John White Returns to Roanoke

In the early morning light of August 18, 1590, a ship with billowing sails pierced the water off the Outer Banks of what is now North Carolina. Wearing a dark cloak, a man sat on a stool near the rail and sketched something on a pad. The man’s name was John White, a British artist and governor of Roanoke. Except for a few gusts of wind and the creaking ship, not much could be heard. The silence unnerved White. He looked up from his work and peered toward the eastern horizon. The sun began to peak over the dark outline of the banks. “Just a few more hours and we’ll reach Roanoke,” thought White.

White glanced down at his drawing, a picture of a lovely young woman. A stab of fear pierced his heart. “Three long years. I should have never left my beloved daughter Elinor and her child, Virginia, and the other colonists.” White gently stroked the picture. He thought back to August 18, 1587. Then White had been in charge of an English colony of about 100 people located on Roanoke Island. Although a skilled artist, John White was not a very strong leader. Many colonists complained of his governing and resented having an artist as the leader of their group. However, no amount of complaining had been able to dampen White’s mood on that day. His daughter had just given birth to a baby girl, named Virginia Dare.

But White’s good humor was short lived. A few days later many colonists began to complain heavily about the lack of supplies. They convinced the indecisive White to sail back to England for more provisions. “After all,” White thought, “I won’t be gone more than a year.” He had been wrong though. Political unrest between England and Spain delayed the return expedition for three years.

Now, seated on deck, White folded up his drawing, placed it in his vest pocket, and stared across the water. “I will be returning on the third birthday of my granddaughter,” he thought. “Maybe this is a good sign.” Indeed, his hope was kindled further a few hours later when he saw a stream of smoke rising from Roanoke Island. However, by the time the ship reached the island, the smoke had disappeared.
White, the ship’s captain, and a few sailors landed and then hurried toward the fort that the colonists had built. The walls were still standing and seemed in decent condition. But everything was strangely silent. “Hello,” White shouted. No response. A sense of dread filled him. As White approached the fort, he noticed the word Croatoan carved on one of the fort’s doorposts. He rushed inside and gasped with disbelief.

Gone! The buildings, the houses, and shelter were all gone. And not one person, other than his companions, was in sight. Frantically, he searched the grounds. All he could find were a few small cannons and an open chest. Then he heard a shout. John and the captain ran in the direction of the sound. Soon they saw one of their sailors pointing toward a nearby tree. Out of breath, White reached the tree and saw the letters “CRO” carved on it.

“It’s a message,” exclaimed White. “This and the word “Croatoan. The settlers are telling us that they have gone to Croatoan Island. We must sail there immediately.”

“We’ll give it a try, but a storm is brewing and we’ll be heading into the teeth of it,” replied the captain.

Several storms hit, which made it impossible for the ship to reach the island. John White clenched some rigging as the ship tossed in the fierce gale. The ship’s captain stood nearby. To be heard above the wind, White yelled, “We must keep trying.”

“I can’t,” shouted the captain. “I have the crew to think of. Besides by now we’re probably closer to England than to America.”

“No!” White shrieked in despair, but to no avail. Soon the captain gave the order to sail for England.
### Organization

Use questions like those in the chart below on John White to organize your biographical narrative. Include background description, physical description, and specific actions as you write answers to the questions. In addition, use dialogue to bring your subject to life. You should also reveal your own attitude toward your subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is your subject important?</th>
<th>Governor of first English colony in Americas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What background information do your readers need to know about your subject?</td>
<td>general overview of his governorship of Roanoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What event or incident in your subject’s life do you want to describe?</td>
<td>His return to Roanoke in 1590.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When and where did the incident take place?</td>
<td>Roanoke Island, North Carolina, August 18, 1590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who else was involved?</td>
<td>Ship’s captain, crew, Roanoke colonists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about your subject?</td>
<td>skilled artist, not a good governor, loved his daughter and granddaughter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
John White Returns to Roanoke (continued)

**Details**

Vivid details such as **physical details**, **specific actions**, **inner thoughts**, and **dialogue** help to bring your subject and the historical period you are writing about to life. What details will your biographical narrative contain?

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A few days later many colonists began to complain heavily about the lack of supplies. They convinced the indecisive White to sail back to England for more provisions.

“Just a few more hours and we’ll reach Roanoke,” thought White. . . .

“Yes, this and the word “Croatoan. The settlers are telling us that they have gone to Croatoan Island. We must sail there immediately."

“We’ll give it a try, but a storm is brewing and we’ll be heading into the teeth of it,” replied the captain.”
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Clear Position

Biographical narratives often contain statements that make the author’s position on his or her subject clear. What is your position or opinion about the subject of your biographical narrative? What statements are you including to make your position clear?

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