



Day 4-6 Colonization Unit
195 - 220 Minutes

Jamestown

Jamestown – LESSON PLAN (195 MINUTES)

Adaptable for Grades 3–9

TITLE:

Jamestown: Survival, Leadership, Conflict, and the Beginnings of English America

OBJECTIVE:

Students will understand why Jamestown was founded, analyze the challenges faced by the settlers, evaluate the leadership of John Smith, examine relations with the Powhatan people, and explain how tobacco, labor systems, and conflict shaped the colony's survival and legacy.

GRADE LEVEL:

Grades 3–9 (Differentiated)

MATERIALS:

- Jamestown article
- Jamestown PowerPoint presentation
- John Smith comprehension story
- Biographies: John Smith and Pocahontas
- Article: The Starving Time
- Optional biographies: John Rolfe, Christopher Newport
- Optional articles: Tobacco culture, slavery and indentured servitude at Jamestown
- Literacy and comprehension activities
- Student notebooks or writing sheets

DAY 1 — FOUNDING JAMESTOWN AND EARLY FAILURE

INTRODUCTION (5–7 MINUTES)

Teacher says:

“Today we begin learning about Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in North America. Unlike Roanoke, Jamestown survived—but barely.”

Ask students:

“Why do you think England kept trying to settle after Roanoke failed?”

Grades 3–5: Verbal responses.

Grades 6–9: Short written prediction.

ARTICLE READING: FOUNDING AND EARLY PROBLEMS (15 MINUTES)

Students read the opening sections of the Jamestown article:

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/colonies-and-cities/virginia-colony>

- Founding of Jamestown
- Swampy location and disease
- Poor leadership and lack of survival skills

Differentiation:

- Grades 3–5: Teacher reads aloud; students underline problems settlers faced.
- Grades 6–9: Independent reading with annotation (location, leadership, disease).

Quick Check:

“What made Jamestown a difficult place to live?”

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION (15 MINUTES)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/explorers/plans/jamestown.pptx>

Teacher presents slides 1- 8

- Christopher Newport and the London Company
- Why Jamestown’s location was chosen*
- Early deaths and disease
- Lack of cooperation among settlers
- John Smith’s leadership

Grades 3–5: Students draw or list three challenges Jamestown faced.

Grades 6–9: Students take structured notes.

[Optional: Christopher Newport Biography](#)

JOHN SMITH COMPREHENSION STORY (10–15 MINUTES)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/adventures-in-the-life-and-times-of-13-colonies-figures/adventures-through-the-life-and-times-of-john-smith>

In this interactive story, students travel through key moments in the life of John Smith, guided by his words and experiences. At each historic location, they explore illustrated scenes, read narrated passages, and answer thoughtful comprehension questions to track his progress. When all sites are visited, students receive a printable score report showing their journey through America's founding story.

[Optional Instead: John Smith Biography](#)

CHOOSE A WRITING ASSIGNMENT

1. DEAR MR. SMITH - Letter (20-25 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/13-colonies/13-colonies-writing-activities/dear-mr-smith/:preview>

Kids will get a kick out of this creative writing assignment.

In the early days of the Jamestown settlement, many of the colonists were men known as gentlemen. These men came from wealthy or upper-class families in England and were not used to doing physical labor. In English society, gentlemen did not farm, build shelters, or perform manual work—those jobs were done by servants. When these gentlemen arrived in Jamestown, they expected to live as they had in England, even though the colony struggled with hunger, disease, and shortages.

John Smith believed survival depended on everyone working and became famous for the rule that those who did not work should not eat, a rule that greatly offended many gentlemen. Your task is to write a satirical letter titled “Dear Mr. Smith, I am a Gentleman!” Pretend you are one of these Jamestown gentlemen writing directly to John Smith. In your letter, explain—using humor, exaggeration, and sarcasm—why you should not be expected to work, yet still deserve food and comfort. Defend your social status, complain about labor, and show a sense of entitlement. Your letter should be written in the first person, sound serious from the gentleman’s point of view, and include historical details about Jamestown life.

2. Tough Love (20-25 min.)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/13-colonies/13-colonies-writing-activities/tough-love/>

Tough love is a way of showing care by being firm and honest, even when it is uncomfortable. Instead of making things easy, tough love allows people to face consequences so they can grow stronger and more responsible. John Smith used tough love at Jamestown by demanding that everyone work in order to survive. Although many settlers—especially gentlemen—complained about labor, Smith believed that discipline and shared effort were necessary. His rule that those who did not work would not receive food was strict, but it helped keep the struggling colony alive during times of hunger and danger.

Your task is to write about a time when you were the recipient of tough love and explain how it impacted you. Describe who showed you tough love, what they did, and what you learned from the experience. If you cannot think of a personal example, you may write about a character from literature, a movie, a video game, music, or sports who experienced tough love. Explain the situation and how it helped the character grow or change.

CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

Exit Ticket:

“One problem Jamestown faced early on was...”

DAY 2 — LEADERSHIP, POWHATAN, AND THE STARVING TIME

WARM-UP DISCUSSION (5 MINUTES)

Tell students they will be learning about Jamestown post-John Smith. Ask them “ How do you think the colony fared without the Smith’s leadership?” Further, ask them “What do you know about Pocahontas?”

POWER POINT PRESENTATION (15 MINUTES)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/explorers/plans/jamestown.pptx>

Present slides 8-12 that focus on:

- A new outlook on profits
- The Starving Time
- The Kidnapping of Pocahontas

Optional: [Biography of Pocahontas](#) | [Pocahontas U.S. Postage Stamp Coloring Page](#)

ARTICLE READING: THE STARVING TIME (15 MINUTES)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/events-of-the-13-colonies/the-starving-time-winter-of-1609-1610>

Teacher frames this as a turning point.

Grades 3–5:

- Identify causes of starvation.
- Describe how settlers tried to survive.

Grades 6–9:

- Analyze causes and consequences.
- Explain why Jamestown was almost abandoned.

Optional: [Powhatan Nation Profile Article](#)

ARTICLE READING: THE KIDNAPPING OF POCOHONTAS (10 MINUTES)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/events-of-the-13-colonies/the-kidnapping-of-pocahontas>

Review discussion questions with students:

1. Why was Pocahontas an important figure in early American history?
2. What were the reasons the English kidnapped Pocahontas?
3. What happened to Pocahontas while she was held by the English?
4. How did Pocahontas's story get changed or romanticized over time?

Class Discussion and Closing:

“Why did Jamestown survive when Roanoke did not?”

DAY 3 — TOBACCO, LABOR, CONFLICT, AND LEGACY

INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

Teacher says:

“Jamestown survived—but survival came at a cost. Today we look at how Jamestown changed and what that meant for the future.”

COMPLETE POWER POINT PRESENTATION ON JAMESTOWN (15 MINUTES)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/explorers/plans/jamestown.pptx>

Review the discussion questions at the end of the slide show. The deep thought question at the end of the slideshow can be considered an optional writing prompt.

Explain to students that there two important effects of the settlement of Jamestown are:

- The discovery of a new kind of tobacco as a cash crop
- The ensuing birth of slavery and indentured servitude in the New World.

ARTICLE READING (10 MINUTES) - TOBACCO IN THE NEW WORLD

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/events-of-the-13-colonies/a-history-tobacco-in-the-southern-colonies>

- Grades 3–5: Teacher reads aloud or reads with students. Students highlight words from the glossary.

- Grades 6–9: Independent reading with annotation. Students identify:

- Why tobacco was valuable
- Who grew it
- How it changed society

[Optional Biography: JOHN ROLFE](#)

ARTICLE READING - SLAVERY AND INDENTURED SERVITUDE (15 MINUTES)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/events-of-the-13-colonies/the-birth-of-slavery-in-america-1619>

- Grades 3–5: Teacher reads aloud selected sections. Students underline key words and ideas.
- Grades 6–9: Independent reading with annotation. Students identify causes, effects, and questions.

Optional Article: [Enslaved People vs Indentured Servants](#)

LITERACY AND COMPREHENSION OPTIONS (15-25 MINUTES)

[LearnAboutAmerica.com](#) provides a wide range of literacy and comprehension options related to Jamestown to reinforce learning in the classroom. Use your discretion to choose the best option for your students or classes.

- [Indentured Servants vs Enslaved People Compare and Contrast Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 900
- History of Tobacco in the New World Reading Comprehension Lexile 1050 : [Printable](#) | [Online](#)
- Pocahontas Reading Comprehension Lexile 700: [Printable](#) | [Online](#)
- Jamestown Part I Reading Comprehension Lexile 1150 - [Online](#) | [Printable](#)
- Jamestown Part II Reading Comprehension Lexile 1150 - [Online](#) | [Printable](#)
- [Jamestown Part III Reading Comprehension Printable](#)
- [Jamestown Super Cloze Series](#) - This interactive Cloze Reading Activity is designed to reinforce key historical concepts about Jamestown through an engaging, differentiated format. Students complete fill-in-the-blank passages using drag-and-drop vocabulary, with features like limited dictionary hints, read-aloud, and three progressive difficulty levels. Built-in scoring, printable reports, and customization options make it ideal for independent practice, centers, or blended learning environments.
- [Jamestown Sentence Surgeons](#) - Sentence Surgeons: Jamestown Edition is an interactive grammar game that turns students into “language doctors.” Players repair sentences related to Jamestown by fixing specific types of errors—like punctuation, capitalization, or spelling—while earning medical ranks and unlocking celebrations along the way. Perfect for grades 4–7, this engaging activity combines history and language skills in a fun, game-like experience!

OPTIONAL: JAMESTOWN FUN STUFF (10-15 MINUTES)

- [Jamestown Ms. Information](#) - Watch the animation and then follow the instructions to set the record straight about Jamestown.

- [Jamestown Correct-me Passage](#) - This fun activity requires students to identify and correct the factual errors in a short paragraph about Jamestown. Click the factual error and then select the correct fact. The program gives immediate feedback.