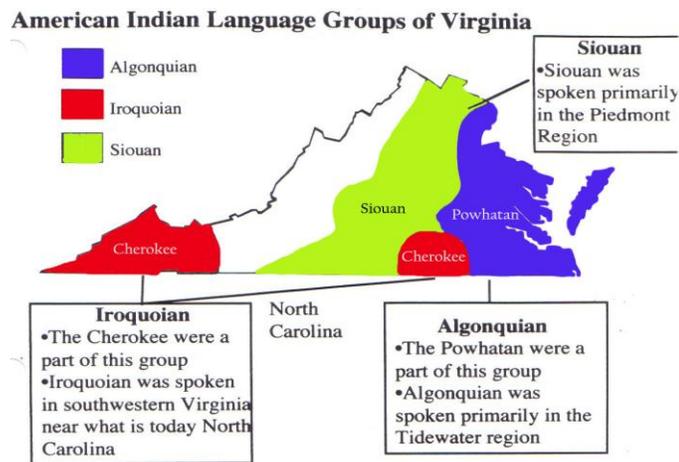


# Native People in Early Virginia

When the Jamestown settlers arrived in Virginia in 1607, there were already thousands of Native Americans, or “First Americans,” living on the land they called “Pamahsawuh,” which meant “the world and everything in it.” Forests covered most of the land and there were many different Indian tribes in Virginia. **All of the tribes are classified as “Eastern Woodland Indians.” Each tribe spoke a different dialect of one of three Indian languages: Algonquian, Siouan, or Iroquoian.** Each of these Indian language groups held different beliefs, traditions, and customs.



**Native Americans lived in all areas of Virginia, but the most tribes lived in the Tidewater, Piedmont, and Appalachian Plateau regions.**

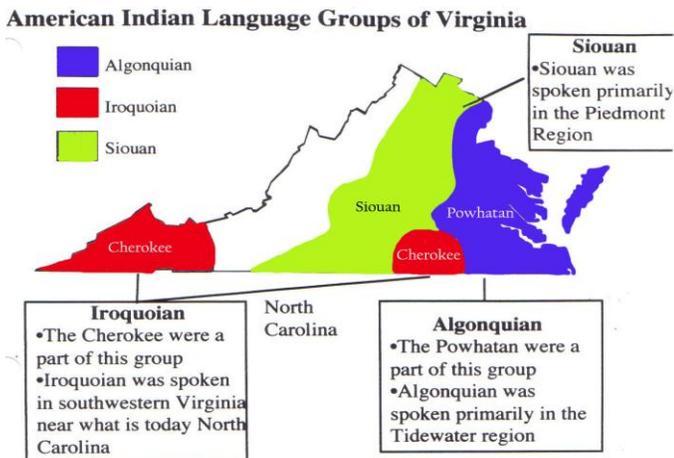
Indians in the Tidewater belonged to the Algonquian (pronounced *al-GON-kwi-an*) language group. The Powhatan Indians were powerful members of this group. Indians in the Piedmont belonged to the Siouan (pronounced *SOO-an*) language group. The Monacan tribe was part of the Siouan language group. Indians in the Appalachian Plateau region belonged to the Iroquoian language group. This language was also spoken by Indians in southern Virginia, near today’s border with North Carolina. The Cherokee Indians were part of the Iroquoian language group.

**The Native Americans lived with nature and adapted their lifestyles to the seasons and to their surroundings.** All of the tribes used natural resources for food, clothing, and shelter throughout the year. The Indians met their basic needs by interacting with the climate and the environment. **The climate of Virginia is relatively mild and because of it, we have four seasons.** The four seasons allow there to be a great variety of plant life, or vegetation. The types of food the First Americans ate, the clothing they wore, and the shelters they lived in depended on

Virginia's seasons. For example, in the winter, the Native Americans ate birds and other animals. In the spring, they ate fish and berries. In the summer and fall, they grew and harvested crops like the "three sisters:" corn, squash, and beans. All of the Indians' food was obtained by hunting, fishing, or gathering.

Virginia Indians made shelters from the natural materials around them.

## ALGONQUIAN LANGUAGE GROUP



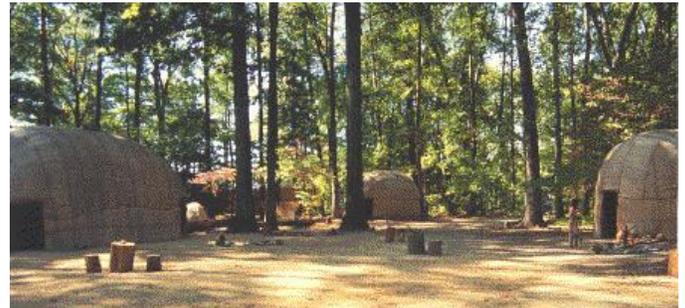
**The Algonquian language was primarily spoken in the Tidewater (Coastal Plain).** Some of our English words come from the Algonquian language: *tomahawk*, *skunk*, *squash*, *wampum*, and *succotash*.

The Algonquian Indians grew corn, beans, squash, and sunflower seeds. Many of these crops were dried or smoked and used for food during the winter months. The food these Indians ate changed with

the seasons. They ate fresh vegetables in the summer and fall. They hunted deer, turkey, and other small animals year round, but especially in the winter. In the spring, they ate fish, berries, nuts, wild plants and roots.

Because they farmed, tribes in the Algonquian language group settled villages. All villages were located near a source of water, like a river or the Chesapeake Bay. The Indians depended on rivers for drinking water and for transportation.

**Algonquian Indians lived in longhouses.** Longhouses were made of wooden poles and were covered with bark or woven grass mats.



Indians in the Algonquian language group painted their faces and bodies with different colors and designs. Men and women also wore tattoos. Both genders usually wore their hair long. Women dressed in knee-length skirts and men wore breechcloths made of deerskin. They usually did not wear shirts, although in colder weather they would wear fur mantles or cloaks made of turkey feathers.

**The Powhatan Indians belonged to the Algonquian**

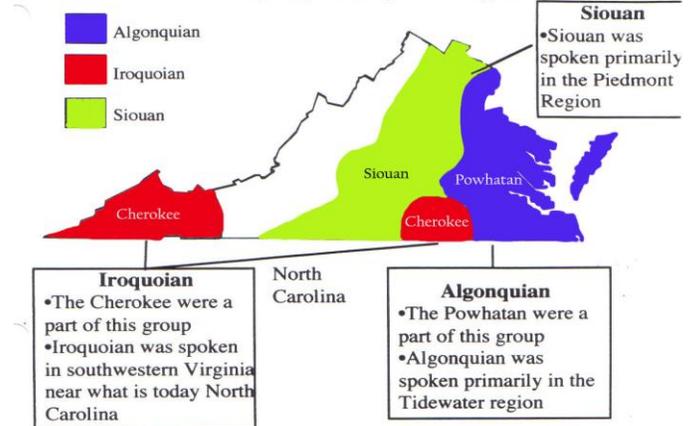
language group and lived in an area that was from today's Washington, D.C. to northern North Carolina.



**Wahunsenacawh (pronounced wah-hun-sena-kaw) was the powerful ruler of the Powhatan,** a tribe with over 9,000 members. The English settlers called him “Powhatan,” after the tribe that he ruled.

## SIOUAN LANGUAGE GROUP

### American Indian Language Groups of Virginia



**The Siouan language was spoken in the Piedmont region of Virginia.** The Siouan Indians ate deer, black bear, and fish. They grew corn, squash, and beans and gathered nuts, berries, and wild plants.

The Siouan Indians lived in villages surrounded by a palisade, or high fence made of wooden poles. Their homes were dome-shaped structures covered with bark and woven grass mats. The Siouan Indians wore clothes made of animal skins decorated with beads.

**The Monacan Indians belonged to this language group.** The Monacan culture was very similar to the Powhatan culture. A big difference was that the Monacan tribe mined copper. They used the copper to make jewelry. Copper jewelry was a sign of wealth and high status.

The Monacan traded with other Indian tribes. They traded copper and furs

for things such as beads made from shells. The Monacan also made beautiful woven baskets. They used thread they made from milkweed plants to make a strong cord to hold the woven baskets together.

Unlike the Powhatan, the Monacan were not interested in trading with the English. There are few written descriptions or records of the Monacan. English explorers visited their villages but none stayed to learn their customs or language, so we do not have a good written history of this Native American tribe.

The Siouan-speaking Indians of the Piedmont were enemies of the Algonquian-speaking Indians in the Tidewater and the Iroquoian-speaking people in other parts of Virginia. The Monacan and the Powhatan were often at war and so the Powhatan probably had to get their copper from friendlier tribes in North Carolina. Chief Powhatan warned Captain John Smith that the Monacan were very unfriendly.

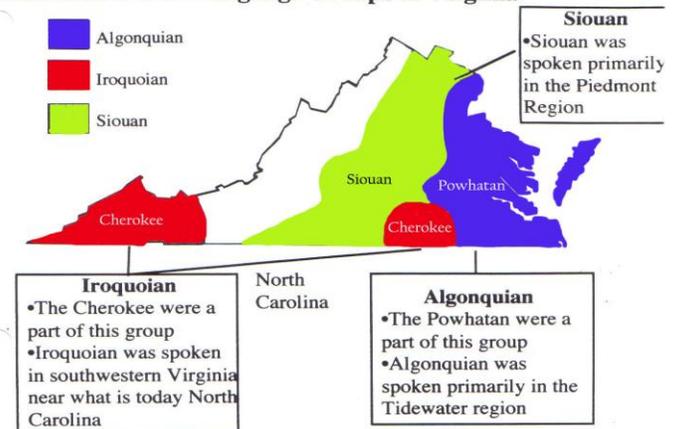
According to legend, the Monacan tribe discovered Natural Bridge while they were under attack from the Powhatan. When the Monacan reached Cedar Creek and did not have a way to cross it, they prayed for the Great Spirit to protect them. When they had finished praying, the 215-foot Natural Bridge had appeared, allowing the Monacan women and children to cross the creek safely. The men followed, but only after they had met and

defeated the Algonquian-speaking Powhatan.



## IROQUOIAN LANGUAGE GROUP

American Indian Language Groups of Virginia



The Iroquoian language was spoken in the Appalachian Plateau region of Virginia, near what is today North Carolina. It was also spoken in a small area near the

## **North Carolina border in parts of the Tidewater and Piedmont regions.**

The Iroquoian-language tribes were hunters, gatherers, farmers, and fishermen. They hunted bear, deer, and elk. They hunted turtles, ate the meat and used to shells to make rattles. These Indians planted corn, beans, squash, and tobacco. They smoked the tobacco. They gathered nuts and berries.

The Iroquoian-speaking tribes lived in villages along rivers. Their houses were in the shape of a square or a rectangle. Poles formed the framework and were covered with bark, wood, or wooden slats covered with clay.

Iroquoian-speaking women wore skirts made of woven plants and light capes made of feathers. Men wore breechcloths or leggings. Early European explorers were amazed by the complicated tattoos that covered the bodies of both men and women.

**The Cherokee belonged to the Iroquoian language group.** Cherokee men and women were treated as equals. The Cherokee had many ceremonies. One of these was the Booger Ceremony. The Booger Ceremony was held when warriors were preparing for battle. They would make Booger masks to ridicule their enemies and would often wear them into battle.



The Cherokee often fought among themselves. Any captives the Cherokee took in battle were either used as slaves or burned at the stake.

### **FAST FACTS TO KNOW**

1. Virginia Indians were part of the Eastern Woodland Indians.
2. Virginia's climate can be described as mild, with distinct seasons.
3. To meet their basic needs, Virginia Indians depended on their environment.
4. Virginia Indians used deerskin for clothing.
5. Virginia Indians constructed shelters from resources found in their environment.
6. In 1607, most of the land in Virginia was covered with forests.

7. The kind of food Virginia Indians ate depended on the seasons.

## HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT VIRGINIA'S NATIVE AMERICANS?

Artifacts, such as arrowheads, pottery, and other tools, tell a lot about the Indian tribes that were living in Virginia in 1607 when English settlers arrived.



**What is archaeology? It is the scientific study of people in the past, their culture, and their interaction with their environment.** The purpose of archaeology is to understand how humans interacted with their environment in the past and to preserve this history for the present and future learning.

Archeologists are scientists who work in teams, like detectives, and search for clues in the soil. They are looking for clues about how past cultures lived.

**Werowocomoco** (pronounced *whero-wo-co-MO-co*), the village in which Chief Powhatan lived, is being excavated by archaeologists and students from

Virginia Commonwealth University. Artifacts found at the site—mostly Indian pottery and tools—tell us about the powerful Powhatan Empire that ruled the Tidewater region for decades before the English landed at Jamestown.



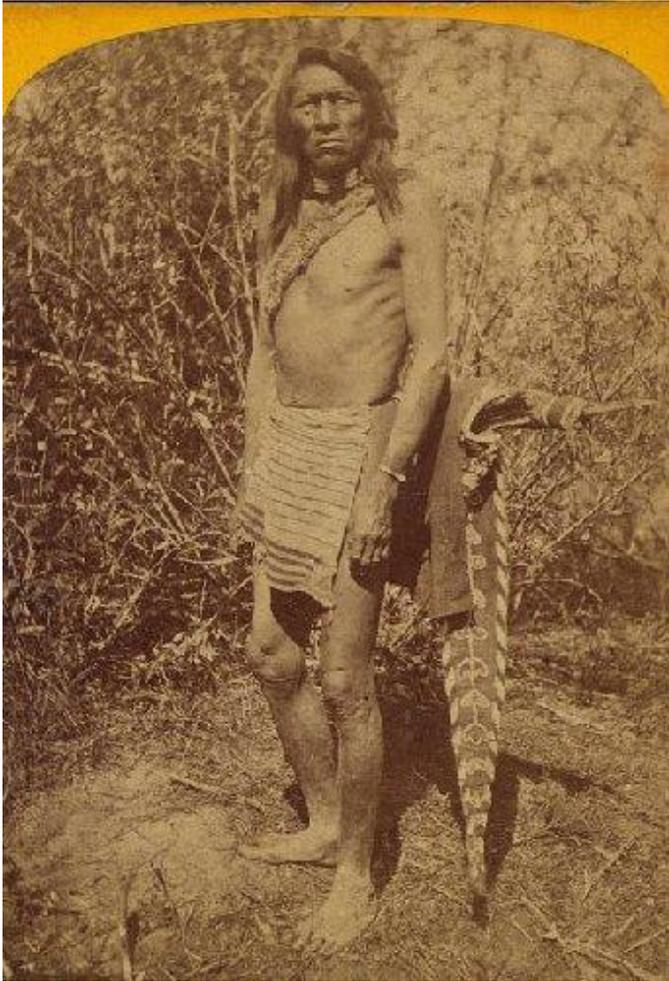
*These depressions in the Earth at the Werowocomoco site, above, prove that the Indian village was surrounded by a palisade.*



*Beads, pottery pieces, and pieces of copper like those above have also been excavated at Werowocomoco. These copper pieces were probably given to the Powhatan Indians by the English settlers, in exchange for food.*

Werowocomoco, the “capital” of the Powhatan Empire, has changed since the early 1600’s, but it is still there! Werowocomoco’s archeological record

contains evidence of the daily life of the Powhatan.



*Did Virginia Indians look like this in 1607?*

**Keep this information in your  
VIRGINIA STUDIES FOLDER.**

**Do not take it home until I tell you  
to begin studying for your next quiz.**

**Thank you!**