

Handout 2

Misrepresentation of Native Americans in mainstream American literature

Ex. 1. What do you associate with the following names:

- Pocahontas
- Captain John Smith

Ex. 2. Decide if the statements are TRUE or FALSE:

1. Pocahontas was the daughter of a chief.
2. She was considered a symbol of peace by the natives and the colonists.
3. Pocahontas met Captain John Smith when she was about 15.
4. Though young, she saved Smith's life on several occasions.
5. When older, Pocahontas married one of the colonists out of love.
6. Pocahontas never left America.
7. Pocahontas died of an illness.
8. Pocahontas was buried near her village.

Ex. 3. Read fragments of *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) and answer the questions:

1. What happened to Mary Rowlandson and her family?
2. How would you characterize the narrator? Why?
3. How does the experience of captivity change the narrator's perception of life?
4. Why does the narrator frequently refer to God?
5. How are Native Americans presented in the narrative? Why?

Ex. 4. Read "The Indian Burying Ground" (1787) by Philip Freneau and answer the following questions:

1. What meaning is delivered by the 1st and the 2nd stanza?
2. How does Freneau present Native Americans?
3. Which elements of the poem signal the development of Romanticism?
4. What can be inferred from the phrases "a ruder race" and "children of the forest"?

“The Indian Burying Ground” (1787)
In spite of all the learned have said,
I still my old opinion keep;
The posture, that we give the dead,
Points out the soul's eternal sleep.

Not so the ancients of these lands—
The Indian, when from life released,
Again is seated with his friends,
And shares again the joyous feast.

His imaged birds, and painted bowl,
And venison, for a journey dressed,
Bespeak the nature of the soul,
Activity, that knows no rest.
His bow, for action ready bent,
And arrows, with a head of stone,
Can only mean that life is spent,
And not the old ideas gone.

Thou, stranger, that shalt come this way,
No fraud upon the dead commit—
Observe the swelling turf, and say
They do not lie, but here they sit.

Here still a lofty rock remains,
On which the curious eye may trace
(Now wasted, half, by wearing rains)
The fancies of a ruder race.

Here still an aged elm aspires,
Beneath whose far-projecting shade
(And which the shepherd still admires)
The children of the forest played!

There oft a restless Indian queen
(Pale Shebah, with her braided hair)
And many a barbarous form is seen
To chide the man that lingers there.
By midnight moons, o'er moistening
dews;
In habit for the chase arrayed,
The hunter still the deer pursues,
The hunter and the deer, a shade!

And long shall timorous fancy see
The painted chief, and pointed spear,
And Reason's self shall bow the knee
To shadows and delusions here.

Ex. 5. James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826).