

English - Powhatan Word List

Virginia Algonquian was the language spoken by the Powhatan people, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Coastal Plain. This vocabulary list represents a small selection of words that were recorded by English colonists during the early 17th century. While some Algonquian words survive, much of the language was lost when Powhatan people adopted the English language to survive colonization. Today, Virginia Indians are working to revitalize their language.

Key Terms to Know

- Wahunsunacawh — Birth name of the paramount chief known as Powhatan.
- Tsenacommacah — “Densely Inhabited Land” Powhatan word for the land now known as Virginia.
- Powhatan — “Priest’s Hill” or “Priest’s Place” refers to the place (near Richmond), paramount chiefdom, and individual.
- Many places in Virginia today reflect Indigenous names like Chesapeake, Potomac, Tappahannock, and Appomattox. Tribal names are still used to describe rivers throughout the region including Chickahominy, Nansemond, Pamunkey, Mattaponi, and Rappahannock.

Note on Spelling

Virginia Algonquian was traditionally a spoken language with no written form. English settlers transcribed Powhatan words phonetically, which means spellings varied widely — just as English spelling itself was not standardized at the time. Since these words were recorded based on how they sounded to English ears, pronunciation can vary and may not perfectly reflect the original Powhatan speech.

General Guidelines - Vowel Sounds

- e - “ay” as in bay
- o - “oh” as in slow
- a - “ah” as in awe
- i - “ee” as in bee
- u - “oo” as in boo

Interesting Fact

Some Algonquian words, such as pecan and raccoon, were adopted into English and remain in use today, showing the lasting influence of the language.

house



yehakin

arrow point



raputtak

beans



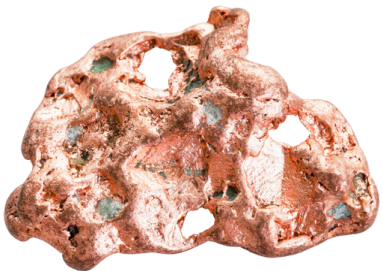
peccataas

ax / club



tomahawke

copper



matassun

corn



poketawes

crab



tuttascuk

deer



uttapantam

eagle



opateniok

sea



yapam

fish



namaske

friend



netab

gourd



mahawke

leader



**weroance
weroansqua**

opossum



aposoum

raccoon



aroughcun

river



yeokanta

rope/cord



pemminaw

squash



cushaw

tobacco



apooke

pecans



paucauns

shoe



moccasin

wow



waugh

**welcome,
friend**



wingapo