



Jamestown in the Media: Distinguishing Fact from Opinion

Subject: English, Grade 7
Skills: Reading Comprehension
Strategies: Employing critical thinking
Time: One half class period

Objectives: SOL English 7.6c
Students will distinguish fact from opinion in newspapers.

Background: In June 1606, King James I granted a charter to the Virginia Company, a group of London entrepreneurs, to establish a settlement in the Chesapeake region of North America. By December, 108 settlers sailed from London to settle Virginia in an effort to find gold and a water route to the Orient. On May 14, 1607, the Virginia Company explorers landed on Jamestown Island to establish the first Virginia English colony. The settlement and its fort were located near the James River some 60 miles from the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay.

For nearly two hundred years, scholars believed the fort at Jamestown was lost to the river. However, archaeological work begun in 1994 by the Jamestown Rediscovery Project has not only found the site of the original fort, but hundreds of thousands of artifacts that give an important glimpse into the lives of those colonists who lived nearly four hundred years ago.

Procedure:

1. Activate the students' prior knowledge of Jamestown.
2. Discuss today's relevance of the work done by the Rediscovery Project.
3. Remind students of the role of the media.
4. Solicit from students the different types of newspaper articles (hard news, feature news, editorials, reviews, etc.).
5. Discuss with students the role of opinions in the different newspaper articles.
6. Have the students read the two articles about recent archaeological finds at Jamestown.
7. Have students identify what kind of articles these are (feature news).
8. Discuss the content of each article to ensure reading comprehension.
9. Have students make a list of the opinion words found in each article, words such as: dramatic, tantalizing, baffling, difficult, toughest, easy...

10. Have students understand the function of these words in the article:

- some are used by the author to enhance the interest value of the story, but must be distinguished from the article's facts
- some are found in quotes by people being interviewed for the article. While these words express the interviewee's opinion, they represent a fact in that the interviewee stated them
- the phrases "Kelso seemed to grimace" and "His face softened" as used in the article "Historical questions" could be construed as opinion since another witness to the event might have interpreted Dr. Kelso's facial expressions in a completely different manner