ENGLISH WOMEN COME TO VIRGINIA

LEVEL
Elementary

GUIDING QUESTION
What was life like for English women who came to Jamestown, and why was their presence important to the success of the colony?

VIRGINIA STANDARDS AND HISTORICAL SKILLS
SOL: VS.3a, b, e-g
Determining relationships with many causes or effects; making connections between past and present; explaining connections across time and place

LESSON OVERVIEW
When the Susan Constant, Godspeed, and Discovery arrived in Virginia with a group of 104 settlers in 1607, women were not among them. Despite the references of habitation and plantation in the Jamestown colony’s charter, the Virginia Company sent men to Virginia primarily to explore the region and discover how to best exploit its natural resources for commercial profit. After many years of hardship, Virginia Company officials recognized that they would need to establish a family structure in the colony if they wished to bring stability to Virginia and ensure that Jamestown became a permanent settlement. In November 1619, under the leadership of Sir Edwyn Sandys, the Virginia Company declared its intention to recruit “a fit hundredth . . . of women, maids young and uncorrupt to make wives to the Inhabitants and by that means to make the men there more settled and less movable.” 90 women arrived in Jamestown in May 1620, followed by another 57 women in 1621. In this lesson, students will analyze primary and secondary sources to gain a better understanding of what life was like for English women during the 1620s at Jamestown. Afterwards, the class will discuss the different connections students as individuals made to help understand the bigger picture of Jamestown and the women who made a home there.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION
- Primary and secondary source set on English women in Virginia
  *The resources can be hung around the room or posted to Google Classroom so that students will be able to view them closely. Use double copies to keep groups small and make the rotations go faster.*
- “Guardians of Jamestown, 1619” video clip: “The Arrival of English Women to Virginia”
- Student Worksheet: Primary & Secondary Source Observations (optional)
PROCEDURE

Warm up/Staging the Question
1. Have students complete a K-W-L chart (Know – Want to Know – Learn) on what they have learned about the Jamestown colony thus far. Prompt them to think about the people, environment, economy, etc. Lead students to the understanding that not many women lived in Jamestown at this point, then ask them, “Why would the lack of women at Jamestown have been a problem for the colony?”
2. Explain to students that today they will be using primary and secondary sources to better understand the lives of English women who came to Jamestown and why they came. To do this, they will use sources from the past to draw conclusions about Virginia’s history.

Main Activity
1. Divide students into small groups. Explain that students will rotate around the room to each station to investigate the primary and secondary sources. They will have time to look closely and record their observations and inferences/conclusions. You may use the Primary and Secondary Source Observations worksheet in hard copy or digital form, or have students record their observations on their own paper by drawing a chart similar to the worksheet.
2. Students should complete the source analysis gallery walk. Ensure ample time for all groups to rotate through every source. After each group has had time to analyze each source, bring the class back together with students sitting in their groups.
3. As a class, discuss what students observed and could infer from each source. Guide students to answer the compelling question, “What was life like for English women who came to Jamestown, and why was their presence important to the success of the colony?”
4. Use the “The Arrival of English Women to Virginia” video clip to help students understand how we learn from artifacts and what we have learned about women in Jamestown from items like the bodkins.
5. To close the lesson, have students write a conclusion statement about this group of people from the past. Alternatively, have students imagine that they are living in Jamestown in 1622, and writing home to family in England about their lives in Virginia. Encourage students to draw from what they’ve learned about the history of 1619 in their responses. Students could also add images to further demonstrate understanding.
### PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCE OBSERVATIONS

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<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>OBSERVATIONS</th>
<th>INFERENCES &amp; CONCLUSIONS I CAN MAKE</th>
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CONCLUSION

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SOURCE 1:
FROM “LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR AND COUNCIL IN VIRGINIA”, AUGUST 21, 1621

“Whereas by long experience we have found that the minds of our [men] in Virginia are much dejected, and their hearts enflamed with a desire to return to England...We therefore judging it a Christian charity to relieve the disconsolate minds of our people there...employed as a stock in sending of young, handsome, and honestly educated Maids to Virginia: there to be disposed in Marriage to the most honest and industrious planters who shall defray and satisfy us the charges of their passage and provisions.”

SOURCE 2:
FROM “LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR AND COUNCIL IN VIRGINIA”, AUGUST 21, 1621

“The Plantation can never flourish till families be planted, and the respect of wives and Children fix the people on the Soil; therefore [we] have given [them] this fair beginning; for the reimbursing of whose charges, it is order that every man that Marries them [the women] give 120 pounds weight of the best leaf Tobacco* for each of them.”

*The amount the husbands were ordered to pay was eventually raised to 150 pounds tobacco. This would be equal to $5,000 today, an amount that only wealthy planters in the colony could afford. The tobacco payment by her future husband was intended to cover the cost of the woman’s passage to Virginia and is why the Jamestown brides are sometimes referred to as “tobacco wives.”

SOURCE 3:  
“ARRIVAL OF THE YOUNG WOMEN AT JAMESTOWN”

Dear Sister,

You would have heard from me earlier if not for the extremity of sickness that has hindered me till now. For our ship was so pestered with people and goods that we were full of infection, and after a while we saw little but throwing folks overboard; it pleased God to send me health till I came to shore and 3 days after I fell sick but I thank God I am well recovered. Few else are left alive that came in our ship; for here have died husbands, wives, children and servants. They told me they sent a Ship less pestered for me, but there never came a Ship so full to Virginia as ours. I had not so much as my cabin free to myself. This was our fortune at sea, and on land we did little better, for our people as well as our cattle have died, so that we are all undone, especially we that are newcomers. If our friends do not help it will go hard with us next winter. I know not who to send to for help but you, for my mother is so far that she could help me none when I left.

You and my sister helped much: if she desires to send me butter and bacon, tell her I prefer butter and cheese. Since the Indians and we fell out we dare not send a hunting party except with so many men that it is not worth the labor.

Your sister and servant,

Mary Wyatt

SOURCE 5: PHOTOS OF WOMEN’S BODKINS FROM HISTORIC JAMESTOWNE

This bodkin (women’s hair pins), along with others found at Jamestown, had initials carved into them after purchase. This suggests that some of the early 1620s arrivals were literate, or able to read and write.

*Courtesy of Preservation Virginia.*