ARRIVAL OF AFRICANS TO VIRGINIA IN 1619

LEVEL
Elementary

GUIDING QUESTION
Who were the first Africans who came to Virginia in 1619?

VIRGINIA STANDARDS AND HISTORICAL SKILLS
SOL: VS.3e
Analyzing and interpreting primary and secondary sources; applying geographic skills; recognizing points of view and historical perspectives

LESSON OVERVIEW
In August 1619, a privateering vessel flying the flag of the Dutch Republic arrived at Point Comfort, Virginia (in present-day Hampton). According to John Rolfe, the ship held no cargo but “20 and odd” Africans, who were traded to Governor George Yeardley and Cape Merchant Abraham Peirsey in exchange for provisions. These individuals, originally captured by Portuguese slavers in West Central Africa (likely modern-day Angola), were the first recorded Africans to arrive in English North America. In this lesson, students will learn about the lives and cultures of the first Africans to arrive in Virginia, by analyzing primary source images of significant aspects of their culture.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Primary source set on the first Africans
  Post around your classroom. Use two copies of the set for a larger class.
- 5 Sticky notes per student
- “Guardians of Jamestown, 1619” video clip: “The Arrival of the First Africans to Virginia”
- Student Worksheet: Primary Source Analysis
PROCEDURE

Warm up/Staging the Question
1. Tell students that today they will be exploring the culture and lives of the first Africans who came to Virginia in 1619, but don’t provide any further details.
2. Give each student 5 sticky notes. Instruct students to visit each of the five primary sources related to the first Africans, and to record one observation and one question they have about the source on their sticky note. When they are done, students should place their notes above and around the corresponding primary source. (Depending on the size of your class, you may wish to use two copies of each primary source and divide the class in half, so fewer students are analyzing an image at a time.)
3. Discuss the students’ questions and observations regarding the first Africans as a class. Then, ask students to share what they already know about the first Africans and/or slavery in Virginia.
4. Show students “The Arrival of the First Africans to Virginia”, and then discuss what they learned about the arrival of the first Africans to Virginia.

Main Activity
1. Explain to students that they will revisit the primary sources related to the first Africans, now that they have more knowledge about their journey. Divide students into groups of 2-3 for this activity.
2. Groups will record their observations of the primary sources on the primary source analysis worksheet.
3. When students have returned to their desks, display each image for the class and discuss what the primary source tells them about the life and culture of the first Africans who came to Virginia. Refer to the background information on the primary sources if needed.
4. To close, have students write a paragraph reflection on the compelling question, “Who were the first Africans who came to Virginia?,” drawing on what they learned from the primary sources they analyzed.

Extension Activity
Have students create a digital poster using Canva, Padlet, or ThingLink on the significance of 1619, including the arrival of the first Africans, the first meeting of the General Assembly, and the growing population of women in the Virginia colony. Students could also include what they have learned about the Powhatan Indians in their poster.
FOR EDUCATORS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PRIMARY SOURCES

Images #1 & #4: Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi, 1687, courtesy of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation

The included Cavazzi engravings come from a book in the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation collection, *Istorica Descrizione de' tre regni Congo, Matamba ed Angola*, written by a Capuchin monk named Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecuccolo (1621–1678). This book is based on Cavazzi’s experiences as a chaplain in Angola from 1659 to 1665. He lived at Queen Njinga’s court at Matamba in Angola. While there he completed a series of watercolors that were later converted to line engravings.

Image #2: Elmina Castle, watercolor, circa 1640, courtesy of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation

Elmina Castle, built in 1482, was the most important Portuguese stronghold on the Gold Coast in Africa. An important trading center, it was seized from the Portuguese by the Dutch in 1637 and was a key European trading post in Africa until the 19th century.

Image #3: Gold Necklace, 17th-19th century, Akan Culture, West Africa, courtesy of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation

The Akan are the largest ethnic group in what is now the nation of Ghana. The Akan have a long tradition of mining and working gold. It was for this reason that the so-called “Gold Coast” where the Akan lived was a major focus of European interest as early as the 15th century. From trading posts such as Elmina, Europeans bought Akan gold jewelry as well as mined gold, which they melted down and turned into gold coins such as the English “Guinea.” This particular necklace was given to the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation by the Virginia African-American Forum.

Image #5: “A New Mapp of Africa divided into kingdoms and provinces,” c. 1690, courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

This map, completed between 1687 and 1690, shows in detail the western coast of Africa. It highlights the areas of highest relative value to European powers, including the modern-day countries of Congo and Angola, the homeland of the first Africans to arrive in Virginia.
Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi (1687). Courtesy of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
Elmina Castle (c. 1640). Courtesy of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi (1687). Courtesy of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation.
"A New Mapp of Africa" (c. 1690). Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
**PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET**

Study the image for one minute, taking note of any key details, including any people, objects, environment, or any activity that is occurring in each image. Record your observations for each of the primary sources below.

**IMAGE:**

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