

Educational materials developed through the Baltimore County History Labs Program, a partnership between Baltimore County Public Schools and the UMBC Center for History Education.

The Tobacco Economy: How did the Geography of the Chesapeake Region Influence its Development?

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Grade Level: Upper Elementary

Duration: 3-4 days

Overview: The unique environment of the Chesapeake region had a profound impact on the Europeans who settled there in the 1600s and 1700s. As farming practices developed, tobacco cultivation became increasingly important to English planters. To be profitable, tobacco required vast quantities of land and careful tending. The growth of tobacco as the primary cash crop in the region affected the labor market, as well, as the system of indentured servitude was supplanted by that of enslaved African labor. In this History Lab, students will examine primary sources, including wills, probate inventories, and other records, to understand how tobacco transformed the Chesapeake region in the colonial period.

History Standards:

National History Standards

Era 2 Colonization and Settlement (1585 – 1763)

Standard 3: How the values and institutions of European economic life took root in the colonies, and how slavery reshaped European and African life in the America

Historical Thinking Standards

2. Historical Comprehension
 - B. Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage
 - F. Appreciate historical perspectives
3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation
 - C. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships
4. Historical Research Capabilities
 - B. Obtain historical data

Common Core State Standards: Reading Standards for Informational Text, Grade 5

Key Ideas and Details

1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
3. Explain the relationship between two or more ideas or concepts in historical text based on specific information in the text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

9. Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgably.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, at the high end of the grades 4-5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

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Maryland State Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

Standard 3.0 - Geography

Topic B – Geographic Characteristics of Places and Regions

Indicator 1 – Examine the similarities and differences of regions in Colonial America

Objective c – Explain how geographic characteristics affect how people live and work, and population distribution of a place or region

Topic C – Movement of people, goods and ideas

Indicator 1 – Describe and analyze population growth, migration and settlement patterns in Colonial America

Objective a – Explain how geographic characteristics influenced settlement patterns in Colonial America

Objective c – Explain the importance of shipping and trading in the economic development of the colonies

Purpose:

This History Lab is designed as a multi-day instructional experience in which students draw conclusions about the ways in which the geography of the Chesapeake region impacted its economic and social development during the colonial period. Students will:

- Draw conclusions about property and values based on probate inventories and wills from the colonial Chesapeake region.
- Make inferences about plantation life in the colonial Chesapeake region from information found in advertisements for runaway slaves, plantation sales, and shipping space.
- Analyze primary and secondary sources to develop a description of economic and social activity in the colonial Chesapeake region.

History Lab Objectives:

- Determine the factors that led to economic growth in the colonial Chesapeake region.
- Determine how the change in population affected the economic development of the colonial Chesapeake region.
- Identify and explain characteristics of plantation life in the mid-1700s in the Chesapeake region.

Topic Background:

In the sixteenth century, Spanish and Portuguese explorers to the New World regularly brought interesting plants home with them. Many – sweet corn, beans, and pumpkin – became a regular part of the Iberian diet.¹ However, the plant that made one of the greatest impacts on both the European Continent and the New World was tobacco.

Native Americans routinely used tobacco as part of their religious ceremonies. However, by 1560 European physicians began assigning the plant near-miraculous healing qualities. Grown as part of a doctor's medicinal garden, tobacco was considered a topical cure for wounds, an inhalant to relieve asthma and rheumatism, and was even considered a cure for weak sight and

¹ Wesley Frank Craven, *The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century, 1607-1689* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 18.

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hearing. This initial use of tobacco did not have any real commercial benefit; in fact it was prohibitively expensive and only available to a few. That changed in 1586, when Sir Francis Drake arrived in England with large quantities of tobacco from the West Indies, making it popular among the upper classes. Eager to enjoy the benefit of “sotweed” (a sixteenth century name for tobacco), sailors started bringing it into seaports for their own use.² Eventually the tobacco craze permeated all levels of English society, and English society wanted a piece of Spanish profit from the sale of tobacco.

In an effort to take some of the tobacco market share away from Spain, King James I of England granted a charter in 1606 to the Virginia Company of London. The Company’s goals were straightforward: bring settlers to Virginia and return a profit to shareholders in England. However, early attempts at industry – glass manufacture, tar production, and beer making – were too labor intensive to turn a profit.³ Efforts to raise crops – cotton, sugar cane, indigo, plantains, grapes, pomegranates – grown profitably by the Spanish in the West Indies did not do well in Virginia. Nothing seemed to work. This changed in 1612 when John Rolfe (a Virginia settler and husband to Pocahontas) planted a strain of tobacco from Venezuela called Orinoco. Orinoco was sweeter than native Virginia tobacco and could command a higher price in England. Most importantly, the climate and soil in the Chesapeake were perfect for this type of tobacco. Exports grew tremendously. In 1615 only 2,300 pounds of tobacco were grown in Virginia; by the 1620s this figure jumped to over 500,000 pounds. By the 1670s, after Maryland’s farmers entered the tobacco game, exports of tobacco exceeded 10 million pounds. The Virginia Company had finally found the marketable staple that promised a significant return on its investment and tobacco had become the Chesapeake’s main cash crop.⁴

Growing tobacco is not an easy affair. Not only is it a labor intensive crop, it is also very hard on the land, which means that in order to turn a profit, planters needed a great deal of labor and land. Typically, a farmer would grow tobacco on a plot for three years, corn for the next three, after which the land had to lie fallow (no planting at all) for the next twenty years.⁵ This meant that large tracts of land were needed to achieve a profit. Maryland planter Robert Cole had a tract of 300 acres, but nearly 200 of these acres were unusable either because of their location on the land or they were lying fallow.⁶

The planting cycle for tobacco is long, taking up the most of the year. February was time for preparing the planting beds so that seeds could be planted in late March. The resulting seedlings were planted into “hills” in May and June. Throughout the summer workers hoed to keep out the weeds, pulled tobacco worms from the plants by hand, and removed both the flowers and lower

² Ibid., 22–23; Henry Miller, “The Lure of Sotweed”, n.d., <http://www.stmaryscity.org/History/The%20Lure%20of%20Sotweed.html>.

³ “Historic Jamestowne - The Virginia Company of London (U.S. National Park Service)”, n.d., <http://www.nps.gov/jame/historyculture/the-virginia-company-of-london.htm>.

⁴ Craven, *The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century, 1607-1689*, 124; “The Founding of Virginia - North Carolina Digital History”, n.d., <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-colonial/2029>; Miller, “The Lure of Sotweed.”

⁵ Lois Green Carr and Russell R. Menard, “Land, Labor, and Economies of Scale in Early Maryland: Some Limits to Growth in the Chesapeake System of Husbandry,” *The Journal of Economic History* 49 (June 1989): 408–409.

⁶ Ibid., 411.

leaves for maximum plant growth. During the summer months, workers were expected to work twelve hours a day, six days a week. September and October was the time to cut and dry the leaves; in November laborers stripped the tobacco leaves and packed them for market.⁷ Because of the high labor factor, there was initially more work than there were people to do it. Planters began buying slaves from Africa in 1619, but because they were expensive and their life expectancy was short it did not make economic sense at the time. Instead, planters turned to English indentured labor.

The English economy during this period was in severe decline, meaning that the £6 fare to cross the ocean was just too costly for many. To get to the New World, these workers (mostly men) entered into an indenture agreement with a planter: 4-7 years bound labor in exchange for their ocean passage. During this time, indentured servants were considered the master's property. They could be bought and sold, exchanged, or lost in a card game. They could not marry or own property. However, once the servant fulfilled his contract, he received "freedom dues," generally clothes, food, tools, and 50 acres of land. Since the majority of indentured immigrants were poor and desperate, owning their own land was something they never could have achieved in England, so for them it was a good deal. It was also a dangerous gamble. Because of high mortality rates in the Chesapeake, many died before collecting their freedom dues. Women came over as well, but in smaller numbers. They generally worked as house staff and did not get freedom dues. However, because of their low numbers these women had a better chance of finding a good husband than if they went to less dangerous New England. This system worked until the English economy began to grow again in the late-seventeenth century. With more work at home, voluntary indentures declined. To bridge the labor gap, planters began buying African slaves.⁸

The definition of slavery shifted as the seventeenth century progressed. In the earliest days of the Chesapeake, slaves were bound for a defined period of time, much like an indentured servant, after which they would be freed. They could also earn their freedom by converting to Christianity.⁹ Once freed, a slave could buy property and firearms, testify in court, and vote. Some even married across racial lines. The slave population in the Chesapeake at this time was so small that it did not present a threat to the planters. However, as their numbers increased, so did the restrictions. By mid-century, slavery became a life-long condition not only for slaves, but for their children as well. Slaves could not congregate outside of the plantation, African traditions were forbidden, and work was done under ever increasing supervision. These new laws drove home the point that slaves were property – nothing more. An English visitor to the colonies noted, "planters do not want to be told that their Negroes are human creatures."¹⁰

Vocabulary:

Do – ditto, "same as above." Today we use the "" symbol to indicate this.

indentured servant – a person who is bound to work for another for a specified time in return for payment of travel expenses, room and board

⁷ Miller, "The Lure of Sotweed"; Carr and Menard, "Land, Labor, and Economies of Scale in Early Maryland," 413.

⁸ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 142–143, 153–154.

⁹ "Africans in America | Part 1 | Narrative | From Indentured Servitude to Racial Slavery", n.d., <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1narr3.html>.

¹⁰ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 154–155.

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labor intensive – a product, such as a crop, that requires a great deal of work to produce

pounds – a British unit of money

probate list – a list of one’s valuable possessions

seconds – tobacco that is not top quality, so it is not as valuable as other tobacco

will – a list of who should inherit one’s possessions after death

Conducting the History Lab:

Overarching Question: How did the geography of the Chesapeake region influence its development in the colonial period?

In this multi-day instructional experience, students will draw conclusions about the ways in which the region’s geography impacted its economic and social development. As tobacco became the significant cash crop in the region, students will see how the labor market was transformed in the colonial period from one dependent on indentured servants to a slave-based system.

Materials:

RS#01: Probate Inventory of George Gant (Excerpted)

RS#02: Robert Cole’s Will

RS#03: Last Will and Testament of John Symons, 9 April 1636

RS#04: Last Will and Testament of Robert Edmunds, 27 December 1633

RS#05: Tobacco and the Economy

RS#06: Colonial Chesapeake Organizer

RS#07: Probate Inventory of Eleanor Addison (Excerpted)

RS#08: Francis Goodrick Probate List (Excerpted)

RS#09: Probate Inventory of Matthew Barnes (Excerpted)

RS#10: Probate Inventory of Raphael Neale (Excerpted)

RS#11: Probate Inventory of Thomas Addison (Excerpted)

RS#12: The Rise of Slavery

RS#13: A Tobacco Plantation

RS#14: Plantation Organizer

RS#15: Ad for Runaway Slave – April 1766

RS#16: Advertisement for Sale of Virginia Plantation, August 1768

RS#17: Shipping Advertisements

RS#18: History Lab Assessment

(Day One) Lab Part One – The Way to Wealth

Initiate the History Lab by displaying the overarching question. Have students brainstorm a list of sources that they could use to answer the question. Review the terms primary (a first-person account by someone who actually witnessed or took part in the experience or event being described) and secondary (a record of the findings of someone who did not observe the event, but who investigated primary evidence) sources, and have students classify the items on their list.

Display the term “probate list” and its definition. Have students create a probate list of their own. Display several lists and discuss what can be learned about a person based on their probate list.

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Display the term “will” and its definition. Have students create a will for the items on their probate list. Have several students share their wills, and discuss what can be learned about a person by analyzing a will.

Organize students into groups of three and distribute one copy of **RS#01**, “Probate Inventory of George Gant,” to each group. Explain to students the meaning of “pounds” (A British unit of money), “do” (Ditto. “Same as above” Today we use the "" symbol to indicate this.), and “seconds” (Tobacco that is not top quality, so it is not as valuable as other tobacco.). Also explain that they will be examining a number of probate inventories and wills during this Lab, but that they will often only be excerpts or portions of these documents. Allow students several minutes to analyze the probate list with their group, and record five things that the probate list reveals about George Gant. Have groups share their responses with the class.

Student responses will reveal that George Gant’s possessions consisted of clothing, animals, and objects, such as furniture, weapons, household goods, and tools.

Display **RS#2**, “Robert Cole’s Will.” The teacher will read aloud the will and discuss what this implies about Robert Cole and the life of his workers. Note the date of the will (1662).

Robert Cole’s will shows that when someone died, their property was distributed to family and friends. Students should also note that tobacco is included in his possessions that are to be given away.

Have one half of the class analyze **RS#3**, “Last Will and Testament of John Symons,” from 1636, and half analyze **RS#4**, “Last Will and Testament of Robert Edmund,” from 1633. Remind students that they are thinking like historians, and have each group share what the document reveals about the life of the person who wrote it.

Have students examine the four documents, looking for similarities. Lead students to the discovery that mention of tobacco is found in all of the documents.

Revisit the overarching question, and have students determine what information they have gained from the primary sources that would assist in answering the question.

Distribute **RS#5**, “Tobacco and the Economy.” Have students determine the difference between this resource sheet and the others (this is a secondary source, but can provide information to allow us to answer the overarching question). Have students read the document and underline any information that would help in answering the overarching question.

Revisit the overarching question, and ask students what factors led to the economic growth of the region. If they are unsure, have them determine the common element in all the reading. Ask the students why tobacco was a cash crop and how it affected the colonists in the region.

Have students complete the activity for Lesson One on **RS#6**, “Colonial Chesapeake Organizer.” Summarize the first part of the History Lab by having students determine what they have learned about the overarching question, and what they still need to discover. (Students will complete the organizer during Parts Two and Three of the History Lab.)

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(Day Two) Lab Part Two – Wanted: Free Labor

Have students recall what they learned about the economy of the Chesapeake region during colonial times from yesterday's lesson. Have students make predictions about the way that the tobacco industry may have affected the population of the Chesapeake region.

Divide students into five groups. Distribute one of the following to each group: **RS#7**, "Probate Inventory of Eleanor Addison," **RS #8**, "Probate Inventory of Francis Goodrick," **RS#9**, "Probate Inventory of Matthew Barnes," **RS #10**, "Probate Inventory of Rapheal Neale," or **RS #11**, "Probate Inventory of Thomas Addison."

Point out that each of the inventories they will be analyzing were prepared in the 1700s, approximately 100 years after the documents they reviewed the day before.

Point out some that the words and spellings from the colonial period can seem strange to us in the present day. Students are to look specifically at what is listed as property.

Remind students that they are seeing only an excerpt of the probate inventories. Allow groups three minutes to examine their document, and write down three things they notice about the contents. Have groups pass the documents clockwise, and then allow them three minutes to examine the new document and write down three things they notice about its contents. Continue this process until all groups have had an opportunity to examine all five documents.

Have each group revisit the list of points they noticed about the documents to look for any commonalities among them. Have a representative from each groups share their responses with the class, and lead the class to notice that "Negroes" (enslaved Africans) are listed on all of the documents. Have students discuss why think these individuals are listed as property, and lead them to the understanding that each of these documents contains a listing of enslaved persons.

Ask students what they recall about indentured servants from past history courses. Students should understand that indentured servants only served for a period of time and then were freed, while enslaved persons, unless they were freed (the process of manumission), were owned by another for life.

Display the chart "Estimates of Enslaved Blacks as a Percentage of the Population by Colony" from **RS #12**, "Rise of Slavery." Have students identify the trends shown in the chart, and draw conclusions as to factors causing the dramatic rise in the population of enslaved persons in the region during this time. Have students read the text at the top of the resource sheet to verify the conclusions that they drew from the data.

Have students complete the activity for Part Two on **RS#6**, "Colonial Chesapeake Organizer." Summarize the second part of the History Lab by having students determine what they have learned about the overarching question, and what they still need to discover.

(Day Three) Lab Part Three – Pulling it All Together

Display **RS #13**, "A Tobacco Plantation." Have students list everything they notice in the image. Explain that today they will be examining documents in order to make inferences about life on a colonial Chesapeake plantation.

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Distribute a copy of **RS #14**, “Plantation Organizer,” to each student. Display **RS #15**, “Runaway Slave Advertisement - April 1766.” Read the advertisement aloud, consulting the transcription and definitions as needed.

Model how to record important information from the advertisement on **RS #14**. Provide an example of an inference about plantation life from this information.

Review the physical features and why this enslaved person might have missing teeth, a scar from a burn, and ugly round feet. (His life is harsh – he probably worked on a plantation that harvested tobacco and cotton; poor diet/hygiene caused his teeth to fall out, or maybe he was hit; the owner branded the slave to mark him as being owned since he was treated as property; and his feet might be deformed because he has spent much of his life working hard while on his feet a great deal without the benefit of proper footwear.)

Ask the students what this might tell us about living on a plantation for this person. (He worked very hard and was not given a lot of nutritious food or medical care.) Continue the discussion by asking the students why the owner would want him back if he treated the slave so poorly. (The owner needed the enslaved person to work to plant and harvest crops or help run the plantation; he was possibly a good worker because he had a lot of work experience based on his age.)

Ask what the person who placed the advertisement might be like. (This person had enough money to own one or more slaves, and had a need for slaves, and so this must be a white, land-owning man.) As you conduct this conversation, model recording the inferences on **RS #14**.

Display **RS #16**, “Advertisement for Sale of Virginia Plantation, August 1768.” Have students read the advertisement, using the transcription and definitions as needed to help decipher meanings of unclear words. Afterward, point out that the plantation is 275 acres, has a “very good” house that is 40 by 38 feet with a “very good” kitchen, has all necessary out houses that are new and in good condition. The property itself is pleasantly situated which probably means it’s in a good location since it is near the town as evidenced by the reference to the property being convenient to the courthouse, church, and mill.

Ask the students if they think this is a small, medium, or large farm. Why might someone want so much land? (To grow tobacco and other crops to earn money)

Discuss whether or not this house is large. Why might the advertisement mention the kitchen, but not other rooms such as bedrooms or living rooms? (Kitchens were the most important room since this is where food preparation was done, and a “very good” kitchen probably was very important to most families). Why might the advertisement include information about the outhouses? (It indicates that it is property ready to be run as a farm.) Why might it be important for the plantation to be close to the town? (The owner might need to go to court if there were contract or ownership of slave questions that needed to be settled. Going to church might be important for the plantation owners since it could be a part of their social life on a day when work is not really done like the other days. Being close to a mill means they are close to a water source and a place to grind the grains that might be grown on the plantation.)

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As you are discussing these points, continue to model how to complete **RS #14**.

Organize students into groups of four, and distribute a copy of **RS #17**, “Shipping Advertisements,” to each group. Have students work with their group to read these advertisements, using the transcriptions and definitions as needed to decipher meanings.

Allow several minutes for students to record information and inferences from these advertisements on **RS #14**.

Have groups share their responses, and use this information to complete the activity for Part Three on **RS#6**, “Colonial Chesapeake Organizer.”

Revisit the overarching question and have the class make generalizations about plantation life in the Chesapeake region during colonial times based on all of the information that they have gathered during the History Lab. Distribute **RS #18**, “History Lab Assessment.” Have students use the information they have gathered to complete one of the choices on the assessment.

References:

“Africans in America | Part 1 | Narrative | From Indentured Servitude to Racial Slavery”, n.d. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1narr3.html>.

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