In desperation and without John Smith's approval, the settlers take Pocahontas hostage and send Brave Eagle back to the Algonquin village to demand supplies in return for the princess's release. Scene 3: Brave Eagle delivers the ransom terms to the Algonquins and an angry Chief Powhatan begins preparations for war. Scenes 4 & 5: Captain Smith learns of the kidnapping and ransom plan, frees Pocahontas and bravely returns with her to the Algonquin village. Scene 6: Pocahontas, arriving at the village with John Smith, pleads on behalf of the English. Powhatan will hear none of it and swiftly prepares to dispatch John Smith. Just as the axe is about to fall, Pocahontas covers John Smith and halts the execution. Powhatan recognizes his daughter's courage and chooses to seek peace with the settlers.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**Wordspinner**, knows the legends of the Algonquin

**Little Running Rabbit**, Algonquin maiden

**Happy She Walks**, another Algonquin maiden

**Brave Eagle**, Algonquin boy

**Aunt Morning Star**, Pocahontas' aunt

**Pocahontas**, Algonquin princess

**Chief Powhatan**, Algonquin king

**Thundercloud**, medicine man

**Esther Finley**, girl of Jamestown

**Spirit of Mother Earth**, guardian of the forest

**Captain John Smith**, in charge of Jamestown

**Squirrel**, forest creature

**Wolf**, another forest creature

**Raven**, another forest creature

**Margaret Wheeler**, Jamestown girl

**Barbara Matthews**, Jamestown girl

**Carolina**, Barbara's sister

**Jeremy**, Esther's brother

**Mercy Rogers**, sharp-tongued citizen of Jamestown

**Charity Matthews**, mom of Barbara and Carolina

**Thomas Rogers**, Mercy's husband

## LESSON IDEAS

### Classroom Discussion (Pre-Performance)

1. *How many of you have experienced a live theater performance? What did you see?*
  2. *What are some of the differences between going to the theater and watching television or going to a movie?*
- Theater features live on-stage actors. They have spent many weeks rehearsing for the performance.
  - The audience is a very important part of the performance. Appreciation for the performers is shown by close attention, participation, and applause at the proper times. The success of the production often depends on the audience.
  - The theater is a very special place. Its atmosphere is entirely different from your home, where the television is always available.
  - It is easy to identify with live actors. You can see how they use their bodies and voices to convey different emotions.
  - Actors wear costumes and make-up to help create the impression of the characters they portray.
  - There is much more to most live performances than actors. Special sets, effects, lighting, music, costumes, and of course, the audience add to the total experience.

### Vocabulary

The following are some words that are associated with *Pocahontas*.

Act	Plot	Set	Props	Downstage	Upstage
Program	Director	Producer	Colony	Algonquin	Settlement
Settlers	Harvest	Mocassin	Longhouse	Stockade	Tomahawk
Wool	Storehouse	Hostage	Ransom	Mischievous	Provision

### Theater Etiquette

*Discuss the role of the audience and proper theater etiquette.*

- Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything and so that you will not disturb the rest of the audience while trying to get comfortable in your seat. Lights go out before the curtain goes up and seating is very difficult after that time.
- It is easier for you (and the rest of the audience) to see and hear the performance if you stay in your seat and listen very carefully.
- The KiMo Theater is a historic building. Please respect and preserve the beauty of the KiMo by not bringing food and beverages (including water, gum and candy) into the theater. These items are permitted in the lobby only.
- There is no intermission during the performance, which is 75 minutes in length. Be sure to use the restroom before the performance begins.

- Although you may wish to say something to the actors, you need to hold your thoughts, as you will disturb their concentration.
- Sing or participate *if and only if* you are invited to do so. Your participation is often very important.
- Listen to how the music sets the mood and affects your own feelings.
- Show the cast and crew your appreciation for their hard work with applause. Do this when you like a song or dance or joke.
- Be sure to turn off *all* electronic devices and cell phones. Do not text during the performance. This is very inconsiderate to the performers and distracting to your fellow audience members.

## **Classroom Discussion and Activities (Post-Performance)**

### **Reading/Writing**

- Write a description of one of the characters and share it with a partner. After sharing, students can question each other about the ideas presented. This can be done with a drawing for lower levels.
- Have students write about Pocahontas' important role in the early settlement of Jamestown. How might have history been different if Pocahontas would not have worked to establish communication and trade between the Algonquins and the Jamestown settlers?
- Have students write a question about a specific scene or character in the musical. They can ask the questions as a whole class activity or work in small groups.
- Assign a research project based on colonial America. The students can research Jamestown, Williamsburg, Plymouth, or other early settlements.
- Compare and contrast the leadership styles of Captain John Smith and Chief Powhatan. Remind the class that these are real people from history. How does historical context affect some of the decisions these two men may have made?
- Explore the relationship of protagonists and antagonists in classroom stories and draw a comparison to relationships in the musical, such as Pocahontas and Chief Powhatan, Captain John Smith and Chief Powhatan, Chief Powhatan and Thundercloud, John Smith and Mercy Rogers, or Captain Smith and Pocahontas.

### **Science**

- Discuss how the location of Jamestown may have been a poor choice based upon the quality of the soil for planting and the topography of the land for hunting. How could this have led to starvation in the early settlement?
- Identify various diseases that may have been prevalent in early America, i.e. dysentery, tuberculosis, etc. Cite causes for some of these diseases. Are there any diseases that no longer exist? How did people 400 years ago treat their illnesses? What was the life expectancy in the early 17th century? How has modern medicine contributed to cures and management of disease?
- Research what native flora and fauna may have been new to the English settlers when they arrived at Jamestown in 1607. What new plants and animals did the settlers introduce to the North American continent?

## **Art**

- Create a class mural of the musical. Include the scenes from the story such as the forest, the Algonquin village, and the Jamestown settlement. What were the details of each scene that made it believable from the audience's perspective.
- Draw a picture of a favorite scene or character.
- Re-create the Algonquin village or the Jamestown settlement using clay forms in a box.
- Draw an advertisement or program cover for the musical.
- Design stage scenery for *Pocahontas* or another story that you would like to see on stage.

## **Music**

- Ask the students to identify musical instruments that they heard in the musical. Discuss other instruments that could have been added for greater effect.
- Can you identify any recurring musical themes or motives in the music?
- How did the music express the action or emotion of the story (tempo, volume, range of notes, etc.)
- Did you hear any incidental music (purely instrumental music that functioned as background music for a scene change)?

## **Math**

- Create a budget for a theatrical production. List all of the expenses involved (set design and materials, professional musicians, lighting design, props, costumes, theater rental, scripts, royalties, etc.). Discuss ways that a theater company might raise money to cover all of the expenses.
- Using a spreadsheet, create a rehearsal schedule for a theatrical production. Discuss how much time it might take for the cast to learn all of the staging and dancing. How many hours a day/week/month does it take to put on a production?

## **History/Social Studies**

Obviously, with a historical musical such as *Pocahontas*, the possibilities for History and Social Studies enrichment are endless:

- Discuss the history of the Jamestown settlement. What were preparations like before departure from London? How long was the voyage? When did they arrive? Who were the most famous people involved in the expedition? List various challenges that the settlers faced.
- Explore the relationship between the English settlers and the Native Americans. Identify positive and negative outcomes. What worked, what didn't? Are there ways in which the relationship could have been stronger?
- Create a scene in your classroom. Assign students to play Algonquin Indians and Jamestown settlers and have them interact with each other.

## **SOURCES**

### **Books**

Woolley, Benjamin. *Savage Kingdom: The True Story of Jamestown, 1607, and the Settlement of America*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.

Price, David A. *Love and Hate in Jamestown: John Smith, Pocahontas, and the Start of a New Nation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

### **Internet**

#### **Jamestown**

<http://www.history.com/topics/jamestown>

<http://www.historyisfun.org/jamestown-settlement/>

<http://historicjamestowne.org/history/history-of-jamestown/>

<https://www.nps.gov/jame/index.htm>

#### **Pocahontas**

<https://www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/pocahontas-her-life-and-legend.htm>

<http://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/pocahontas>

#### **General Information**

<http://pocahontas.morenus.org> (This site compares the Disney movie to the real-life history).