

Name: _____

Life in the American Colonies

By Anita Kim Venegas

Imagine sailing across the Atlantic Ocean in the early 1600s. With hopes of owning land and religious freedom, people sailed for 60 days or more. Babies cried, food rotted, sailors shouted, and families waited on deck to catch sight of the New World.

“Land!” someone shouted and everyone looked west to the horizon. Parents lifted their small children to look over the rail. The long journey was about to end. Stepping cautiously onto the rocky shores, families

noticed endless forests and wilderness. People needed food, fresh water, shelter, and safety. Men chopped trees for timber to build log shelters, women searched nearby for edible plants while children chased one another.



Painting depicting the James Fort construction in May-June 1607.



The first attempt at colonization in 1607 was a failure. Settlers in Jamestown were met with unfriendly Native Americans as well as a lack of fresh water. A second settlement in present-day Massachusetts became the setting and story of Thanksgiving. Colonists were fortunate to find fields ready for planting and a helpful Native American named Squanto to teach them to plant corn, beans, and squash. Even so, nearly half of the settlers died before the winter of 1620 ended. These first two settlements focused on survival while later settlements focused on making products and growing crops to sell to England.

A Native American named Squanto helped teach colonists to plant crops in present day Massachusetts.

Near present-day Boston, a third attempt to establish a colony was an economic success. Throughout the Massachusetts Bay Colony, families built homes and started businesses. The town needed craftsmen to work as blacksmiths and shipbuilders, as well as fishermen and fur trappers.

Climate and geography influenced the type of work settlers did. Settlers in the north cleared forests for timber to build furniture and export it to England. Farmers in the south grew tobacco to export to England on the ships that were built in the north. As trade expanded in different directions, the colonies imported sugar and molasses from the islands, then exported these products to England. In exchange, England exported cloth, iron, and glass to the colonies.

Native Americans befriended the newcomers when they could trade with them to attain new items from England. Natives traded furs in exchange for axes and guns from the settlers. Violence erupted when either the Native Americans or the settlers felt cheated in some way. Perhaps an agreement was made, and then broken. Perhaps one or the other felt they did not get a fair trade.

For many years, the colonies were profitable for England. Settlers sent goods across the Atlantic, and the British sold them in the European market. When England raised their prices for the colonists, and colonists found they could pay less than what England charged, the colonists bought from other countries. England reminded the colonies that they were established to make a profit for the King of England and not for themselves. England began imposing restrictions on colonists, writing laws that forbade the colonists to buy from other countries besides England.

After leaving their homeland in search of new opportunities and freedoms, the English laws angered the colonists. While they had no voice in the laws that were made, they were forced by England to obey the laws, and pay the taxes. Colonists were unhappy and began to speak of independence; at first in whispers, and then in public meetings. Revolution was coming to the North American colonies.



Drawing showing Native Americans trading with the first settlers.

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1. What is the author's purpose for writing this article?
 - a. to persuade readers to move to America
 - b. to teach readers how to establish a colony
 - c. to entertain readers with an amusing story in American history
 - d. to inform readers about the history of English colonists in America



2. List three items mentioned in the article that were exported from the American colonies to England.

_____, _____, and _____

3. List three items mentioned in the article that were imported from the England to the American colonies.

_____, _____, and _____

4. Which statement about life in the American colonies is an opinion?
 - a. Life was difficult for all settlers in the American colonies.
 - b. Native Americans traded furs in exchange for axes and guns from the settlers.
 - c. England imposed laws and taxes on the American colonists.
 - d. Farmers in the southern American colonies grew tobacco.

5. Reread the following sentence from the article.

Climate and geography influenced the type of work the settlers did.

What do the words climate and geography mean?

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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

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|----------------------|---|
| _____ 1. New World | a. having to do with money |
| _____ 2. failure | b. buying and selling goods |
| _____ 3. settlers | c. lucky |
| _____ 4. fortunate | d. land in North and South America |
| _____ 5. economic | e. people who makes things from iron |
| _____ 6. blacksmiths | f. not a success |
| _____ 7. trade | g. people who live in England |
| _____ 8. revolution | h. people who make a home in a new place |
| _____ 9. British | i. an event in which citizens attempt to overthrow the government |