

The Jamestown Colony

The Jamestown colony, America's first permanent English colony, was founded in Virginia in 1607 – 13 years before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts. The colony was sponsored by the Virginia Company of London. The Virginia Company was made up of a group of investors who hoped to earn a profit from the colony. The Virginia Company also supported the mercantilistic goals of England like blocking the colonial expansion of England's rivals, finding a quicker route to Asia and creating a more favorable balance of trade. The Jamestown colony won support from the crown and was **chartered** or approved by King James I in 1606.

Three ships, the *Susan Constant*, the *Godspeed* and the *Discovery*, departed from England in December 1606 and reached Virginia in late April 1607. They arrived with 105 passengers. After two weeks of exploring they selected a site for the colony and began building a settlement. The colony was governed by a council of seven men with one serving as the president.

Life was immediately difficult for the colonists. They were not prepared for the harsh conditions or the work that was required to carve out a new settlement. Many of the colonists were upper-class Englishmen who were not used to backbreaking physical labor. The colony did not have nearly enough skilled farmers or laborers. The settlers had difficulty finding the food, water and shelter they needed – much less making as profit as was expected of them by the investors back in London. The colony also had other problems to contend with. The settlement had been built in the middle of Algonquian Native American territory. Relations with the Native Americans and their powerful chief Powhatan were shaky at best.

In 1608, Captain John Smith was named the new leader of the colony. Smith brought much needed discipline and order; he instituted a “no work, no food” policy. Unfortunately, Smith was injured and soon returned to England. The period after his departure was known as the “starving time,” because of the Indian hostility and the deaths of many English men and women from starvation and disease. Just when the colonists decided to abandon Jamestown, settlers with supplies arrived from England, eager to find wealth in Virginia.

Although Smith had saved the colony from complete disaster, it had not yet repaid the investment to the Virginia Company. The colonists had tried silk making, glassmaking, and lumber production but had not yet found a way to make a profit. Finally, John Rolfe provided the answer when he began growing tobacco. Tobacco farming caused the rapid growth of the Virginia colony. Jamestown remained the center of political and social life in Virginia until 1699 when the government was moved to Williamsburg. Although Jamestown disappeared in the mid 1700's, it was a vitally important in the growth of the English colonies in America.



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Name: _____

The Jamestown Assignment

Task: Read the passage entitled “The Jamestown Colony”. Then answer each of the following questions. This assignment is worth 10 points.

1. What company sponsored the Jamestown Colony?
2. Name TWO of England’s “mercantilistic goals” that were supported by the Virginia Company.
3. What, in your opinion, was the *biggest* challenge faced by the colonists? Give TWO facts or details to support your opinion.
4. *Think Question* - Why did John Smith create a “no work, no food” policy?
5. *Think Question* - Describe why tobacco was so important to the Jamestown Colony.