The Virginia Colony

By Anthony di Battista

Grade Level: 9 and 10
Number of class periods: 2 class periods
Common Core State Standards:

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3** Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.5** Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

Objective

In a summer seminar devoted to the origins of European contact with the Americas, teachers are faced with problems of accessibility of sources. The language is often daunting, and the relevance for students of American history sometimes seems remote. An examination of the history of Virginia Colony can help students and teachers overcome these obstacles. Its documents provide students with an account of the earliest history of the colony which is unparalleled in its depiction of desperate brutality in the nation’s earliest decades. In addition, the spelling, language, grammar, and usage are similar enough to modern English to be read in their original and to provide students with valuable lesson concerning orthography, and the evolution of American Standard English. Students will demonstrate competence through a demonstration of the ability derive meaning from unfamiliar vocabulary and an analysis of the causes and explanations for the failures of the Virginia Colony.

Introduction

One of the most heartbreaking episodes in American colonial history occurred during the winter of 1609-1610 as the Virginia Colony faced extinction. Disease, famine, and harsh weather reduced the population from almost 500 persons to fewer than 60. The conditions were described in Captain John Smith’s General History of Virginia as “The Starving Time.” These passages provide students with a visceral recounting of the hardships faced by the Virginia colonists as well as moral and ethical questions surrounding the treatment of Native Americans and the issue of cannibalism.
Materials

- *Supplies the Colonists took to Virginia*: http://www.learner.org/workshops/primarysources/virginia/docs/supplies.html
- In addition, students will also find useful, a guide to reading early documents found at: http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/howto.html

Vocabulary

The vocabulary opportunities for a lesson of the sort are limitless. Students are confronted with archaic usage and spelling, and the opportunities for comparisons with modern English will engage students beyond the compelling narrative of “The Starving Time.”

Procedure

Begin by placing the documents in a proper historical context: the goals, objectives, and conditions of the Virginia Colony should be outlined with special emphasis on the events that exacerbated the brutal conditions of the winter of 1609-1610.

Students can begin with a close reading of the documents, and since they are relatively short, can list words that have archaic spellings divergent meanings (i.e. the use of “Salvage” for “Savage” in reference to Native Americans.

After students have mastered the vocabulary and usage in these short documents, they can begin to consider some of the larger questions that emerge from this analysis:

Citing textual evidence:

1) How do the Virginia colonists evaluate their situation?
2) To whom do they cast blame for their situation?
3) How do they justify their actions against Native Americans and to their own dead comrades?
Appendix

How To Read A 250-Year-Old Document

And Other FAQs

In reading newspapers, books and magazines from the 18th Century you will invariably notice that an "f" is apparently used where there should be an "s."

For instance, the word "vessel" is printed as "veffel," the word "same" appears as "fame" and "castle" becomes "caftle." Because of the confusion encountered by readers new to 18th Century documents, we have asked three individuals knowledgeable in the history of typography to render their views on the subject.

Their explanations follow:

"The Long S is a legitimate form of "S." See the American Heritage Dictionary "S" entries. The Long S is similar to a lowercase f but the horizontal stroke does not go through the top of the letter. The long s still survives in German (or at least it was available when I studied German). German has an uppercase S, a lowercase long f and a lowercase s.

"The Rules Are:

"Regular uppercase S; "Terminal lowercase s and medial s under certain conditions; initial long f and medial long f."

"Examples:

"In the 1791 Bradford edition of Thomas Paine's Common Sense, the Introduction reads:

"Perhaps the sentiments contained in the following pages are not yet sufficiently fashionable to procure them general favor..."

"You will note that both sentiments and pages end with a normal lowercase "s" and both sentiments & sufficiently have an initial lowercase long f."

- Richard Irby

The typographic script "s" is an analogue of the handwritten letter, a sort of double loop, and used in the middle of the word. Printers set the graphic version of the handwritten letter, which differs from the "f" in having a very minimal cross-stroke. They (the "s" and the "f") are not the same.

To be precise, the script "s" was used in all positions except the last. Thus the word "success" would have begun with a script s, the penultimate letter would have been a script s, but the final letter would have been what we consider a normal "s".
The symbol ("s") was not an "f" although it looked like one. The long s letter can better be described as an "f" without the crossline traveling through the vertical line. The crossline only extends to the right of the vertical line. Also, the long s was never used at the end of a word or to denote the possessive or to pluralize. Since handwriting was considered an art form, the placement of the long s depended on what the "clerk" felt would be visually pleasing to his audience. In a hand-written document, the top of the long s looked like the lower case "f."
When did they discontinue using hand-made paper?

As we said, for newspapers — between 1870 and 1880.

Maps, however, began to be printed on machine-made paper sometime after 1801. You can tell the difference by closely examining the texture of the paper. Hand-made papers tend to be course and are often of uneven thickness, while machine-made paper is much smoother, and has a more uniform thickness.

Despite this apparent improvement, printers made sure their customers could still see the lines created (supposedly) by the wires of the mould...and continued to imitate the earlier hand-made paper for another couple of decades. Of course, the physical content of the old-style hand-made paper itself was superior to the newer product, certainly in terms of its longevity and durability.

From 1815 on — coincident with the Industrial Revolution — bleached papers had arrived, then and forever changing the look and feel of printed materials.

What is the historical relevance of maps from the Revolutionary War?

In many ways they are unique....in that they were based on the observations of eyewitneses, and published close to the time of the events they describe. In effect, they were "reports from the front lines" and were much in demand by those who were outside the sphere of action. They influenced large numbers of interested persons and helped to interpret what transpired. They were the earliest and, sometimes the only, pictorial portrayals of the engagements of battle. In another context they might be likened to CNN's on-the-spot coverage of the military action during the Gulf War, the fighting in Bosnia and Somalia.

How many copies of these 18th Century early American maps were printed?

An exact answer is impossible to come by. Publishing houses in those days did not keep precise records. Whatever records existed never survived beyond that time. However, we know that a copperplate (from which these maps were printed) would last for approximately 1000 impressions. It is generally estimated that the survival rate ranged anywhere from 8 percent to 20 percent. The actual number of any one particular map surviving today represents a tiny proportion of the original printing. Furthermore, of those originals that may still be extant, most are in libraries, or in private or public collections, and do not often appear on the open market.

How many copies of each newspaper were printed 200 years ago?

A daily press run of about 500 copies was a full day's work. Often no more than 200 -issues were printed. Unlike today's 4-color newspapers printed on high-speed automated presses, the newspapers from George Washington's time were literally hand-crafted. Each page was printed on one side, the paper had to dry, then printed on the other side.

They were published by printers whose other work included stationery, legal and government documents, and other announcements. So it's only natural that the final product was more like a document than a newspaper.
How did printers set the type in those days?

All of the type was set by hand — letter by letter. A page full of type might weigh over 50 pounds. It was locked into forms, printed on a damp piece of paper and hand-cranked up so that, inevitably, the ink on each copy would be of a different thickness or density. If the type dented the paper evenly, the printer had a good copy. That's how the phrase "making a good impression" came into our language!

What do you mean by "browning" or "toning" in a document?

As the organic material in paper begins to age, it produces a slight brownish cast to the paper, otherwise known as browning or toning. Many older documents have a natural toning, a patina that appears when an object of value has survived the passage of time and has been well cared for.

What is meant by "foxing" in describing a document?

Foxing refers to brown stains or spots found on paper (newspapers, maps & pages in a book), mainly caused by age, storage in damp conditions or chemical content of the paper. Unless it is excessive, foxing does not detract from the value of a document.

What is an "octavo" size book, magazine or pamphlet?

Octavo size runs about 8 1/2 inches by 5 inches. An octavo book is bound from sheets of paper folded in half three times. This is a popular size for 18th century magazines.

I keep hearing about "folio" and "quarto" sizes? Please explain.

Popular for newspapers from early America, folio size measures approximately 11 by 18 inches. A folio book is bound from sheets of paper folded one time. A folio map typically has a vertical dimension greater than about 11 inches. The quarto size in newspapers runs about 12 by 9 inches. A quarto book is bound from sheets of paper folded in half twice. Quarto-sized maps typically measure about 9 to 11 inches vertically.

“How to Read a 250 Year Old Document...” http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/howto.html
This selection, taken from Captain John Smith’s *Generall Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles*, describes a desperate chapter in the history of the colony. Under Smith’s leadership, the colony had flourished during 1608 and early 1609, but Smith was forced to return to London in the summer of 1609 due to a gunpowder accident. The London Company sent 500 colonists to Virginia in the late spring of 1609, but a storm caused their leader’s ship to wreck on the Bermuda coast, and the remaining 400 settlers arrived sick from the storm and the plague. They consumed the remaining stores, and the colony suffered extreme disease and famine during the winter. By March 1610, the colony was reduced from 500 to 60 people.

Now we all found the losse of Captaine Smith, yea his greatest maligners could now curse his losse: as for corne provision and contribution from the Salvages, we had nothing but mortall wounds, with clubs and arrowes; as for our Hogs, Hens, Goats, Sheepe, Horse, or what lived, our commanders, officers and Salvages daily consumed them, some small proportions sometimes we tasted, till all was devoured; then swords, armes, pieces, or any thing, wee traded with the Salvages, whose cruell fingers were so oft imbrewed in our blouds, that what by their crueltie, our Governours indiscretion, and the losse of our ships, of five hundred within six moneths after Captaine Smith’s departure [October 1609 — March 1610], there remained not past sixtie men, women and children, most miserable and poore creatures; and those were preserved for the most part, by roots, herbes, acornes, walnuts, berries, now and then a little fish: they that had starth in these extremities, made no small use of it; yea even the very skinnes of our horses.

Nay, so great was our famine, that a Salvage we slew and buried, the poorer sort tooke him up againe and eat him; and so did divers one another boyled and stewed with roots and herbes: And one amongst the rest did kill his wife, powdered [i.e., salted] her, and had eaten part of her before it was knowne; for which hee was executed, as hee well deserved: now whether shee was better roasted, boyled or carbonado’d [i.e., grilled], I know now; but of such a dish as powdered wife I never heard of.

This was that time, which still to this day [1624] we called the starving time; it were too vile to say, and scarce to be beleeved, what we endured: but the occasion was our owne, for want of providence industrie and government, and not the barrennesse and defect of the Countrie, as is generally supposed; for till then in three yeeres, for the numbers were landed us, we had never from England provision sufficient for six moneths, though it seemed by the bils of loading sufficient was sent us, such a glutton is the Sea, and such good fellowes the Mariners; we as little tasted of the great proportion sent us, as they of our want and miseries, yet nothwithstanding they ever overswayed and ruled the businesse, though
we endured all that is said, and chiefly lived on what this good Countrie naturally afforded. Yet had wee
beene even in Paradice it selfe with these Governours, it would not have beene much better withe us;
yet there was amongst us, who had they had the government as Captaine Smith appointed, but that
they could not maintaine it, would surely have kept us from those extremities of miseries. This in ten
daies more, would have supplanted us all with death.

But God that would not this Countrie should be unplanted, sent Sir Thomas Gates, and Sir George
Sommers with one hundred and fiftie people most happily preserved by the Bermudas to preserve us
[May 21, 1610]...
As We Doubt not but you will have especial Care to Observe the Ordinances [i.e., the charter] set Down by the Kings Majestie and Delivered unto you under the privy Seal So for your better Directions upon your first Landing we have thought Good to recommend unto your care these Instructions and articles following. When it Shall please God to Send you on the Coast of Virginia, you shall Do your best Endeavour to find out a Safe port in the Entrance of Some navigable River, making Chois of Such a one as runneth farthest into the Land, and if you happen to Discover Divers portable Rivers, and amongst them any one that hath two main branches, if the Difference be not Great, make Chois of that which bendeth most toward the Northwest for that way shall You soonest find the Other Seal[,] When you have made Chois of the river on which you mean to Settle, be not hasty in Landing your Victuals and munitions but first Let Captain Newport Discover how far that River may be found navigable that you make Election of the Strongest, most Fertile and wholesome place for if you make many Removes besides the Loss of time You Shall greatly Spoil your Victuals and Your cask[s] and with Great pain transport it in Small boats But if you choose your place so far up as A Bark of fifty tuns will fleet then you may Lay all Your provisions a Shore with Ease, and the better Receive the trade of all the Countries about you in the Land and Such A place you may perchance find a hundred miles from the Rivers mouth, and the further up the better for if you sit Down near the Entrance Except it be in Some Island that is Strong by nature An Enemy that may approach you on Even Ground, may Easily pull You Out and if he be Driven to Seek You a hundred miles within the Land in boats, you shall from both sides of your River where it is Narrowest So beat them with Your muskets as they shall never be Able to prevail Against You. And to the end That You be not Surprised as the French were in Florida by Melindus and the Spaniard in the same place by the French you shall Do Well to make this Double provision first Erect a Little Sconce at the Mouth of the River that may Lodge Some ten men With Whom you Shall Leave a Light boat that when any fleet shall be in Sight they may Come with Speed to Give You Warning. Secondly you must in no Case Suffer any of the natural people of the Country to inhabit between You and the Sea Coast for you Cannot Carry Your Selves so towards them but they will Grow Discontented with Your habitation and be ready to guide and assist any Nation that Shall Come to invade You and if You neglect this You neglect Your Safety. When You have Discovered as far up the river as you mean to plant Your Selves, and Landed your victuals and munitions to the End that Every man may know his Charge you Shall do well to Divide your Six Score men into three parts whereof one party of them you may appoint to fortifie and build of which your first work must be your Storehouse for Victual 30 Others you may impoy in preparing your Ground and Sowing your Corn and Roots the Other ten of these forty you must Leave as Centinel at the havens mouth The Other forty you may impoy for two Months in Discovery of the River above you and on the Country about you which Charge Captain Newport and Captain Gosnold may undertake[,] of these forty Discoverers when they Do Espie any high Lands or hills Captain Gosnold may take 20 of the Company to Cross Over the Lands and Carrying a half Dozen pickaxes to try if they Can find any mineral. The Other twenty may go on by River and pitch up boughs upon the Banks Side by which the Other boats Shall follow them by the Same turnings You may also take with them a Wherry Such as is used here in the Thames by Which you may Send back to the President for supply of munition or any Other want that you may [be?] not Driven to Return for Every Small Defect.
“Supplies the Colonist took to Virginia” 1620’s
http://www.learner.org/workshops/primarysources/virginia/docs/supplies.html

The record of the supplies that the first settlers took to Virginia has been lost. This inventory, created in the early 1620s by Samuel Purchase, seems to have been written in response to the inadequacy of the supplies that they had taken; it is his recommendation for what subsequent settlers should take with them.

The Inconveniences that have happened to some persons which have transported themselves from England to Virginia, without provisions necessary to sustaine themselves, hath greatly hindered the Progresse of that Noble Plantation: For prevention of the like disorders hereafter, that no man suffer either through ignorance or misinformation; it is thought requisite to publish this short Declaration: wherein is contayned a particular of such necessaries, as either private Families or single persons shall have cause to furnish themselves with, for their better support at their first landing in Virginia; whereby also greater numbers may receive in part directions how to provide themselves.

Apparell for one man and so after the rate for more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Monmouth Cap</td>
<td>1.s. 10.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three falling bands</td>
<td>1.s. 3.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three shirts</td>
<td>7.s. 6.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Waste-coate</td>
<td>2.s. 2.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One sute of Canvase</td>
<td>7.s. 6.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One sute of Frize [i.e., frieze, a heavy woolen having a shaggy uncut nap on one side]</td>
<td>10.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One sute of Cloth</td>
<td>15.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three pair of Irish stockins</td>
<td>4.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foure pair of shoos</td>
<td>8.s. 8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pair of garters</td>
<td>10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One doozen of points [i.e., cords used to lace up items of clothing]</td>
<td>3.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pair of Canvase sheets</td>
<td>8.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Ells [i.e., an archaic unit of measure equal to 45 inches] of Canvase, to make a bed and boulster, to be filled in Virginia</td>
<td>8.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Rug for a bed in 8.S. which with the bed serving for two men, halfe is</td>
<td>8.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Ells course Canvase, to make a bed at Sea for two men, to be filled with straw 4.S.</td>
<td>8.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One coarse Rug at Sea for two men, will cost 6.S. is for one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Virginia Colony

By Anthony di Battista

Victuall for a whole yeere for one man and so for more after the rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eight bushels of Meale</td>
<td>2.li.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two bushels of Pease at 3.S.</td>
<td>6.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One gallon of Aquavitae</td>
<td>2.s.  6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One gallon of Oyle</td>
<td>3.s.  6.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two gallons of Vinegar 1.S.</td>
<td>2.s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[total] 3.li. 3.s.

Armes for one man, but if halfe of your men have Armour it is sufficient, so that all have Peeces and Swords.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Armour compleat, light</td>
<td>17.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One long Piece, five foot or five and a halfe, neere Musket bore</td>
<td>1.li. 2.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One sword</td>
<td>5.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Belt</td>
<td>1.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Bandaleere</td>
<td>1.s.  6.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twentie pound of Powder</td>
<td>18.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixtie pound of shot or lead, Pistoll and Goose shot</td>
<td>5.s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[total] 3.li. 9.s. 6.d.