

Name: _____

Colonial America

Jamestown

Directions: Read the following passage then answer the questions.



Jamestown: The English Footprint in America

In a world filled with uncharted lands and adventures, a group of English colonists set sail. The year was 1607. Their destination? The vast New World, where they hoped to find gold and create a thriving colony. They landed on the coast of what is now Virginia. And they named their settlement Jamestown, in honor of King James I.

Dreams Versus Reality

The settlers of Jamestown began their adventure with big dreams. Many hoped to easily find gold, become rich, and live comfortably. But they were met with a tough reality. Instead of gold, they found swamps, mosquitoes, and a hot and humid climate. They weren't prepared for farming. They didn't bring enough food and they lacked the know-how to grow their own. Starvation was a real threat. Worse still, they had conflicts with the Powhatan, the local Native American tribe.

Jamestown's Darkest Winter: The "Starving Time"

By the winter of 1609-1610, things had taken a grim turn. This period came to be known as the "Starving Time." Food stocks dwindled. Settlers faced extreme hunger. The cold was biting, and their attempts at farming failed. Desperation grew. The settlers resorted to unthinkable measures. They ate horses, rats, and even their leather shoes and belts. There were even whispers that some were eating the dead. Times were tough. Most of the settlers didn't make it through the winter.

These hard times pushed the settlers to their limits. But as the snow melted and spring came, things started to change. New supplies and people arrived. Jamestown began to grow stronger. But the memories of that dark winter would always remind the colonists of how hard life could be.

The Turnaround

So, how did Jamestown survive? Two major events changed their fate. First, Captain John Smith, a leader and explorer, took charge. He encouraged the settlers to work hard. He made a rule saying, "He who will not work, shall not eat." He also made connections with the Powhatan tribe. This led to trade and food supplies.

Second, a cash crop came to the rescue: tobacco. John Rolfe, one of the settlers, began growing a type of tobacco that became very popular in England. It grew very well in the fertile Virginia soil. Soon, ships were coming and going. They exported tobacco to England and imported goods and settlers to Jamestown. This trade helped Jamestown grow. Many of the settlers who survived did grow wealthy, just not in the way that they had first imagined.

From rocky beginnings, Jamestown grew into the beacon of English success in the New World. It paved the way for more settlements. It became a melting pot of cultures. People from all different parts of the world called it home. Today, Jamestown stands as a symbol of human spirit, grit, and the drive to forge a new path, even in the face of adversity.

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Reading Questions

1. Why did the settlers name their settlement "Jamestown"? _____

2. What were two problems that the settlers first encountered? _____

3. How did the settlers' hopes for Jamestown differ from reality? _____

4. Why do you think the settlers were unprepared for farming in Jamestown? _____

5. What led to the period known as the "Starving Time"? _____

6. If the settlers made friends with the Powhatan early on, how might things have been different?

7. Why do you believe this?

8. How did tobacco play a role in Jamestown's growth? _____

9. How would you describe the character of the Jamestown settlers? _____

10. Why do you feel this way?
