Early Jamestown

A Unit of Study for Grades 5–8

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and

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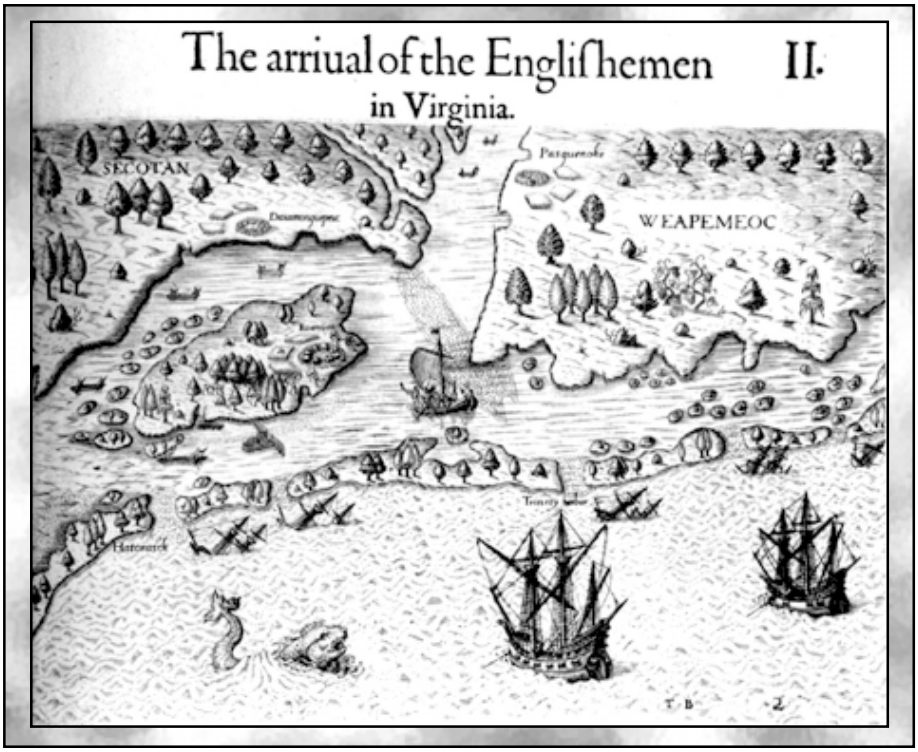

National Center for History in the Schools
University of California, Los Angeles

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Teacher Background Materials

I. Unit Overview

Through primary sources, this unit explores the founding and early development of Jamestown and the relationship between the colonists and the indigenous people. Although the colony was established by the Virginia Company of London in the hope of making a profit by finding gold, locating a trade route to Asia, or harnessing the labor of the natives, only the discovery that tobacco could be profitably raised permitted the colony's survival. The colonists' first years were marked by disease, disaster and death brought about largely by inappropriate expectations, poor planning and an inability to adapt to the unfamiliar world in which they found themselves. During this same period, the foundations of Anglo-Indian relations in Virginia were also being laid. The helplessness of the colonists to secure their own survival led them to establish an intimate relationship with the Indians of the Chesapeake. While this relationship was not the one originally desired by either people, the Indians were the ones who ultimately lost.

Students need to understand how very tenuous England's early efforts at colonization actually were. They need to learn how the haphazard and ill-considered decisions of the first English colonists had a profound impact on Anglo-Indian relations. Finally, this unit should allow students to experience history in a way that lets them see the past not as a series of inevitable events, but as the meandering record of human choices, some good, some bad, but all leading to the world of today.

II. Unit Context

This unit should be taught after studying Pre-Columbian Indians and the Age of Exploration and prior to studying late colonial America and the American Revolution. It is essential that students have a sense of what native American cultures were like before European contact. Prior to this unit, students should already have some feel for the relationship between environment and culture, as well as an appreciation of the richness, complexity, and diversity of native American cultures. It would also be helpful if students were familiar with the Spanish model of colonization.

Contrasting the colonization of Jamestown with the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the Quakers of Pennsylvania would be an excellent way to show that there were different approaches to colonization. Understanding how different these three regions were in their beginnings would help students understand the abiding regional differences that mark American history.

III. Correlation to National History Standards

Early Jamestown provides teaching materials that address *National Standards for United States History, Basic Edition* (Los Angeles, National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), **Era 1**, "Three Worlds Meet," and **Era 2**, "Colonization and Settlement." Lessons specifically address **Standard 1A** in **Era 1**, "Patterns of change in indigenous societies in the Americas" and **Standards 1B** and **3A** in **Era 2**, which calls for student understanding of how English settlers interacted with Native Americans and the development of economic systems in colonial Virginia.

Lessons within this unit likewise address a number of specific Historical Thinking Standards. Students are challenged to reconstruct the literal meaning of historical passages; compare and contrast different sets of ideas, values, and behaviors; employ quantitative analysis to explore migration patterns; and, evaluate alternative courses of action.

IV. Unit Objectives

1. To study historical documents in order to experience history as a dynamic discipline which studies, interprets, and debates the meaning of human artifacts and, through those, humanity's collective past.

2. To explain how the hard times experienced by Jamestown settlers were the result of the peculiar mix of people who emigrated to Virginia, their inappropriate expectations, and their difficulties in adapting.

3. To understand the interaction between the early settlers of Jamestown and the native Americans.

4. To appreciate that human choices determine much of what happens to people and that these choices are subject to different interpretations.

V. Introduction to Early Jamestown

The English settlement of North America began in earnest on April 26, 1607, when three small ships sighted what is now Cape Henry, Virginia. On board were 104 adventurers who hoped to emulate Spanish conquistadores like Cortez and Pizarro. After several weeks spent exploring the Chesapeake Bay, they settled on the site that would become Jamestown and began erecting a fort and dwellings.

From the beginning, English colonization in North America was essentially different from the Spanish model. Spanish colonization was capitalized, organized, and operated by the crown; the Jamestown settlement was funded by a private joint-stock company, the

Virginia Colony of London, founded by merchants. Despite featuring the Christian conversion of natives prominently in its charter, the Company's real aim was profit. The Virginia Company hoped to find gold or other valuable minerals, locate a Northwest passage to Asia, trade with the indigenous population, and, if feasible, harness them into a pliant labor force as the Spanish and Portuguese had done. But the conditions of Virginia, the lack of precious minerals and a less dense, more broadly dispersed population, made the Spanish model inappropriate. Moreover, Spanish imperialism was supported with funds and soldiers from the government and hundreds of priests from the Catholic church. The Virginia Company did not have such resources.

For many years, the extraction of wealth, rather than settlement, remained the principal goal of the adventurers who came to Jamestown. There were no women among the first settlers, and for decades after its founding women were greatly under-represented. Even into the eighteenth century, a hundred years after the founding, there were three men for every two women.

Among the first three groups from England to arrive in Jamestown, gentlemen comprised a third of the number, a proportion six times greater than in England. By definition, gentlemen had no manual skills and could not be expected to do ordinary labor. Their class background and education prepared them only for service in the military or legal professions. But because the military and legal professions were already overrepresented in the colony, many gentlemen were unemployed and resorted to squabbling, gaming or drinking. This was not an ideal situation for the rigors of colonization, but the Company had little choice except to take such people; they were the ones who wanted to come and could afford to pay their way.

The curious mix of settlers, with notions of colonization unsuitable for the land and resisted by the people they found in Virginia, meant that for many years Jamestown's survival was extremely precarious. Unwilling to farm or do the other mundane physical tasks essential for survival, these soldiers of fortune relied on England and Indians for food. But the supplies from England were often spoiled or hoarded, and obtaining food from the Indians was contingent on the extremely variable state of Indian-settler relations. Aware that the colonists could not survive on their own, Smith had sought to force trade with the Powhatans by intimidation. At times raiding and destroying their fields and villages to extort food and supplies, Smith engaged in practices which had the same adverse impact on the English settlers as on the Powhatans. Combined with often foul, brackish drinking water, an unfamiliar climate, and marshy terrain, these self-defeating behaviors led to a staggering mortality rate. Of the over 900 European settlers to arrive between 1607 and 1609, only 59 survived to the spring of 1610.

If Captain John Smith had not taken command of the settlers and established a sort of military regimen requiring that settlers work for food, the colony might well have failed.

After Smith left, his example was followed by others who established strict laws to regulate conduct. But even this order imposed upon the settlers would not have preserved England's first colony had not some sort of profit making venture been found.

A host of different enterprises had been unsuccessfully undertaken before John Rolfe managed to raise a West Indian strain of tobacco. In 1614 he laid the basis for a viable economy and began the English-Virginian tobacco trade by sending four barrels of tobacco to England. By 1624 Virginia was annually exporting 200,000 pounds of tobacco, and by 1638 the amount had risen to 3,000,000 pounds. Despite James I's attempts to discourage the use of tobacco, its popularity gave Virginia a period of sustained growth.

In 1618 it was still not clear to the London Company that tobacco would be a profitable commodity for trade. As the company teetered on the edge of bankruptcy, it tried to entice new settlers to Virginia by offering 50 acres to anyone who paid his own way or the way of anyone else. The company also tried to improve Virginia's government in 1619 by adopting English common law and a more representative resident government. Thus was born the House of Burgesses. Even when in 1624 the crown seized the London Company's charter, and the new king Charles I proclaimed Virginia a royal colony, Virginia continued to be governed in accordance with procedures set up by the company.

Because culturing tobacco was extremely labor intensive, Virginia needed an abundance of cheap labor. Planters recruited workers primarily from the armies of displaced peasants and destitute city dwellers in England and Ireland. Thousands of desperate people sold themselves into servitude for three to seven years in order to secure passage to the New World. Since they were mostly young, between the ages of 15 and 24, and almost three-fourths male, they hoped that after their servitude they could establish their own farms. But for most, this hope was never realized. Of the 9,000 immigrants who voyaged to Virginia between 1610 and 1622, only 2,000 survived the period. As few as one in 20 of these people, called indentured servants, managed to achieve freedom and acquire land. Not only were these servants subject to the same malarial fevers and dysentery that depleted the ranks of planters, they were also subject to harsh work routines by masters who treated them with little regard to their humanity. The brutal treatment of indentured servants anticipated, and partially prepared society for, the eventual transition to slave labor.

While tobacco gave the colony an economic basis for survival, it sharpened the already abrasive relations between European colonizers and the Powhatan tribes of the Chesapeake. From the beginning, relations between the colonizers and Native Americans were marked by ambivalence, suspicion, and frequent violence. Continuous contact did not bring understanding. The English were inclined to see their technological advan-

tages as proof of their inherent superiority, while the Indians found the Europeans extremely militaristic.

But this very quality inspired Powhatan, the canny leader of several dozen of the 40 small tribes in the Chesapeake region, to propose an alliance with the English. He saw in the English a potential ally who could help him retain and extend his control in the tidewater area and limit the threat of his western enemies. For this reason he repeatedly provided crucial relief for the English during their initial years of struggle. Yet the Indians of the Chesapeake were also aware of the English designs on their land. The economic success of tobacco brought increasing pressure for land. In 1617, when Opechancanough replaced Powhatan as head of the Chesapeake tribes, he concluded that the English encroachment must be halted. An epidemic which decimated the Powhatan tribes between 1617 and 1619 added to his sense of urgency, as did the English murder of a Powhatan religious leader. On March 22, 1622 Opechancanough launched a well-planned attack on the English of Virginia which resulted in the death of nearly a third of the immigrants. But the Indians, with their numbers reduced by disease, were no match for the English. Despite a recognition by many of the settlers of the causes of Indian hostility, this massacre provided the motivation to wage a ruthless war of extermination against the Indians. Although there was nothing inevitable about the course of Indian-settler relations in Virginia, the English land-hunger was a major contributing factor to recurrent hostilities.

VI. Lesson Plans

1. The Powhatans

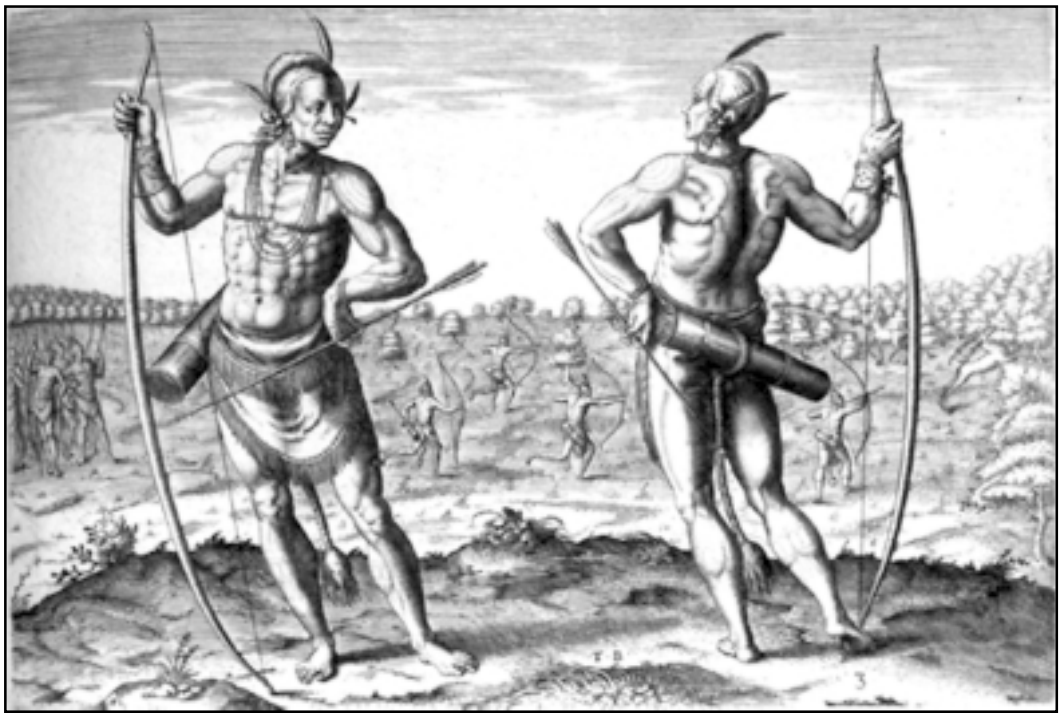
2. The First Settlers of Jamestown

3. Starving Time in Jamestown

4. Tobacco Comes to Virginia

5. Indian Hostility and White Revenge

Lesson One



A Weroan or great Lorde of Virginia
"The Princes of Virginia are attired in suche a manner as is expressed in this figure. . . ."
Engraving by Theodore de Bry in Thomas Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1590).

The Powhatans

A. Objectives

- To consider how historians study preliterate societies.
- To analyze some aspects of Native American culture.
- To practice distinguishing between descriptions and judgments.

B. Lesson Activities

1. The **Dramatic Moment** which began the unit was adapted from *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith, President of Virginia, and Admiral of New England, 1580–1631* Vol. 1, edited by Edward Arber. It can be read to students or by them to set the stage for studying the founding of Jamestown and Indian-settler relations. After reading this passage, teachers can ask students to discuss it. Questions might include: What do the Indians and English want from each other? Could the Indians and English have become friends? What do they think Powhatan's decision should have been? Why?

2. Ask students to consider how historians learn about people who lived hundreds of years ago. They should consider both literate and preliterate cultures. Be sure they understand that historians rely on artifacts from the past to guide their interpretations. Often these artifacts are some sort of written record, but when a culture transmits knowledge by means other than a written language, objects like utensils, garbage mounds, ceremonial artifacts, and other physical remnants of that society are used. These objects are compared with the artifacts from societies which historians better understand. Another way to learn about preliterate cultures is to study the descriptions of these cultures from contemporary outside observers. Students should understand that if such descriptions were made by observers unsympathetic or guided by ulterior motives, they may not be reliable. For this reason, historians learn to use and interpret records selectively. Smith's description of the Powhatans is a good example; historians appreciate his descriptions but must weigh his judgments against those of other participants.

3. Have students read **Documents A1** or **A2**, a modern version of the same document, and discuss their impressions. First have them separate Smith's descriptions from his judgments. This may be difficult for students because the description is also interpretive. As long as students can defend their responses, a wide variety is acceptable. Then have students discuss whether these people can properly be characterized as "barbarous" (uncivilized).

C. Extended Activities

There are several ways to extend this exercise. Students can consider the accuracy of Smith's interpretations.

1. For instance, Smith states that babies were washed regularly to toughen them. Since Europeans at this time did not bathe regularly, Smith may have

misinterpreted Powhatan hygiene. Based on what students have learned about a tribal society's dependence on the skills and physical strength of its hunters and warriors, was Smith's observation unusually perceptive? These mothers might have just been cleaning their children.

2. Students might draw inferences about aspects of Indian life not specifically discussed. Smith describes a sharp division of labor along gender lines. Have students speculate on who would make bows and arrows or the boats for fishing. Ask students to speculate on why Smith called hunting, fishing and war "manlike exercises", and the rest of the Indian society's activities "work."

3. Be sure students justify their speculations with evidence drawn from the reading. Students might also be asked to compare the way the Powhatans lived with some other group, possibly themselves.

D. Concluding Activity

Have students draw pictures of what they imagine the Powhatan boats, houses, and villages looked like. Their efforts could be more accurate and their understanding enhanced if you showed them the pictures drawn by John White in 1587 available, among other places, in *The New World: The First Pictures of America,* Stefan Lorant, editor (New York, 1966) or on the following Web site:
Professor Troy Johnson, "Indians of North America," California State University, Long Beach [August 10, 2000] http://www.csulb.edu/~gcampus/libarts/am-indian/woodcuts/

John Smith's Description Of The Powhatans, 1612

(Primary Source)

Each household knoweth their owne lands and gardens, and most live of their owne labours.

For their apparell, they are some time covered with the skinnes of wilde beasts, which in winter are dressed with the haire, but in sommer without. The better sort use large mantels of deare skins not much differing in fashion from the Irish mantels…

Their buildings and habitations are for the most part by the rivers or not farre or distant from some fresh spring. Their houses are built like our Arbors of small young springs [saplings?] bowed and tyed, and so close covered with mats or the barkes of trees very handsomely, that not withstanding either winde raine or weather, they are as warme as stooves, but very smoaky; yet at the toppe of the house there is a hole made for the smoake to goe into right over the fire. . . .

Their houses are in the midst of their fields or gardens; which are smal plots of ground, some 20 [acres?], some 40, some 100. some 200. some more, some lesse. Some times 2 to 100 of these houses [are] togither, or but a little separated by groves of trees. Neare their habitations is [a] little small wood, or old trees on the ground, by reason of their burning of them for fire…

The Indian Village of Pomeioc

This illustration is reproduced as published in *America 1585: The Complete Drawings of John White,* edited by Paul Hulton, 1984 (The University of North Carolina Press). Copyrighted by the Trustees of the British Museum and used with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

Men women and children have their severall names according to the severall humour[s] of their parents. Their women (they say) are easilie delivered of childe, yet doe they love children verie dearly. To make them

hardy, in the coldest morning they wash them in the rivers, and by painting and ointments so tanne their skins that after [a] year or two, no weather will hurt them.

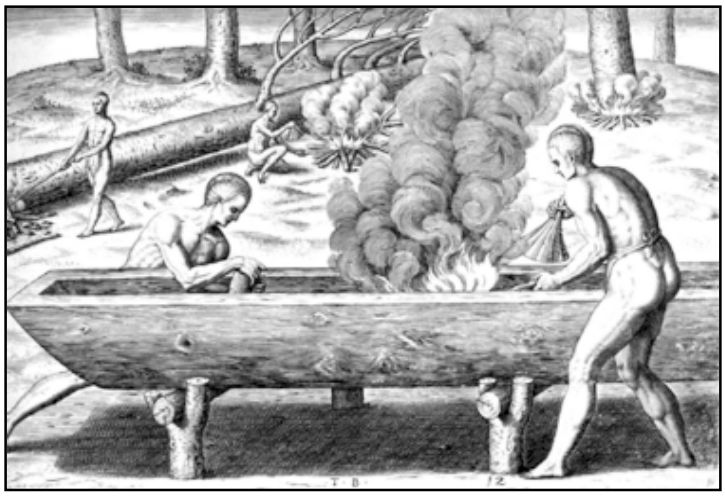
The men bestow their times in fishing, hunting, wars, and such manlike exercises, scorning to be seen in any woman like exercise; which is the cause that the woman be verie painfull and the men often idle. The women and children do the rest of the worke. They make mats, baskets, pots, morters; pound their corne, make their bread, prepare their victuals, plant their corne, gather their corne, beare al kind of burdens, and such like…

Their fishing is much in Boats. These they make of one tree by bowing [i.e., burning] and scratching away the coles with ston[e]s and shels till they have made it in [the] form of a Trough. Some of them are an elne [i.e., an ell, a unit of measure equal to 45 inches] deepe, and 40 or 50 foot in length, and some will beare 40 men; but the most ordinary are smaller, and will beare 10, 20, or 30. according to their bignes. Insteed of oares, they use paddles and sticks, with which they will row faster then our Barges…

There is yet in Virginia no place discovered to bee so Savage in which the Savages have not a religion, Deare, and Bow and Arrowes. All thinges that were able to do them hurt beyond their prevention, they adore with their kinde of divine worship; as the fire, water, lightening, thunder, our ordinance peeces [i.e., ordinance pieces, large guns], horses, etc.

Although the countrie people be very barbarous; yet have they amongst them such government, as that their government, as that their Magistrats for good commanding, and their people for du[e] subjection and obeying, excell many places that would be counted very civill.

The forme of their Common wealth is a monarchicall governement.



Indians Making Canoes

Modern Version of John Smith's Description of the Powhatans

Each family has its own land and gardens. They do their own work.

For clothes they wear animal skins. In winter they wear skins with the fur and hair left on, but in summer they wear leather. More important people wear cloaks made of deer skins that look like the cloaks the Irish wear. . . .

They build their homes near rivers or springs. They tie long slender branches together in bundles and weave them into a frame for the house, like a giant basket. Then they lay mats or bark over this frame. The houses are warm and snug, but very smokey, even though they leave a hole above their fireplaces for smoke. . . .

Their houses are surrrounded by their own fields and gardens. This farmland can be a small plot or large fields. Sometimes these houses are grouped together, separated only by groves of trees. Near their homes are piles of wood for burning in their home fires. . . .

Parents give children several names. Women have babies easily, and love them very much. To make babies strong, on the coldest mornings they wash them in rivers. They also put oils and lotions on the skin of babies to protect them against the weather.

Men fish, hunt, and go to war. Women often work while the men are idle. Women and children do all the other work. They make mats, baskets, pots, and grinding tools, grind corn into flour, bake bread, and do all the cooking. They also do the farming, planting, raising, and gathering of corn. Women do the hauling and all the other heavy work. . . .

They use boats for fishing. The boats are made by burning out the center of the tree. They scrape away the burned coals with stones and shells to form a long hollow trough. These boats can be almost four feet deep and 40 or 50 feet long. Some will hold 400 men, but most are smaller, holding 10 to 30 men. They use paddles instead of oars and can travel quickly. . . .

So far all the people we have seen in Virginia have religion, hunt deer, and use bows and arrows. They worship natural forces which they cannot control, like fire, water, and lightning. . . .

Although these people are barbarous (uncivilized), they have a form of government which is superior to the governments of many places in the world which are considered civilized. They have leaders who are wise and people who are willing to follow laws. They are ruled by a king.

Source: John Smith, *A Map of Virginia. With a Description of the Countrey, the Commodities, People, Government and Religion. . . .* (Oxford, 1612)