Some European countries, including England, were in competition to increase their wealth and power by expanding their empires to America.

The King of England had the power to grant charters allowing settlement in North America. The first permanent English settlement in British North America was Jamestown, which was founded in 1607 as an economic venture.

**FAREWELL TO ENGLAND**

Virginia was named to honor Queen Elizabeth I. She was called the Virgin Queen because she never married or had children. When she died, her empire went to her cousin, who was crowned King James I, and whom we identify with the King James Bible.

**Word to Know**

- **colony**
  
  COL-uh-nee
  
  A place far from home where a group of people called colonists settle. Their mother country rules the colony.

As she sat on her majestic throne, Queen Elizabeth could not relax for one minute. England, her island nation, had to find new sources of raw materials—lumber, furs, gold, silver, and other natural resources.

By the late 1500s, a race was on among many European countries to start colonies in the “New World,” as they called it. Of course the Americas were not new to the Indians, who had lived there for thousands of years! Spain had already grabbed vast areas in the Americas and plundered gold and silver. To make England more powerful, Elizabeth had to claim her chunk, too. She wanted to establish an American **colony** to increase England’s wealth and power and to compete with other European nations. In the 1580s she asked her trusted aide, Sir Walter Raleigh, to start a colony for England. The two imagined a colony that, as early as 1584, was called Virginia.

*Sir Walter Raleigh (shown with his son) believed there were gold and silver deposits in Virginia.*
The Lost Colony

With hopes high, 110 men, women, and children set sail for the New World. On a hot July day in 1587, the English colonists anchored off Roanoke Island, in what is now North Carolina. When a supply ship returned in 1590, every single settler had vanished. A tree trunk with the word “Cro” scratched in it left a clue to their fate. Tales of the “Lost Colony” haunted England, and it would be many years before anyone dared to start another settlement.

What was the best way to make a colony work? England decided to set up each colony as a business. A colony was an economic venture. Imagine a bakery. You need money to buy ingredients to make cakes. You need people to do the baking and selling. To raise money to build a bakery, you can get people to invest—lend you cash so you can start baking. If you sell a lot of cakes, you will make a profit. When the company is a success, you pay each investor a share of the profits. That was how Virginia was started—as a place to get rich. But making a fortune in the Americas was difficult, dangerous, and often deadly.

Virginia’s Charters

The King of England had the power to grant **charters** allowing Englishmen to settle in North America. In 1606 King James signed a charter that formed the **Virginia Company of London**. Its goal was to start a new settlement in North America. The first charter defined the physical boundaries of the colony and gave the Virginia Company a piece of land that stretched 100 miles inland and 50 miles to the north and south.

In exchange for providing ships, workers, and supplies to build the new colony, each stockholder got a share of any profits. Two additional charters—one in 1609 and another in 1612—greatly increased the boundaries of the Virginia colony. Together, the charters authorized the settlement of the colony, discussed how to govern it, and promised settlers that they would have the rights of English people even though they lived across the Atlantic Ocean.

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**Did the people of the “Lost Colony” go and live with the Croatan Indians? How might artifacts help us solve this mystery?**

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**Word to Know**

- **charter**
  - CHAR-tur
  - *noun*
  - A document that grants certain rights to a town, city, land, school, or organization.
The English believed the natural resources at Jamestown would benefit England. The location and physical characteristics of the Jamestown site influenced the decision to settle there.

OFF TO JAMESTOWN

On a brisk December day in 1606, the Virginia Company launched three small ships, the Susan Constant, Godspeed, and Discovery, with more than 100 men and boys aboard, and set sail across the Atlantic. Who were they? There were well-to-do gentlemen, soldiers, laborers, and three young orphans. On April 26, 1607, they made their first landfall at a place they named Cape Henry. They planted a small cross to honor their Christian faith, then hopped back onto their ships and kept sailing. Finally, on May 13 the weary voyagers dropped anchor. The next day they rowed ashore and, with weapons clutched tightly, began to explore some land that seemed like a good place for their new home.

A Difficult Voyage

It had been a long trip—two months spent on the stormy Atlantic and three more months sailing north from the West Indies. There had been all sorts of turmoil on the crossing, and one passenger, John Smith, had been so much trouble he had been put in chains. Everyone was glad to finally get off the smelly, damp boats and stand once more on solid ground. But they were about to make a big mistake.

Christopher Newport

Getting to the new colony was the job of Christopher Newport, captain of the Susan Constant and leader of the expedition. Once the colonists arrived, Newport kept exploring the Chesapeake. The ocean-going boats were too big, so he used a smaller boat to head up the James River until he reached the Fall Line, passing dozens of Indian dugouts and towns on the way. What do you think motivated Newport to keep exploring the new colony?
The Perfect Place?

The Virginia Company had strict orders from England to settle at least a hundred miles upriver, but the colonists saw a narrow peninsula bordered on three sides by the James River that looked perfect. The water along the shore was deep enough for their ships to dock. It could be easily defended from attack by Spanish ships, and it was connected to the mainland by a skinny strip of land, making it easier to defend against Indian attacks.

Natural resources were bountiful. The settlers thought there was ample fresh water. There was fruit for picking, timber for building houses, waters full of fish, and iron ore for making pots and weapons. The site was perfect...or was it?

Danger Ahead

Jamestown, founded in 1607, became the first permanent English settlement in British North America, but life in James Cittie got off to a rocky start. The settlers fought with “the Naturals” (the English name for the Indians) who were simply trying to defend themselves. The men quickly built a three-sided fort along the river they named the James, to honor their king. The “gentlemen”—well-to-do investors who had come to Virginia to grab gold, land, and profits from goods sent back to England—would not pitch in with the work. Was that fair?

Spring gave way to a hot summer. Mosquitoes swarmed, and food began to rot. Hunger arose, the water supplies grew foul, and diseases spread. Colonists began dying, and for the next few months it seemed as if there was someone new to bury almost every day. By September of 1607, almost half the settlers lay dead. Perhaps Jamestown had been a poor location after all. Could Virginia be saved?
The native peoples and the English settlers in Virginia established trading relationships and, for a while, had positive interactions.

WHEN WORLDS MET

What happened when the English settlers met the Virginia Indians? Over time the native peoples realized the English settlement would keep growing. They believed the settlers were invaders who would one day take over Indian lands. Still, at first they tried to get along. They showed the hungry settlers how to plant corn and harvest tobacco. They traded food, furs, and leather with the English in exchange for tools, pots, and copper for jewelry.

John Smith: Taking Charge

By the age of 23, Captain John Smith had already seen the world as a soldier of fortune—a man who fights for whoever will pay the most. Smith described himself as brave and fearless. Many others thought he was obnoxious.

While aboard Christopher Newport’s ship to Virginia, Smith was nearly hanged for stirring up trouble. In December 1607, seven months after their arrival, Smith found himself in trouble once more. While exploring the James River, he was taken captive by Powhatan’s men. Powhatan knew that Smith was a leader of the new settlers and hoped to get the English settlers to join the Powhatan tribes. During Smith’s days with the Powhatan, he began to learn the Algonquian language and he made new friends.

When Smith returned to the fort after his time in captivity with the Powhatans, he found Jamestown near ruin. He began giving orders, telling people exactly what to do. His tough rules helped Jamestown survive, as did the trade he began with the native peoples.

In 1609, after being badly burned by a gunpowder explosion, Smith returned to England. When he next came back to America, he headed to Massachusetts to map that area. He never returned to Virginia.

Smith wrote about his adventures. How can these primary sources help you understand the events in Virginia history?

A drawing of Powhatan based on Smith’s description

“Their emperor proudly lying upon a bedstead a foot high, upon ten or twelve mats, richly hung with many chains of great pearls about his neck and covered with a great covering of raccoon skins.”

—JOHN SMITH, DESCRIBING HIS FIRST MEETING WITH POWHATAN
Powhatan: Man of Strength

John Smith may have been fearless, but he met his match in Powhatan, the paramount chief of many Virginia Indian tribes. Powhatan knew the English settlers were a terrible threat, but he was a ruler of great spiritual, mental, and physical strength.

As he met with Captain Smith and the English settlers, Powhatan planned to bring them under his rule, just as he had done with the other tribes he controlled. He sent his people to teach the Englishmen how to plant corn and harvest tobacco, but over time Powhatan came to realize that the English settlement would keep growing and would one day take over the native people’s lands.

An artist imagines Powhatan at the height of his power.

Pocahontas: Prisoner to Bride

We know Powhatan’s daughter as “Pocahontas,” a nickname that means “mischievous one.” A lively ten-year-old, Pocahontas first met Captain Smith when he was held in her father’s village. She learned English and soon bridged the Indian and English worlds, serving as a contact when the Indians brought food to the starving settlers. When Pocahontas was about 16, she was kidnapped by the colonists in the hope that Powhatan would exchange several English captives. She was taken to a new settlement, Henricus, where she met a tobacco planter, John Rolfe. Rolfe fell in love with her and the two married in 1614, leading to peace between the Powhatan and the settlers. In 1616 the couple and their child, Thomas, went to England. She met King James I and Queen Anne and saw John Smith again, but she died just as they were about to return to Virginia.

Without the help of Powhatan, his daughter Pocahontas, and the Powhatan Indians, Jamestown might have ended up as another “Lost Colony.”

Why should you take by force that which you can have by love? Why should you destroy us, who have provided you with food? What can you get by war? We can hide our provisions, and fly into the woods; and then you must consequently famish by wronging your friends.”

—POWHATAN

These two portraits of Pocahontas, one with her son, show her in English dress.

“She...was the instrument to preserve this colony from death, famine, and utter confusion.”

—JOHN SMITH, 1616
The English settlers found life in Virginia harder than they expected.

The native peoples and the English settlers in Virginia established trading relationships and, for a while, had positive interactions.

THE STARVING TIME

Heat, disease, rotting crops, misery, and death. That was the fate of the first Jamestown settlers. The marshy soil made planting difficult, and the drinking water was contaminated—way too salty. Just a few short months after the colonists arrived in Jamestown, they were in trouble. By the autumn of 1607, there was hardly anyone healthy enough to build a home or tend to a garden, and the Virginia Algonquians were certainly not going to become servants for a bunch of foul-smelling intruders. Someone had to do something!

Too Much Hardship

In 1608 Captain Smith took charge of the colony. Smith was tough. Even though many settlers knew nothing about farming and lacked the skills needed to provide for themselves, Smith started a no work, no food policy. When, in the spring of 1609, the corn supplies were devoured by rats, Smith traded copper and metal kettles for food with the Indians, who also introduced tobacco to the new colonists.

There were more hardships. A drought in Virginia at the time of settlement reduced the amount of food available to everyone. Even the Powhatan struggled. When that crisis passed, the colonists got down to the work of making their colony profitable, especially by cutting timber. But in their excitement to do well, they failed to stow away enough food for their own needs. When a shipload of 400 new settlers arrived just before winter, things took a deadly turn. That bitter winter came to be known as the Starving Time.

He that will not work shall not eat, except by sickness he be disabled.”

—John Smith, after being put in charge of the Jamestown Colony, 1609
The Starving Time

After a summer of drought and poor harvests, the winter of 1609–1610 was brutal. As icy winds blew, the colonists ran out of food. Some ate their horses. Some even ate their belts and boots. That terrible winter became known as the “Starving Time,” and many of the colonists died from hunger or disease.

By 1610 the fort was in splinters, its walls torn down. Houses, left empty after their owners’ deaths, were chopped up for firewood by the survivors. In June the remaining colonists decided to give up and head back to England. All hopes of building a new colony were dashed.

The starving colonists were making their way downstream toward the Chesapeake Bay when they saw something amazing. There were ships close by, coming from England with 150 settlers and a load of food and supplies aboard. Three days after it was abandoned, Jamestown was alive once more—saved by the English supply ships.

Surviving Hard Times

Thanks to Captain John Smith’s strong leadership, his forced-work program with its emphasis on agriculture, and the arrival of more ships with supplies and new settlers, Jamestown survived its first years. Still, there was trouble ahead. When Thomas Dale arrived with military reinforcements in 1611, he found a place where many colonists spent their days “bowling in the streets.” That had to stop. Dale could be a cruel man, and anyone who showed the slightest laziness was beaten. Colonists were given a three-acre plot and told to figure out what to grow or go hungry.

A New Crop

John Rolfe, the man who wed Pocahontas, had an idea. He tried planting a handful of tobacco seeds he had carried from the islands of the Caribbean. Soon Rolfe’s sweet tobacco became a favorite back in England and was in great demand.

At the same time, Dale sailed farther up the James River and started a new settlement. He called it Henricus, in honor of Prince Henry, the heir to the English throne. It was safer there with fewer mosquitoes and healthier drinking water. With Pocahontas and John Rolfe’s marriage in 1614, an uneasy peace settled over Virginia between the Powhatan Indians and the newcomers from Europe. Would it last?
As Jamestown grew, Virginia’s system of government evolved.

**THE BURGESSES**

On July 30, 1619, in the Jamestown Church, a group of men sat down to discuss matters of big concern to the Virginia colony. Who were these men and why were they sitting in a church loft, sweating in the humid summer heat?

**What Do We Do Now?**

The Virginia colony had survived through hard times. Thanks to tobacco, it was finally making a profit and growing richer. Ships kept arriving with decks packed with new settlers. Some new rules were needed, so the governor of Virginia (sent by the King of England to run things) called a meeting of his General Assembly.

The General Assembly included two representatives, called **burgesses** (BURR-jis-is) from each of the divisions of Virginia, five handpicked men who made up the Governor’s Council, and the governor. Together they met as one **legislative** body to make laws for the colony. Only certain free adult men had the right to take part. Why were they called burgesses? **Burgh** is an old-fashioned word for “borough” or “town.”

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**Words to Know**

- assembly
  - ah-SEM-blee
  - A group of people gathered together for a common purpose

- legislative
  - LEDGE-is-slay-tiv
  - Having the power to make laws

- burgess
  - BUR-jis
  - Elected representative from each division of Virginia sent to serve in the General Assembly

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**Growing by the “Hundreds”**

By the time the House of Burgesses first met, Jamestown had been joined by several new towns along the James River. Why do you think these new settlements—taken by force from Indians—were built in the locations noted on the map?

The colonists called the new towns “hundreds.” In the colonial era, a “hundred” was a large plot of about one thousand acres.

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**New English Settlements in Virginia**

**Map Legend**

1. Jamestown • 1607  
2. Henricus • 1611  
3. Bermuda Hundred • 1613  
4. Shirley Hundred • 1613  
5. Berkeley Hundred • 1619  
6. Flowerdew Hundred • 1618  
7. Martin’s Hundred • 1618
How Much Can We Charge?
For five hot days the men talked about how to get along with the Indians. They tried to think of ways to make their neighbors go to church. Most importantly, they tried to set a price for the sale of tobacco to England. But the mosquito-filled air soon led to an outbreak of disease, and the feverish delegates went home.

America’s First Election
From the beginning, the burgesses were elected—chosen by white men who owned land in their local areas. By the 1640s the burgesses were meeting separately from the Governor’s Council. They called themselves the House of Burgesses.
Continuing as the first elected legislative body in any colony in America, the burgesses gave free settlers an opportunity to make many of the rules that governed the colony—a chance to have some control over their own government.

A Birthplace of Democracy—For Some
The only people who could become members of the House of Burgesses, and vote, were men who owned land. Virginia Indians, servants (black or white, male or female), and free white women could not vote. As time passed, the rules grew even stricter so that men had to own at least 50 acres of land to vote. Still, the House of Burgesses would play a huge role in the future of our country. Virginia would become a place where—for some people—democracy and freedom were born.

Our current Virginia General Assembly dates back to the start of the House of Burgesses on that July day at Jamestown in 1619. It is the longest continuously running elective legislative body in North America. It would become a place where a new cry for freedom would rise in the 1760s—a cry that changed America.
NEW WAYS, NEW FACES

The ships kept coming to Virginia from across the sea in the early 1600s as the Virginia Company kept pouring more money into the little colony. They hoped that it would soon become rich.

**The First Africans**

In 1619 a group of about 20 African men and women climbed off a ship in Virginia. They came against their will—taken by force from their homeland in what is present-day Angola. The legal status of these early African men and women in Virginia is unknown. They may have become indentured servants for a seven-year period, or been forced into slavery. But there is one thing we can be sure of—soon many more Africans would come to America in chains as slaves. It was the beginning of a long and terrible struggle for dignity.
Send More People!

Why Africans? Virginia needed workers to expand the tobacco economy, but not enough white people were willing to come as servants. Living conditions had improved in England and word had gotten out that many people died soon after arriving in America. Attempts to enslave the Indians had failed. The Indians knew the lay of the land and could better escape, so the Europeans turned to Africa for workers—workers who would have no way to escape back across the Atlantic to safety. Many Africans were fine farmers. The conditions on the tobacco plantations were extremely harsh, and Africans were productive under such conditions. They did not die in such awful numbers from European diseases as the American Indians did.

A Terrible Cycle

At first, European slave traders brought people who were already enslaved—mostly prisoners of war. But as demand grew, innocent people were kidnapped and dragged to slave forts on Africa’s coast. For hundreds of years, European slave traders purchased millions of Africans, packed them onto filthy ships, and sent them in chains to the Americas. So many died! Of those who somehow survived the awful journey, thousands ended up in Virginia, which began to write new laws that led to a lifetime of enslavement and misery.

The Farmer Takes a Wife

In 1620, a new group sailed into Jamestown. Two ships arrived carrying nearly 100 English women. The Virginia Company hoped that if more settlers had wives, they would start families, which would help to establish Jamestown as a permanent colony in Virginia. The ships brought young women, mostly between the ages of 18 and 24. All were poor. Just like the young men who sailed to the new colony, these women hoped for a better future. Each dreamed of marrying a good man who might own his own farm and who would provide for her as she helped her new husband and the growing colony.

Some women were paraded in front of possible husbands. Can you imagine how this woman felt?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1606</td>
<td>December: Three ships leave England to start a new colony in Virginia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1607</td>
<td>April 26: First landfall at Cape Henry. May 13: 104 men come ashore and name their landfall James Cittie. May 26–June 15: After Indians attack, a fort is built to protect the settlers. December: John Smith is captured by the Powhatan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1608</td>
<td>January: Smith, who has befriended Pocahontas, is released. September: Smith elected head of governing council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1609</td>
<td>August: Ships arrive from England with about 300 new settlers, including some women and children. September: Smith, injured in a gunpowder explosion, returns to England.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1610</td>
<td>The Starving Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1612</td>
<td>Rolfe’s Caribbean tobacco crop is a hit in London. Virginia’s economic future begins to emerge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1613</td>
<td>Pocahontas is kidnapped by the colonists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1614</td>
<td>Rolfe and Pocahontas wed, leading to an eight-year-long peace between Indians and colonists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1619</td>
<td>The General Assembly is founded. First Africans arrive in Virginia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1620</td>
<td>Two ships with English women arrive in Virginia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1640s</td>
<td>The burgesses become a separate legislative body called the House of Burgesses.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Review Questions

Use pages 50–51 to answer questions 1–2 in complete sentences.
1. What were two reasons England wanted to colonize America?
2. What was the importance of the charters of the Virginia Company of London to the Virginia settlement?

Use pages 52–53 to answer questions 3–4 in complete sentences.
3. When settlers arrived in 1607, where did they build Jamestown and why did they choose this site?
4. Why do you think the English were interested in the timber and iron ore from Jamestown?

Use pages 54–55 to answer question 5.
5. In what ways did the native peoples contribute to the survival of the Jamestown settlers?

Use pages 56–57 to complete the chart.
6. Settlers faced hardships in Jamestown, but changes helped them survive. Copy and complete this chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardships faced by the settlers</th>
<th>Changes that led to survival</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Use pages 58–59 to answer question 7 in complete sentences.
7. What was the House of Burgesses, and why was it important?

Use page 61 to answer questions 8–9 in complete sentences.
8. As more and more Africans arrived in Virginia, what were the English colonists able to do?
9. In what year did dozens of women arrive in Virginia? How did this affect the colony?

Key Words to Know

Use your own words to explain the meaning of each word.

- agriculture
- colony
- charter
- burgesses
- legislative
- drought

Think and Do

- Create a poster for the Virginia Company of London to use to help them persuade people to go to Jamestown. Be sure to include at least three benefits to help people make the decision to move to Virginia.

- Create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting what you know about the Virginia Indians and the English settlers.

- It is important to consider historical points of view to understand events from Virginia history. Write a letter from an early Jamestown colonist to a loved one in England describing the new colony. Write a diary entry as an American Indian describing life before—and after—the settlers arrived.