

Indigenous Chesapeake Languages

cohattayough
persimmon
popanow hickory tayac
weroance
raccoon
cattapeuk
gnóha wisó
matt-ah-ki-ween
taquitoc nepinough
opossum
gä-hagóñ-wah
k'niháh
halac'quow



Captain John Smith
Chesapeake National
Historic Trail



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American Indian tribes speak different languages. Languages that are similar and share a history are grouped into "language families." In the Chesapeake Bay watershed, indigenous peoples speak languages that belong to the Algonquian, Siouan, and Iroquoian language families. Oral tradition has kept these languages alive over the centuries. Oral tradition means the stories, languages, and histories that have been passed down by being spoken out loud. Also, some words and phrases were written down in the journals of European colonists like John Smith and William Strachey. Many words we use today, such as "raccoon," come from indigenous Chesapeake languages.

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