







The Starving Time at Jamestown

Overview:




Students will read “The Starving Time at Jamestown” and learn why many of the first colonists in the U.S. died of starvation in the winter of 1609-1610.

Objectives:



At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

-  **Explain** why most of the colonists did not survive the winter in Jamestown, Virginia.
-  **Explain** why the Native Americans were skilled at preparing for, and surviving through, harsh winters.
-  **Define** vocabulary words using context clues from a reading passage.
-  **Describe** how they would survive in a food crisis, using foods grown in the garden as a model.


Materials:

-  Teacher Supplement: “Who Survives? Activity Cards”
-  Handout: “The Starving Time at Jamestown”
-  Two bags to hold the Activity Cards


On the Board:

-  Student Reflection Questions
-  Vocabulary

Suggested Snack:

-  Three Sisters Succotash:
[http://
www.eatingwell.com/
recipe/250780/three-
sisters-succotash](http://www.eatingwell.com/recipe/250780/three-sisters-succotash)

Preparation:

-  Prior to the lesson, print and cut the “Who Survives?” Activity Cards. Print enough cards based on the number of students in the class, but only 12% of settlers should survive. Once the cards have been cut, put all the Colonist Cards in one container and all the Native American Cards in a second container. Students will be divided into two groups, Colonists and Native Americans.

Vocabulary

 beguiled
 salvation

 besieged
 benign
 vagrant

 gruel
 Eden

Learning Activities:

- I. Garden Activity: Who survives? (20 min.)

- A. Tell students that when English colonists first came to America, many of them did not survive. Today they will learn why.
 - First, students will participate in a quick role-play activity to see what their chances of survival would have been if they lived in the Jamestown colony in 1609.
 - B. In the garden, divide the students into two groups: Native American and English settlers.
 - The Native Americans can stand in the lush garden, while the settlers should stand on an asphalt or concrete area.
 - Tell students that it is 1609 in the colony of Jamestown, Virginia, and winter is approaching.
 - Tell the students that the English settlers have not learned to grow their own food and are planning to trade with the Native Americans.
 - C. Each student should draw a card out of either the Native American bag or the Colonist bag, depending on the role they have been assigned, that will determine their fate.
 - Once each student has read his/her card, ask all the students who did not survive the winter to sit down.
 - Have students look around the class to see how few settlers, compared with Native Americans, made it through the winter.
 - D. Tell students they will now return to the classroom to learn what went wrong in Jamestown in the winter of 1609.
2. Activity: Reading “The Starving Time at Jamestown” (20 min.)
 - A. Distribute the Handout: “The Starving Time at Jamestown.”
 - B. Have students read the passages on their own and answer the questions in the sidebar.
 - C. Review the vocabulary words when all students have finished reading.
 3. Snack: Three Sisters Succotash (5 min.)
 4. Have students answer the Reflection Questions in their garden journals. (5 min.)

Student Reflection Questions:

1. If you moved to a new place where there were no grocery stores or restaurants, do you think you'd be able to feed yourself? How?
2. What could the colonists have done differently to better prepare themselves for the harsh winter?

Assessment Questions:

1. Why did the colonists originally come to Jamestown?
 - A. To conquer the Native Americans
 - B. To get rich**
 - C. To discover new crops to bring back to England

2. Briefly explain what happened during the “Starving Time at Jamestown.”

Standards:

Common Core State Standards

Key Ideas and Details:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.



The Starving Time at Jamestown

Read the following text and answer the corresponding questions in the sidebar.

Since the first English fleet dropped anchor in April 1607, in Jamestown, Virginia, there had been a stream of arriving colonists arriving. They hoped to make a living out of the relatively **benign** Virginia environment.

Crops grew easily, fish were plentiful, animals abounded in the forests, and if one were careful, wild plants, fruits, and nuts were edible. To transported Londoners this would have been as **close to Eden** as they could have imagined. So what went wrong?

The investors of the first joint-stock company to the New World, the Virginia Company of London, had one goal in mind: gold. If the colonists did not generate any wealth, financial support for their efforts would end. Days were spent vainly searching for gold or sawing trees and splitting boards to return with sellable commodities that would begin to repay the investors. As a consequence, the colonists spent little time farming. Food supplies dwindled. Malaria and the harsh winter **besieged** them.

The colonists didn't plan on growing all their own food. They thought they would rely on trade with the local Native American's Powhatan Tribes while waiting for supply ships from England.

The supply ships arrived in January 1608, months behind schedule, with new colonists and no food supplies. Travel time by sea was roughly 6 to 8 weeks. The colonists did not plant enough to feed themselves and were reduced to one small bowl of **gruel** a day.

What do you think "*benign*" means?

What does "*close to Eden*" mean?

What does "*besieged*" mean?

Two other major issues from the start caused an even greater scarcity of food. First, the colonists were either from the gentlemen or the **vagrant** class. Gentlemen were skilled tradesmen and generally refused to farm because it was beneath them. English vagrants simply did not understand how to farm and relied on begging or stealing to survive. Second, conflict arose between the settlers and the Native Americans. The colonists abused trade agreements and stole food from the natives. As a result, the local tribes targeted colonists using guerrilla warfare.

Captain John Smith who was a leader of the Jamestown settlement from 1608-1609, found some success trading with nearby Native Americans. He also forced the colonists to either farm or learn how to farm. Instead of allowing the gentlemen class to lounge throughout the day, Smith ordered men into the fields for four-six hour shifts. Although Smith helped the colony survive in its infancy, he was disliked for his aggressive attitude. When he was injured in a gunpowder accident and returned to England for medical treatment the colonists petitioned that he not return.

Salvation lay in the hands of the Native Americans, whom the colonists called savages. Trading copper and beads for corn and swords for turkeys kept some of the colonists' alive through the winter of 1608-1609.

Had the Native Americans not been **beguiled** by the European's tools and trinkets, the colony would have collapsed and the course of American history changed. Instead, the Native Americans traded their corn/maize for a future of persecution.

After the Starving Time, the winter period of

What does "*vagrant*" mean?

Why might the gentlemen have been lounging instead of working?

What does "*salvation*" mean?

What does "*beguiled*" mean?

1609-10, only about 60 of 500 English settlers survived the famine. Everything from rats, snakes, mice and roots dug from the forest were consumed. Some were reduced to cannibalism. Had it not been for help from the Native Americans, the colonists would all have perished.

The Starving Time happened, but should not have, had the colonists learned to farm and hunt from the Native Americans. The Native American diet was comprised of corn, pole beans, and squash— their three staple crops. These “three sisters” were planted together in mounds. As the beans grew, they entwined around the corn stalks, and the squash grew around the base of the stalks.

The waterways also provided fish and shellfish, and the woods yielded nuts, fruits and berries. The Indians saw hunting as an important way to get food and clothing, not as a “sport,” as it was regarded by the English gentlemen.

How do these last paragraphs make you feel?



Who Survives? Activity Cards

Colonist Cards:

.....
Unfortunately, you do not have enough food to survive the winter and you die of starvation.
.....

.....
Unfortunately, you do not have enough food to survive the winter and you die of starvation.
.....

.....
Unfortunately, you do not have enough food to survive the winter and you die of starvation.
.....

.....
Unfortunately, you do not have enough food to survive the winter and you die of starvation.
.....

.....
Unfortunately, you do not have enough food to survive the winter and you die of starvation.
.....

.....
Unfortunately, you do not have enough food to survive the winter and you die of starvation.
.....

.....
Unfortunately, you do not have enough food to survive the winter and you die of starvation.
.....

.....
You are one of the lucky ones! You made it through the winter by eating one scoop of gruel a day!
.....

Native American Cards:

.....
Because you know how
to plant crops and
hunt, you have plenty
of food to survive the
winter!
.....

.....
Because you know how
to plant crops and
hunt, you have plenty
of food to survive the
winter!
.....

.....
Because you know how
to plant crops and
hunt, you have plenty
of food to survive the
winter!
.....

.....
Because you know how
to plant crops and
hunt, you have plenty
of food to survive the
winter!
.....

.....
Because you know how
to plant crops and
hunt, you have plenty
of food to survive the
winter!
.....

.....
Because you know how
to plant crops and
hunt, you have plenty
of food to survive the
winter!
.....

.....
Because you know how
to plant crops and
hunt, you have plenty
of food to survive the
winter!
.....

.....
Because you know how
to plant crops and
hunt, you have plenty
of food to survive the
winter!
.....