**Grades:** 3rd and 8th  
**Subjects:** Social Studies and English Language Arts  
**Time required:** 1 or 2 days  
**Author:** Ashli Burton, Teaching With Primary Sources—MTSU

---

**OVERVIEW**

The settlement of Jamestown, Virginia, by English colonists in 1607 was funded by a joint stock company, the Virginia Company. The “Starving Time” refers to the experience of the colonists in Jamestown during the winter of 1609-1610, when the number of colonists fell from approximately 500 to 60 due to crop failure, hostilities with local Indians, and general leadership failure. Representatives of the Virginia Company wrote about this time in *A True Declaration of the Estate of the Colonie in Virginia* in 1610, and another version of the starving time was written by John Smith in *The Generall Historie of Virginia* in 1624.

**UNDERSTANDING/GOAL**

Students will analyze John Smith’s version of the “Starving Time” from 1624, with 8th-grade students reading a version from 1610 in addition. Students will practice reading comprehension of primary source texts about Jamestown and the hardships faced by colonists due to environmental, political, and cultural factors. Students will learn about the founding of Jamestown and become familiar with key figures and terms. Students will read a modern English “translation” of 17th-century English to help them learn to break down informational text in order to derive meaning and evidence.

**OBJECTIVES**

- Students will identify hardships faced by Jamestown colonists.
- Students will locate Jamestown on a 17th-century map.
- Students will analyze primary sources regarding the “Starving Time.”

**INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION**

What caused the “Starving Time” of the Jamestown colony during the winter of 1609-1610? What were the authors of the “Starving Time” excerpts trying to achieve through their texts?

---

**CURRICULUM STANDARDS**

**Social Studies Practices (3rd / 8th grades)**  
SSP.02 Critically examine a primary or secondary source in order to; Summarize/extract and paraphrase significant ideas and relevant information; Draw inferences and conclusions; Recognize author’s purpose, point of view, and reliability/bias.  
SSP.06 Develop a geographic awareness by: Analyzing the spatial relationships between people, circumstances, and resources/Analyzing locations, conditions, and connections of places and using maps to investigate spatial relationships.  

**Social Studies**  
3.24 Explain the significance of the settlement of Jamestown and the role it played in the founding of the U.S.  
8.1 Explain the founding and development of Jamestown as the first permanent English colony, its early struggles, the economic and political structure, and role of the Powhatan people.

**English Language Arts:**  
3.RI.KID.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as a basis for the answers  
8.RI.CS.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.
### Primary Sources:
- Map of **Virginia** [1624]
- John Smith’s “Starving Time” [1624]
- Virginia Company’s “Starving Time” [1610]

### Secondary Sources:
- America’s Story: **Jamestown Was Established** (3rd grade)
- The English Establish a Foot- hold at Jamestown, 1606-1610 (8th grade)

### Materials:
- Projector and screen for PowerPoint
- Worksheet: John Smith “Starving Time” excerpt (3rd & 8th grades)
- Worksheet: Virginia Company “Starving Time” excerpt (8th grade)
- Index cards for exit ticket/investigative question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY 1</th>
<th>Day one may be used for covering key terms and figures not previously taught or for review of previous lessons.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Explain to students that they will be analyzing an excerpt from the “Starving Time.” Using PowerPoint slide 2, explain the term “excerpt” to students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Step 2 | Introduce historical background information for the colonization of Jamestown:  
- America’s Story: **Jamestown Was Established** (3rd grade)  
- The English Establish a Foothold at Jamestown, 1606-1610 (8th grade)  
Students can read content in pairs, together off overhead projector, or individually off print-outs. |
<p>| Step 3 | Using PowerPoint slide 3, discuss what the “Starving Time” was. |
| Step 4 | Using PowerPoint slide 4, cover key terms and figures that students will encounter when reading and analyzing excerpts from the “Starving Time.” |
| Step 5 | Challenge students to locate Jamestown (“Iames-towne”) on a <strong>1624 map of Virginia</strong>. This is best achieved by zooming in on a computer. However, by manipulating printing settings, you can also print out the entire map as a 5-sheet x 5-sheet puzzle for students to put together. In either case, ask students to point out the different features they see on the map (e.g., trees, mountains, houses, rivers). Which way is north? How are the Indians depicted? Remind them that the map was created in London based on observations and notes by John Smith (an eyewitness to many of the locations). |
| Step 6 | Using PowerPoint slides 5-6, show the highlighted location of Jamestown to the class. |
| Step 7 | Using PowerPoint slide 7, explain the origins of the two versions of the “Starving Time” and who wrote them (if using both in an 8th grade classroom). Have students discuss why John Smith or the Virginia Company would write about this tragic episode, the audience they are aiming their texts at, and how that might affect the language and content of the text. |
| Step 8 | Starting with PowerPoint slide 8, introduce the John Smith excerpt. Read aloud as a class or call on a student to read the excerpt. When was this written? Who was John Smith? How would he have known what was going on in Virginia that winter (since he was in England at the time)? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY 2</th>
<th>Day two gives the teacher an opportunity to have students further explore the texts of the “Starving Time” and analyze the language and sentence structuring of the original 17th-century text.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Review what the “Starving Time” was and who John Smith was. Pass out the <a href="#">Worksheet: John Smith “Starving Time” excerpt</a> (for both 3rd &amp; 8th grades). Start PowerPoint with slide 9, which students should already be familiar with from Day 1. Have students discuss what they believe the text is about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Depending on number and ability of students, divide the class into groups of three or four. Have students read the text on the worksheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Once they’ve read the text again in their groups, have them answer the questions at the bottom of the worksheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Bring the students back together as a whole class and review each question. Ask for volunteers to discuss their groups’ answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Explain to them that these aren’t the original words that John Smith wrote. This is a modern English “translation” of the 1624 English text, to make it easier to read. Show them PowerPoint slide 10, which is the original version of the text. The green box marks the excerpt that they read a modern version of. Ask for a student (or two) to volunteer to read the original 1624 language out loud. Ask students to make observations on what’s different about the older version. What words do they not understand? What sentences are hard to make sense of? Why do they think the older version was much more complicated to read?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6</td>
<td>Third graders will now skip to Step 12 (investigative questions and exit ticket). Eighth graders will proceed to PowerPoint slide 11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7</td>
<td>[8th grade] Show them PowerPoint slide 12, and do the same exercise with the Virginia Company “Starving Time” excerpt from 1610. Have them read off slide 12, with a volunteer reading out loud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 8</td>
<td>[8th grade] Use slides 13 and 14 to show students the original version of the 1610 text. Ask a volunteer to read the original text. Have students point out the mixed-up “u”s and “v”s (green circles), words that look familiar but are spelled differently (green lines), and troubling vocabulary terms (red lines).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 9</td>
<td>[8th grade] Use slide 15 to show students one particular excerpt of the excerpt and how it got “translated” into modern English, line by line. Would they “translate” it differently?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 10</td>
<td>[8th grade] Now pass out the <a href="#">Worksheet: Virginia Company “Starving Time” excerpt</a>. They can work in groups again to answer questions. Discuss the answers as a class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 11</td>
<td>[8th grade] Ask students to compare the John Smith excerpt and the Virginia Company excerpt. What kind of message is each sending? Who are they writing for? What is the purpose of these excerpts? How does that purpose come across in the texts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 12</td>
<td>[3rd &amp; 8th grade] Pass out index cards for students to write an exit ticket. Have them answer both of the following questions (though you might just want to give the first question to 3rd graders): What caused the “Starving Time” of the Jamestown colony during the winter of 1609-1610? What were the authors of the “Starving Time” excerpts trying to achieve through their texts?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXTENSION

This lesson provides a great opportunity for creative extension ideas. For example,

- Have students compare and contrast the different cultures at Jamestown. Or divide students into groups and have them answer questions in a role playing format.
- Students can take a virtual tour of Jamestown. After students navigate through the site, have them divide into groups of 4 or 5 and pick a site (Indian village, English settlement, ship dock) and write a brief “day in the life” using prior knowledge and previous instructional content.
- Students can evaluate the impact English colonists made upon American Indian tribes. Have students investigate the interactions between the English and American Indians during the seventeenth century in Virginia and surrounding areas.

EVALUATION

TOTAL POINTS: 100

Class participation= 20%
Excerpt worksheet(s)=50%
Exit ticket/Investigative question=30%

Rubric

Student Name:__________

1. Questioning/Discussion:_______ out of 20

The student contributed to the discussion/questioning. The questions and comments were tied to the investigative question.

2. Excerpt worksheet(s) :______ out of 50

The student contributed to their individual or group’s excerpt worksheets and answered the questions in complete sentences using evidence from the text provided.

3. Exit ticket/Investigative question: ________ out of 30

The student provided a short paragraph answering the investigative question using the texts and key terms discussed in class.

Total Points: 100

Points Achieved:_____

Grade:____
Six months after Captain Smith left, there were no more than 60 people out of 500, and these were the most miserable, poor creatures. These people survived for the most part by eating roots, herbs, acorns, walnuts, berries, now and then a little fish, … and even the very skin of our horses. No, so great was our famine, that the poorer people dug up an Indian that we had killed and buried, and they ate him. Others did the same thing, boiling and stewing [a body] with roots and herbs. And one man among the rest killed his wife, salted her, and had eaten part of her before it was known. For this he was executed, as he well deserved. Now whether she tasted better roasted, boiled, or broiled, I don’t know, but I never heard of a dish of salted wife before. That was the time, that to this day we called the starving time; it is too horrible to say what we lived through, and hard to believe. But the fault was our own, for our lack of goodwill from God, hard work, and ability to govern ourselves. It was not because something was wrong with Virginia (because eventually it became an excellent place to grow crops) as has been thought.

QUESTIONS

1. What percentage of the original 500 colonists survived? What does this make you think about the experience of being a colonist in the New World?

2. Why might they have dug up an Indian to try to eat, as opposed to one of the colonists?

3. Why would the author wonder about the different ways this woman could be cooked?

4. What does the author blame “the starving time” on? How does this make you feel about the colonists’ experience now?

5. Why would the author want to make sure the reader knows there was nothing wrong with the land of Virginia itself?
The basis of all those terrible things was the will of God (since God allowed lots of things to happen).

In the violent storm, mentioned above [in the paragraph that would have come before this one], God separated the head from the body—meaning that he separated the head of the group, Sir Thomas Gates, from the body of the group, the rest of the people.

All the important powers of taking charge were exiled with Sir Thomas Gates in those unfortunate (yet fortunate) islands. [He’s talking about Bermuda. It’s unfortunate because it’s far from Virginia, but it’s fortunate because it’s so warm and pleasant there.]

The rest of those supplies, though beaten up by the storm, made a greater shipwreck (as in, caused greater trouble) in Virginia. The storm this time was dissention, or disagreement among the colonists. Every man, thinking too highly of himself, thought he should be in charge. Every man, thinking others weren’t as good as he, refused to take orders from others.

…It is so easy for these ambitions and arguments to tear into pieces a colony that has just been founded, especially where no prominent and respected leaders have the authority to punish such obnoxious disobedience.

**QUESTIONS**

1. How did God separate Thomas Gates from the rest of the people?

2. What is the author saying Gates would have done if he had been there, instead of being separated?

3. Why would the author compare disagreements among the colonists to a storm or shipwreck?

4. What seems to happen to individuals in a group when there’s no one to take charge?

5. What is the importance of having a clear leader?