COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

Settling a New World: The Lost Colony of Roanoke Island

By National Park Service
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The Fort Raleigh National Historic Site is dedicated to the preservation of England's first New World settlements, as well as the cultural legacy of Native Americans, European Americans, and African Americans who lived on Roanoke Island. In 1585 and 1587, England tried its hand at establishing a colonial presence in North America under the leadership of Sir Walter Raleigh. The attempts were failures on both accounts but they would come to form one of the most puzzling mysteries in early American history: the disappearance of the Roanoke colony. As you read, take notes on what circumstances or mistakes might have put the English settlers at a disadvantage in creating a lasting colony.

[1] *"About the place many of my things spoiled and broken, and my books torn from the covers, the frames of some of my pictures and maps rotted and spoiled with rain, and my armor almost eaten through with rust."* - John White[1] on the lost colony of Roanoke Island

"John White discovers the word "CROATOAN" carved at Roanoke's fort palisade" by Unknown is in the public domain.

1584 Voyage

In the late sixteenth-century, England's primary goal in North America was to disrupt Spanish shipping. Catholic Spain,

1. John White (c. 1540-1593) was an English artist and an early English settler in North America. In 1587, he became the governor of Roanoke Colony. White sailed to England in 1587, looking to take supplies back to the new colony, but once in England he could find no support for his cause. It took him three years before he could return to Roanoke Island, but once he did the settlement was

under the rule of Philip II,[2] had dominated the coast of Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Florida for the latter part of the 1500s. Protestant England, under the rule of Elizabeth I,[3] sought to circumvent[4] Spanish dominance in the region by establishing colonies in the New World.

England's attempt at colonization would serve two purposes. First, a colony would act as a buffer against Spanish control of the North and South American coasts.

Second, a colony would act as a base for privateering,[5] allowing English ships to attack Spanish vessels and gain control of Spanish treasure and trade routes in the region. Sir Walter Raleigh,[6] with the blessing of Queen Elizabeth, sent a reconnaissance[7] expedition[8] to the New World in April, 1584.

[5] The expedition, two ships under the command of Philip Amadas[9] and Arthur

deserted.

2. Phillip II (1527-1598) was King of Spain (1556–98), of Portugal (1581–98, as Philip I), of Naples and Sicily (both from 1554), and during his marriage to Queen Mary I (1554–58) King of England and Ireland by right of his wife. He was a dedicated Catholic and so was his wife Queen Mary I. After her death, Protestant Queen Elizabeth I succeeded the throne and reversed her half-sister's re-establishment of Catholicism, which heightened tensions between Spain and England.
3. Elizabeth I (1533-1603) was Queen of England and Ireland from 1558 until her death. Her 45-year reign brought on a period of stability and cultural revival, especially concerning English drama, known as the Elizabethan era.
4. **Circumvent** ***(verb)*** to manage to get around
5. Privateering was essentially like government-approved pirating. An armed ship owned by private individuals was commissioned by the government and was authorized for use in war, especially in capturing enemy merchant shipping.
6. Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1554-1618) was an English landed gentleman, writer, soldier, politician, courtier, spy, and explorer. He is famous for having risen rapidly in Queen Elizabeth I's favor (and then falling rapidly out of it when he married a lady-in-waiting without her permission). He is also well known for popularizing tobacco in England.
7. Reconnaissance refers to the survey of a region to locate an enemy or gather any strategic information about said enemy.
8. **Expedition** ***(noun)*** a journey or voyage undertaken by a group of people with a particular purpose, especially that of exploration, scientific research, or war

Barlowe,[10] arrived on the Outer Banks of present-day North Carolina in July, 1584. The goal of England's 1584 expedition was not to establish a colony but to scout potential locations along the eastern seaboard for future settlement. The sailors found a potential site at Roanoke Island, a small land mass resting between the mainland and the Outer Banks. Barlowe, in his account of the voyage, attested[11] that "the soil is the most plentiful, sweet, fruitful, and wholesome of all the world."

In addition to praising the natural resources of Roanoke Island, the 1584 expedition also made contact with the Carolina Algonquian.[12] Perhaps the most important outcome of the 1584 expedition was the return to England with two Algonquian on board, Manteo[13] of the Croatoan tribe[14] and Wanchese[15] of the Roanoacs.[16] The two Algonquian were the subject of much fascination upon their arrival in England

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9. Philip Amadas (b. 1565) was a naval commander and explorer in Elizabethan England.
10. Arthur Barlowe (1550-1620) was one of the two captains who, under Sir Walter Raleigh, sailed to North America in 1584. His account is one of the earliest English commercial reports directly about North America.
11. **Attest** ***(verb)*** to declare; to be a witness to
12. The Algonquian people consists of the peoples who speak Algonquian languages, making them one of the most populous and widespread North American native language groups. Today, thousands of people identify with various Algonquian peoples. Historically, they were established along the Atlantic Coast, along the St. Lawrence River, and around the Great Lakes.
13. Manteo was a Croatoan chief of a local tribe who befriended the English explorers that settled at Roanoke Island. He traveled to England twice and returned with Governor John White to the island, where he became the first Native American to be baptized into the Church of England.
14. The Croatoan, or Croatan, people consisted of a Native American group living in the coastal region of modern-day North Carolina. They may have been part of the larger Roanoke people or an ally of them.
15. Wanchese was the last known ruler of the Roanoac tribe encountered by English colonists in the late sixteenth century. He traveled alongside Manteo to England, but did not share the same friendly relations with the Europeans as did Manteo.
16. The Roanoac, or Roanoke, people were a Carolina Algonquian-speaking people. Their territory was composed of present-day Dare County, Roanoke Island, and parts of the mainland (at the time of early English colonization).

and likely boosted Raleigh's efforts to enlist more investors in the potential colony. In addition, Manteo and Wanchese provided the English with detailed descriptions of Algonquian culture and social structure.

On April 9, 1585, almost one year to the day of the first expedition's departure, 600 English soldiers and sailors in seven ships (with Manteo and Wanchese on board) sailed from Plymouth, England in an attempt to establish the first English colony in North America.

1585 Voyage

Having determined Roanoke Island to be a favorable location for the first English colony in North America, seven English vessels with 600 soldiers and sailors began their voyage from England to the Outer Banks in April, 1585.

Under the command of Sir Richard Grenville,[17] the fleet encountered a storm in the Atlantic, damaging ships and destroying one, forcing a stop in Puerto Rico for repairs. The delayed and hobbled vessels arrived at Roanoke Island on June 26th.

[10] The stop in Puerto Rico had caused conflict between Grenville and Ralph Lane,[18] an Irishman appointed governor of the new colony. Lane believed that Grenville's delay in Puerto Rico, which involved privateering and trading as well as repairs to the damaged fleet, had cost valuable time for the colonists to prepare for winter. In addition to the hostilities[19] between Grenville and Lane, one of the largest ships in the fleet, the *Tiger*, was too large to enter the sounds surrounding Roanoke Island. It, along with other larger English ships, were forced to anchor off the Atlantic coast, exposing themselves to more volatile weather and seas.

Almost immediately, the *Tiger* was heavily damaged and the majority of the

17. Sir Richard Grenville (1542-1591) was an English sailor, a soldier, a privateer, a colonizer, and captain of the ship called the Revenge. He accompanied his cousin Sir Walter Raleigh to Roanoke Island.
18. Sir Ralph Lane (c. 1532-1603) was an explorer of the Elizabethan era and part of the unsuccessful attempt in 1585 to colonize Roanoke Island. His exact nationality has been disputed, but he did serve the Crown in Ireland.
19. **Hostility** ***(noun)*** unfriendliness or opposition

colonists' food supplies were destroyed. The initial plan of making Roanoke Island a permanent colony and privateering base had been destroyed along with the *Tiger*'s cargo.

With the loss of valuable supplies, Lane was left with only 100 men on the island to construct temporary shelter from which to scout for a more permanent location; Grenville, after briefly scouting the region for a more suitable location as well, would sail back to England with the rest of the men and return next year with more colonists and supplies.

Lane and his men quickly constructed a small fortification with homes surrounding it. In addition to the homes constructed along the perimeter of the earthwork, the metal-working shop of Thomas Hariot[20] and Joachim Gans[21] was located nearby.

Although it was initially believed the colonists could subsist on agricultural ingenuity,[22] it soon became clear that in order to survive they would have to consistently rely on the Carolina Algonquian for assistance. This reliance may have led to an increasing paranoia in Ralph Lane; he began to exert strict control over the colonists, going so far as to construct a jail to maintain order and discipline.

[15] In addition, what began as peaceful, mutually beneficial relationships with the Algonquian population, rapidly deteriorated[23] into violence. Wingina,[24] Chief of the Secoton tribe[25] of the Algonquian across the sound[26] from Roanoke Island began

20. Thomas Hariot (c. 1560-1621) was an English astronomer, mathematician, ethnographer, and translator. He was an important member of the venture, as he had translated and learned the Algonquian language from Manteo and Wanchese.
21. Joachim Gans was a Bohemian mining expert and is famous for being the first recorded Jewish person in North America.
22. **Ingenuity** ***(noun)*** the quality of being clever, original, and inventive
23. **Deteriorate** ***(verb)*** to become progressively worse
24. Wingina (d. 1586) was the first North American Indian leader to be confronted by English settlers in the New World. He was a principal chief of the Secotan Indians in present day North Carolina and was eventually killed by one of Raleigh's men.
25. also spelled "Secotan"
26. Sound in this context refers to a narrow stretch of water that forms an inlet

to feud heavily with Lane and his men. While the colonists' increased reliance on the Algonquians to provide food had escalated[27] the tension, the exposure of the Algonquians to English disease became the tipping point. Smallpox and other diseases began to decimate[28] the native population, fueling the Algonquian fear of the English. Wingina decided the English should be removed from the region at all costs.

Wingina, now calling himself Pemisapan possibly to signify his new hostile stance on the English, attempted to cut off all food supplies to the colonists, forcing them to break up into small detachments in search of food, detachments that could easily be overwhelmed by a larger Secoton force. Lane heard of this plan before it could be put into action and had Wingina/Pemisapan preemptively[29] killed, forever altering English-Native power dynamics and alliances in the region.

Shortly after the killing of Wingina/Pemisapan in June of 1586, a large fleet was spotted off the coast. Fearful that the fleet was Spanish, Lane and his men were relieved to find that it was an English fleet under the command of Sir Francis Drake.[30] Drake, having made port at the Outer Banks after months raiding Spanish shipping along the Florida coast and West Indies, agreed to help Lane in his continual desire to search for a more suitable settlement location. However, a violent hurricane quickly changed those plans, forcing an increasingly angry and frustrated Lane and his men to abandon Roanoke and return to England with Drake.

Ralph Lane would never return to North America. However, less than one year after Lane returned to England with Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh would send 118 men, women, and children again to Roanoke Island in his most ambitious[31] attempt yet to establish a lasting English colony.

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between two larger bodies of water.

27. **Escalate** ***(verb)*** to increase quickly
28. **Decimate** ***(verb)*** to kill or destroy a large percentage or part of
29. **Preemptively** ***(adverb)*** taking action or a measure against something anticipated in order to prevent it
30. Sir Francis Drake (c. 1540-1596) was an English captain, privateer, navigator, slaver, and politician in the Elizabethan era.
31. **Ambitious** ***(adjective)*** having or showing a strong desire and determination to succeed

1587 Voyage

The 1587 voyage to Roanoke, consisting of 118 men, women, and children, was compromised from the beginning. The failures of the previous expedition to find a suitable base from which to privateer, coupled with the lack of discovery of precious metals and other supposed treasures, led many investors to begin withdrawing support. Sir Walter Raleigh himself, even though still supportive of the idea of an English foothold in the New World, began to show a decreased enthusiasm for the venture; the colonization attempt had already cost 30,000 pounds, a steep sum in the 1580s. Nevertheless, in April of 1587, the new group of colonists began their journey.

[20] Led by John White, the colonists arrived at Roanoke in July, but it was not their intended destination. Roanoke Island was to only be a stopping point on this voyage so White could hopefully make contact with a very small garrison[32] left on the island after the departure of the 1585 expedition. Instead, the colonists were to sail up the Chesapeake Bay to find a more suitable area for settlement. However, the flotilla's[33] captain, Simon Fernandes,[34] refused to take the colonists farther up the coast, the excuse being that summer was rapidly ending. The colonists were left at Roanoke Island.

On July 22, 1587, White and the colonists set foot on Roanoke Island. The only clue as to the fate of the previous garrison was a sun-bleached skeleton of one of the men. The colonists got to work rebuilding and refurbishing the fortification and dwellings left by the 1585 expedition. By the end of July, they had made substantial progress. White, however, was convinced that he could move the colonists north to the Chesapeake, their intended destination, before winter.

Once again, the tenuous[35] relationship between the English and the Algonquian broke down. Shortly after the colonists' arrival George Howe[36] was ambushed and

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32. A garrison refers to troops stationed in a fortress or town to defend it.
33. A flotilla is a fleet of ships or boats.
34. Simon Fernandes (c. 1538 – c. 1590) was a Portuguese-born navigator and occasional pirate who piloted the 1585 and 1587 English expeditions to Roanoke Island.
35. **Tenuous** ***(adjective)*** very weak or flimsy

killed by members of the Secotan tribe. In retaliation, White and his men attacked what they thought was a Secotan village on the mainland. It was Croatoan, straining relationships even further.

The one bright spot in the month of August for White and the colonists was the birth of Virginia Dare, the first English child born in the New World. Her birth signified the possibility that the colony may very well take hold.

The threat of Algonquian attack, the lack of reliable food sources, and the approaching winter forced White to return to England for more settlers and supplies. White left for England in late August, having only been on Roanoke for slightly over a month. Prior to leaving it was determined that the remaining colonists would split into two groups; one group would stay on Roanoke Island while another headed inland in search of a permanent settlement and more potential supplies. In addition, it was agreed that, should the colonists leave Roanoke Island prior to White's return, they would carve their destination into nearby trees.

[25] John White arrived in England on November 8, 1587 and immediately reported to Sir Walter Raleigh.

1590 Voyage

John White, upon his return to England in November, 1587, fully expected to be resupplied and have yet another expedition ready to sail for Roanoke by the spring of 1588. Initially, Sir Walter Raleigh was equally hopeful. However, the primary reason for English colonization of the New World, the Spanish, disrupted their plans.

The Spanish Armada, the most formidable fleet in the world, was preparing to attack England directly. Queen Elizabeth I ordered all English vessels to remain nearby in defense of the homeland. England, with her faster, more maneuverable[37] ships under Sir Francis Drake, defeated the Spanish Armada, signaling a shift in global superpowers. However, the battle delayed the return of White to Roanoke.

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36. George Howe was an advisor and a colonist in Roanoke colony.
37. **Maneuverable** ***(adjective)*** able to be moved or steered easily while in motion

After the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Raleigh's interest in colonization began to shift to Ireland, forcing White to turn to other investors to acquire revenue for the journey. It was not until early 1590 that White was able to convince a group of privateers bound for the West Indies to take him to Roanoke.

Landing on August 18, 1590, White and his men found remnants[38] of the colonists but no signs of life. Arriving at the site of the 1587 settlement, White found "CRO" carved into a tree and "CROATOAN" carved into a palisade.[39] There were no signs of a struggle or of the colonists leaving in haste.

[30] White immediately began to sail to Croatoan but, as had happened so often before, a storm disrupted his plans and he was forced to return to England, never knowing what became of the Lost Colony of Roanoke.

After the failure of the Roanoke Colony and the disappearance of its settlers, John White all but disappeared from the historical record. He died, possibly in Ireland, around 1606, one year before England, having learned from the failures at Roanoke, established the first successful English colony at Jamestown, Virginia.

38. **Remnant** ***(noun)*** a small remaining quantity of something
39. A palisade is a fence of wooden stakes (or a stake in the row of stakes forming the fence).

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following statements best summarizes a central idea of the text?
    A. Roanoke was never technically lost; it is much more likely that they simply moved and became integrated in Algonquian society.
    B. The settlers of Roanoke colony had little experience and support in creating a colony, and outside events made it very difficult for them to succeed.
    C. Roanoke could have survived if John White had simply tried harder to return with supplies between the years 1587 and 1590.
    D. Sir Walter Raleigh is the most to blame for the failure of Roanoke; he pushed for this colony and took on very little responsibility for it.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
    A. "Sir Walter Raleigh himself, even though still supportive of the idea of an English foothold in the New World, began to show a decreased enthusiasm for the venture; the colonization attempt had already cost 30,000 pounds, a steep sum in the 1580s." (Paragraph 19)
    B. "The threat of Algonquian attack, the lack of reliable food sources, and the approaching winter forced White to return to England for more settlers and supplies." (Paragraph 24)
    C. "England, with her faster, more maneuverable ships under Sir Francis Drake, defeated the Spanish Armada, signaling a shift in global superpowers. However, the battle delayed the return of White to Roanoke." (Paragraph 28)
    D. "Arriving at the site of the 1587 settlement, White found "CRO" carved into a tree and "CROATOAN" carved into a palisade. There were no signs of a struggle or of the colonists leaving in haste." (Paragraph 29)

3. Which of the following best describes the English's early involvement in North America?
    A. The English were very much involved in the early exploration and colonization of the New World, desperate for new and available resources to support their war with Spain.
    B. The English did little to engage in exploring and colonizing the New World, as there was a strong Spanish presence there since Columbus and England did not wish to expand their war with Spain overseas.
    C. In the late 1500s, England was more concerned with its war against Spain and decreasing Spanish power in the New (and the Old) World than it was establishing North American colonies for the sake of colonies.
    D. In the late 1500s, England was experiencing a period of cultural heights known as the Elizabethan period; England therefore had no reason or desire to improve or expand their empire.

4. PART A: What does the word "volatile" most likely mean as used in paragraph 10?
    A. Frightening
    B. Uncontrolled or rough
    C. Surprising
    D. Calm or navigable

5. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
    A. "The stop in Puerto Rico had caused conflict between Grenville and Ralph Lane" (Paragraph 10)
    B. "privateering and trading as well as repairs to the damaged fleet" (Paragraph 10)
    C. "It, along with other larger English ships, were forced to anchor off the Atlantic coast" (Paragraph 10)
    D. "the Tiger was heavily damaged and the majority of the colonists' food supplies were destroyed." (Paragraph 11)

6. Which of the following statements best describes the relationship between the English colonists and the Algonquian population?

    A. Their relationship was minimal at best; the settlers were isolated on an island and rarely saw any Native American people.
    B. With only a few exceptions (like Manteo), the Algonquians did not trust these foreigners and continued to sabotage their colony up until the death of Wingina/Pemisapan.
    C. Their relationship began as relatively peaceful with the exchange of culture, information, and aid, but soon tension, sickness, and violence grew between the English and the Algonquian populations.
    D. The English colonists relied entirely on Algonquian agriculture and familiarity with the land to survive, making them strong allies throughout the history of the colony.

7. How does the imagery used in paragraph 1 contribute to or influence the overall passage?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Do you think the attempt to colonize North America was worthwhile for the Europeans, especially the British? Why or why not?

2. What do you think happened to the colonizers of Roanoke Island? What do you think did not happen to them?

3. European colonizers, particularly the English, feared the wilderness and the native populations in the Americas. Did this same fear cause them to isolate themselves? In the context of this passage, how does fear drive action? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

4. In the context of this passage, what does it mean to feel alone? What must have it felt like for the settlers in Roanoke to be so isolated—can you imagine this? Do you think this isolation and loneliness could have contributed to their disappearance and/or the failure of the colony? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

5. There are several theories as to what caused the disappearance of the Roanoke colony, many of which include environmental causes. How did natural causes negatively affect the planning and implementation of the colony—such as storms on the sea and the weather? How might the settlers have planned for this? Could they have prepared themselves better, if at all? In the context of this passage, who's in control: man or nature? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

6. In the context of this passage, how has America changed over time? How does North America differ today from how it looked in the late 1500s? Do you think this change has been for the better? How could a continent change so much in so little time (as compared to other societies)? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.