

Name _____ Date _____

Jamestown

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Notes

In 1606, with Spain well ahead in exploring the New World, King James I approved a charter for the Virginia Company to find gold and a water route to the Pacific Ocean. The plan was to get rich quick and return to England, not to stay or set up a colony. The group of nearly 100 men set sail in December 1606. Six months later, in May 1607, the group landed on a narrow peninsula in the marshy James River. This is where they established Jamestown. After building a wooden fort, a weapons storehouse, a church, and some houses, a portion of the group returned to England. The remaining Englishmen spent the summer searching for gold.

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2. b'

Notes

The settlers who stayed suffered from starvation and illness contracted from mosquitoes and drinking the swampy water. They were also under threat of attack from local Algonquian tribes, led by Chief Powhatan, who were determined to defend their land. After being kidnapped and released by the Powhatans, John Smith took leadership of the colony. Smith instituted new norms, stating, "He who shall not work, shall not eat." By 1608, a relatively peaceful trade relationship had been established between the colonists and the Powhatan tribe. This trade sustained Jamestown in its early years until a bitter winter in late 1609 and early 1610 known as the "Starving Time" hit. In the aftermath, most colonists were prepared to abandon Jamestown and return to England. Before any colonists could leave, 150 new settlers arrived with supplies. On this ship was a new governor named Lord De La Warr who offered a new set of rules for interaction with Native Americans. According to De La Warr, Native Americans had two options: leave the area or be killed.

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3. b'

Notes

As Jamestown grew, colonists became more capable of planting crops and less reliant on trade with local tribes. This shift led to the First Anglo-Powhatan War. It lasted from 1610 to 1614 and was followed by a brief period of peace when colonist John Rolfe married Pocahontas, Chief Powhatan's daughter. Rolfe is credited with a discovery that stimulated Jamestown's economy: tobacco. Tobacco was a newly popular luxury throughout Europe, and Rolfe found that the soil in Virginia was ideal for growing the crop. It quickly became clear the colonists could sell every last bit of tobacco they grew. They hadn't found gold, but this was nearly as good and proof that the colonies could be financially viable.

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4. b'

Notes

Better known by the nickname Pocahontas, Chief Powhatan's daughter Matoaca was born in the late 1500s. According to John Smith, Pocahontas convinced her father to spare Smith's life when he was kidnapped by Powhatans. Though her life story is heavily debated, it is thought that she served as a diplomatic presence between her tribe and colonists until she was kidnapped during the First Anglo-Powhatan War. When Chief Powhatan only partially paid her ransom, colonists kept her imprisoned. During this time, Pocahontas baptized into Christianity under the name Rebecca. While imprisoned, she met and married John Rolfe in 1614. This marriage was viewed as an important step in repairing the relationship between Native Americans and colonists after the First Anglo-Powhatan War. In 1616, Pocahontas traveled to England with Rolfe and her infant son. Pocahontas was welcomed as a princess and was presented to the royal family. Just as she departed to return North America in 1617, she fell ill, forcing her ship to turn back. Shortly after, she died at the age of 20 or 21.

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5. b'

Notes

As Jamestown's economy grew, a social and political structure developed in Virginia. In 1619, the Virginia General Assembly, the first elective governing body in a British colony, was established by male landowners. Out of the General Assembly came its legislative body called the House of Burgesses. The House of Burgesses is considered an early model for representative democracy in America. This legislature was made up of the governor, a council, and two elected burgesses, or representatives, from each of the colony's settlements. This governing body debated public issues, created laws, and eventually led the charge for the American Revolution.

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6. b'

Notes

Tobacco not only enriched the Virginia colony, but also contributed to the beginnings of race-based slavery in America. In 1619, a group of white Europeans and kidnapped Africans arrived on a ship to be sold as indentured servants. Both Black and white servants were promised freedom and land after several years of work, but only white servants had come to Virginia voluntarily. Cheap and forced labor and a high servant death rate meant planters could expand quickly without giving up much land. As the industry grew, wealthy planters gained more and more political power.

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By 1676, soil was depleted, tobacco prices were down, and more indentured servants were surviving their term. As a result, pressure to expand the colony was high. To avoid further conflict with Indigenous tribes, Governor William Berkeley refused to expand westward. This angered recently freed servants who had been denied land. Nathaniel Bacon capitalized on this anger. Bacon formed a militia of landless Black and white men to attack Native American tribes on Virginia's western border. Bacon's Rebellion began with the brutal killing of Native Americans and ended with Bacon's militia burning Jamestown to the ground. Though the movement faded with Bacon's death in late 1676, the rebellion spread fear among the wealthy planter class. Historians note that this fear of a multiracial uprising accelerated the shift from indentured servitude to slavery. To limit the chances of future rebellion, new laws were enacted that favored people of European descent and subjected Africans to permanent slavery.

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