

## 6. Jamestown (1607)

*John and Wahun are walking home from school.*

Wahun: *(dismayed)* Man, can you believe all of this homework we have tonight? I am going to be absolutely miserable all night!

John: Homework is rough, but it's nothing compared to what the first settlers went through at the Jamestown settlement!

Wahun: *(laughing)* Well someone got their homework done early. What happened at Jamestown? Wasn't that the first permanent European settlement in the new world?

John: Yes it was. You name it, and it probably went wrong. The colonists decided to settle in a marshy swamp along the James River in the Chesapeake Bay. While this gave them great access to water, it also was a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes, which rapidly spread malaria among the settlers. Speaking of the settlers, they made some horrible decisions right off the bat.

Wahun: Like what?

John: First of all, the gentlemen refused to work. They never had to perform manual labor back in England, and they felt like this type of work was beneath them.

Wahun: That's not very fair. I bet they had a hard time getting the colony ready to go.



John: Yeah they did. To make matters even worse, the Jamestown colonists spent all of their time searching for gold, which was rumored to be abundant in North America. This meant that when winter rolled around, they were not even close to prepared.

Wahun: This sounds bad. What happened?

John: To give you an idea, they called it the "starving time." It is estimated that only around 60 of the original 215 colonists survived this horrible time.

Wahun: *(amazed)* Wow, that is really horrible. At least it couldn't get much worse!

John: Things would have, but one colonist, John Smith stepped up and took charge. He basically said, "he who shall not work, shall not eat." Without Smith's help and training, the settlement would have totally crumbled.

Wahun: I get the feeling they were not out of the clear yet...

John: You are correct. A series of wars broke out between the English settlers and the Powhatan Confederacy, a large collection of Native American groups in Virginia. The wars were caused by tension between the two sides over plundering and stealing during times of famine and disputes over land. Raids on communities, violence and massacres occurred on both sides. While there were some periods of peace between 1610 and 1646, one being ushered in by the marriage of Pocahontas and John Rolfe, the period of off and on warfare took a toll on the colony. Eventually though, Jamestown became more stable.

Wahun: How did this happen? Did they finally find gold?

John: Not exactly, but you could say that they hit the jackpot with something else: tobacco.

Wahun: Wait . . . I thought tobacco was addictive and harmful.

John: Definitely. But it was in high demand back in Europe, and the Virginia soil was ideal for growing this cash crop. When John Rolfe introduced it in the colonies, profits began to skyrocket and the economy was on firmer economic footing.

Wahun: It seems like striking it rich was a major part of the Jamestown colony.

John: For sure. Jamestown was a proprietary colony, meaning that it was funded by a group of investors looking to make a profit. Later colonies in New England were founded by Pilgrims looking for religious freedom. The joint stock company that set up the Jamestown colony was all about making money for these investors. It also meant the introduction of slave labor to the colonies from an early stage.

Wahun: Interesting. Anything else significant about the colony?

John: The first colonial assembly was established in 1619, called the House of Burgesses.

Wahun: Why was that a big deal?

John: It was the first example in North America of people electing leaders to represent themselves. The colonial governors had always been appointed by either the king or the joint stock companies, but in this case the people had a say in their leaders and the policies that they established.

Wahun: Man, I wish that homework required majority rule!

John: I wouldn't hold your breath. All right, let's get started on some of this work.