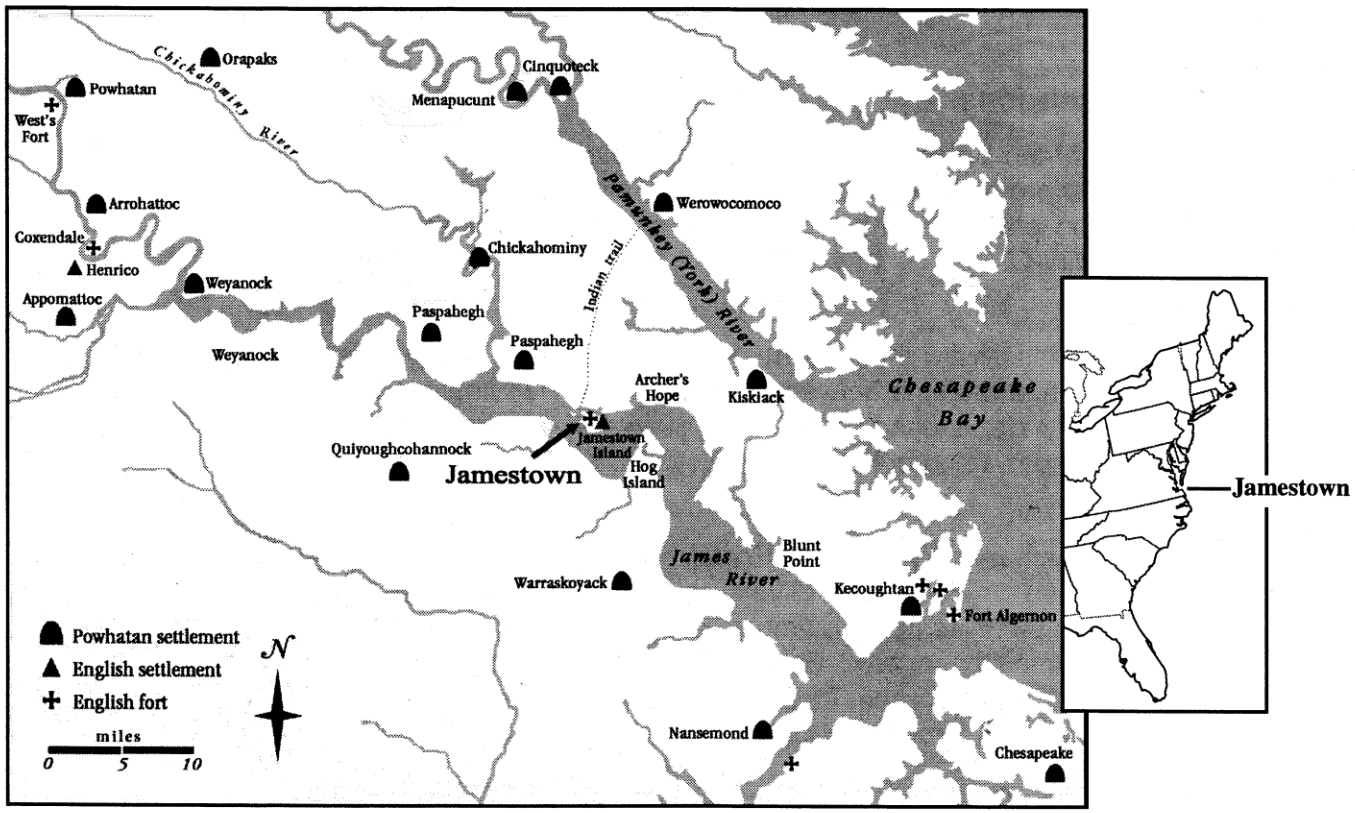
Hook Exercise: Jamestown

Directions: Examine the map, and with a partner, discuss the answers to the questions below. Be ready to share your thinking with the class.

Source: James Horn, *A Land as God Made It*, Basic Books, A Member of Perseus Books Group, New York, 2005. Drawn by Rebecca L. Wren.

Principal Powhatan and English Settlements, 1607-1611



Questions

1. In what modern-day state is this region located?

2. What can you infer about who lived in this area before the arrival of the English?

3. Why do you think the English would choose to settle here?

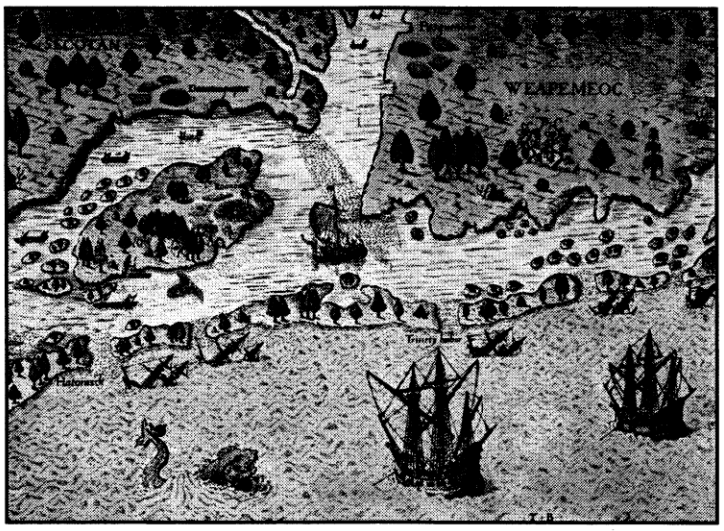
4. Is there any evidence that the English expected trouble?

5. Is there any evidence that the English may have been too confident?

6. Just by looking at this map, can you make any predictions why so many colonists died at Jamestown?

Early Jamestown: Why Did So Many Colonists Die?

In the spring of 1607, three English ships carrying more than 100 passengers sailed into the mouth of **Chesapeake Bay** and worked their way up the James River. Hopes were high, and with good reason. This was to be the first permanent English settlement in the New World. A strong group of English investors stood behind the enterprise. The King of England, James I, had given the colonizers his blessing. Along the river banks one could see freshwater streams, "faire meddowes and goodly tall trees." Ahead lay possible riches, a native population to be taught the ways of Jesus Christ, and maybe even a hidden trade route to China!



Roanoke: Arrival, 1590. The Granger Collection, New York

True, there were dangers. A Spanish warship or two would not be a surprise. Also, the English had experienced a recent failure on nearby Roanoke Island. In fact all the Roanoke colonists had mysteriously disappeared. But in 1607, these were acceptable risks.

What was probably more important is that the "faire meddowes and goodly tall trees" of the Chesapeake were not empty. Some 15,000 **Powhatan** Indians lived in small villages along and around the James River. They were loosely ruled by a great chief named **Wahunsonacock**. One of Wahunsonacock's daughters was the fabled Pocahontas, a very real person who would one day marry an Englishman and sail to England.

When the English settlers arrived they built a fort on a place they called James Island. This was to become Jamestown. Of the 110 original settlers, only 40 would be alive at the end of December. The arrival in January of a resupply ship saved the colony from total collapse, but in the next two years, hard times continued. Captain John Smith who had provided much needed leadership was sent back to England. Then, in the awful winter of 1609-1610, two-thirds of the settlement died.

Remarkably, the English kept coming – men, women, and children. The vast majority were young (17 to 35) and most were poor. They hoped to work off their debt and, one day, own a piece of land. A few arrived with money, and some would one day find success growing tobacco. But for most there was no happy ending. By 1611, of the more than 500 settlers who had arrived at Jamestown, 80% were dead.

It is truly amazing that the colony survived. Those English, both in Jamestown and back in the **mother country**, were a determined bunch. Our focus, however, is not on the survival, but on the near destruction. In a Mini-Q, five documents can only tell part of the story, but that is the challenge. Examine the documents that follow and do your best to answer the question: *Early Jamestown: Why did so many colonists die?*

Background Essay Questions

1. Why did the English come to America in 1607?

2. Who helped pay for settling the James River colony?

3. How many settlers died in the first six months?

4. Define or explain each of these terms:

   Chesapeake Bay

   Powhatan

   Wahunsonacock

   mother country

5. With regard to age and social class, who were the first settlers?

Timeline

1492 – Columbus arrives in the Americas.

1600 – Shakespeare writes Hamlet.

1607 – Jamestown is colonized.

1609 – Galileo discovers the rings of Saturn.

1612 – First tobacco is harvested at Jamestown.

1616 – Pocahontas visits the king of England.

1619 – First African Americans arrive at Jamestown.

1620 – Pilgrims arrive in Massachusetts.

Document A

Source: Dennis B. Blanton, "Jamestown's Environment," Center for Archaeological Research, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, 2000.

Many people have commented over the last four centuries on the qualities of Jamestown's environment....

Because the adjacent river and creeks became brackish as water levels rose, reliable sources of fresh water would have been scarce by the seventeenth century.... English colonists dug shallow wells to supply themselves with sources of drinking water, but these were vulnerable to drought and salt water intrusion. Also, historian Carville V. Earle attributed ... disease in the early years to Jamestown's position at the salt-fresh water transition, where filth introduced into the river tended to fester rather than flush away.

The island is not situated at a point of great natural food abundance, especially relative to other locations very close by.... Fish are present in local streams, but only in the spring and early summer are they there in impressive abundance....

Document Analysis

1. Using context clues, what do you think is meant by brackish water?

2. What twice daily event would cause water levels around Jamestown to rise and cause wells and fresh water streams to become brackish? (Hint: The moon)

3. According to Carville Earle, what happened to human waste that got dumped into the river?

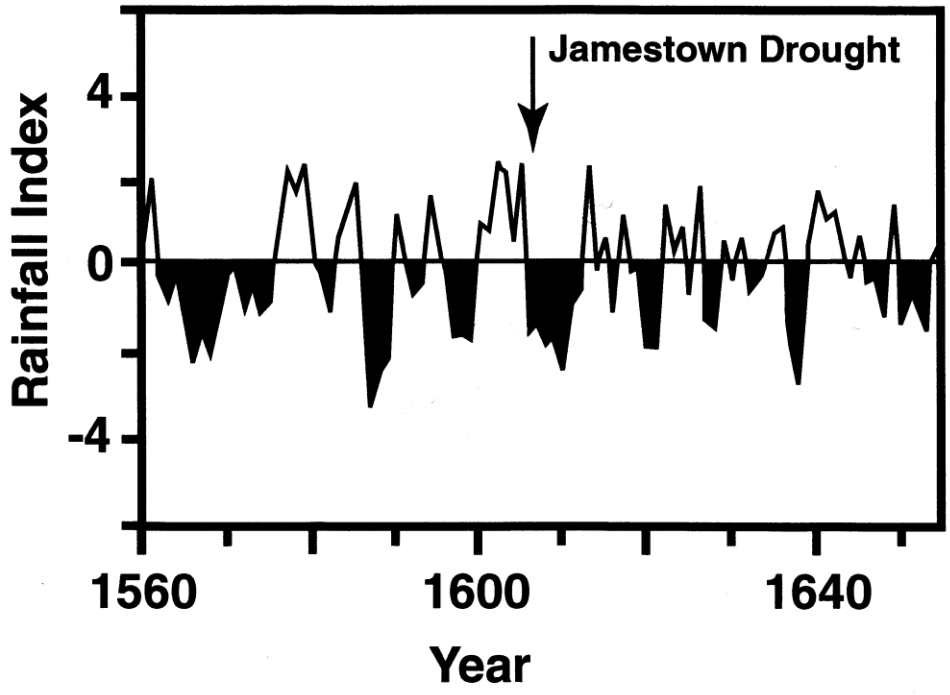
4. What inference can you make about the effect of tides on health in Jamestown?

5. Consider the last paragraph. What time of the year do you think starvation was most likely to happen?

Document B

Source: Adapted from "The Lost Colony and Jamestown Droughts," *Science*, April 24, 1998.

Note: This study determined rainfall amounts by examining tree-ring patterns in old cypress trees growing near Jamestown. Every year leaves a growth ring inside the trunk of a tree. A wider ring indicates plenty of rainfall and good growth. A narrow ring usually means less rain. "0" on the chart means average tree-ring size and therefore average rainfall.



Document Analysis

1. What does the "0" line represent on the chart? What is indicated by a sharp spike below the "0" line?

2. Look at the years 1580 to 1640. During which period did Jamestown suffer its longest unbroken period of drought?

3. In the winter of 1609-1610, Jamestown experienced what settlers called the "starving time." Based on this document, what inference can you make about the cause of this "starving time"?

4. Is there any way lack of rain might strain English relations with the Powhatans? Explain.

Document C

Source: Adapted from John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles, Book III*, 1624.

First and Second Jamestown Ship Lists

Occupation	Original Settlers May 1607	1st Resupply January 1608
Council (governors)	6	1
Gentlemen	47	28
Labourers	12	21
Cooper (barrel maker)	0	1
Carpenter	4	0
Blacksmith	1	1
Sailer (sail maker)	1	0
Barber	1	0
Bricklayer	1	0
Mason	1	0
Tobacco pipe maker	0	1
Tailor	1	6
Drummer	1	0
Preacher	1	0
Boyes	4	0
Jeweler	0	1
Refiners and goldsmiths	0	4
Gunsmith	0	1
Perfumer (wig maker)	0	1
Apothecaries (druggists)	0	2
Surgeon	1	1
Occupation unknown	28	51
TOTAL MALE	110	120
TOTAL FEMALE	0	0

Note: A gentleman was a person of wealth who was not used to working with his hands. Boyes were young servants.

Document Analysis

1. How many settlers arrived in May 1607? 1608? How many had known occupations?

2. How many of the settlers from either group were female? Why do you suppose this was the case?

3. What is a "gentleman"? Approximately what percentage of this first group of settlers were gentlemen?

4. Of the 110 settlers who arrived in May 1607, nearly 70 were dead by December. Is there anything in the ship lists that helps explain why?

Document D

Source: Ivor Noel Hume, *The Virginia Adventure*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

[In 1609] Francis West and thirty-six men [sailed] up the Chesapeake Bay to try to trade for corn with the Patawomeke Indians.... Although still part of Powhatan's Confederacy, the tribe had seen less of the English than had those closer at hand and with luck might be more friendly. And so it proved.

Though West was able to load his [small ship] with grain, the success involved "some harshe and [cruel] dealinge by cutting of towe [two] of the Salvages heads and other extremetyes." The [ship] and her lifesaving cargo returned to [Jamestown].... No one doubted that this new supply of grain would help, but it would not be enough to last the winter. On the other hand, decided the ship's crew, it was plenty to get them fatly home to England. So it was that Francis West "by the perswasion or rather by the inforcement of his company hoysed up [sails]" and headed out into the Atlantic, leaving the colonists to the Indians and to God.

Document Analysis

1. Is this a primary source or a secondary source?

2. Why did Francis West sail up the Chesapeake?

3. Is there any evidence that the English forced the Indians to trade their grain?

4. What eventually happened to the shipload of grain?

5. How might the events described here relate to your findings in Doc B?

6. In what ways can you use this document to help answer the question: Early Jamestown: Why did so many settlers die?

Document E

Source: Adapted from J. Frederick Fausz, "An Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides: England's First Indian War, 1609-1614," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, January 1990.

Chronology of English Mortality in Virginia, 1607-1610

		Total Population
	1607	
14 May	104 colonists disembark at Jamestown Island	104
26 May	2 die in first Indian attack on Fort James	102
June-Aug.	At least 3 more die in Indian ambushes	99
Aug.-Oct.	Summer sickness kills half the colonist	49
Nov.	Capt. George Kendall is executed for mutiny	48
Dec.	Pamunkeys kill 2 colonists in capturing Capt. John Smith, and, at year's end, the English in Virginia "were but fortie in all"	40
	1608	
2 Jan.	Capt. Newport arrives with 100 men (1st Supply)	140
10 Apr.	Capt. Nelson brings 20 in Phoenix; 2 depart	158
7 Sept.	Smith reports "many dead, some sick"	130
8 Oct.	Newport arrives with 70 colonists (2nd Supply)	200
	1609-1610	
Winter 1608-09	Only 8 die during well-provisioned winter	192
Mid-Jan.	11 colonists die in boating accident	181
Summer	Disease returns, 100 at Jamestown "sickened and half the number died"	131
11-18 August	6 ships bring some 250 people (3rd Supply)	381
Aug.-Oct.	Of 120 men stationed near the falls, the Indians kill "neere halfe"	330
Aug.-Oct.	Of 100 men at Nansemond, Indians kill 50	280
Nov.-May 1610	Powhatan's siege of Jamestown (the "Starving Time") kills some 110 colonists from famine and disease; another 33 slain; 37 desert	90

Document Analysis

1. What is the total number of colonists to arrive at Jamestown by summer of 1609?

2. In 1607 and 1608 how many settlers died from disease? How many were killed by Indians?

3. What generalization can you make about the numbers and causes of settler death in 1609?

4. What can you infer about settler – Indian relations from 1607 to 1609?