

BY THE NUMBERS: Making Change in Colonial Virginia



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Overview

ECONOMICS IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF all cultures, past and present. To illustrate the point, this lesson engages third-grade students in a comparative cultural study of colonists in 18th-century Virginia and the people of today's commonwealth. The lesson enables students to experience economic life as Colonial consumers by engaging in a variety of activities in the marketplace of 18th-century Williamsburg.

Teaching Activities

Day 1

Present the background information to the students and read one of the suggested stories about Colonial Williamsburg as an introduction.



Objectives

- / Students understand how 18th-century Virginians satisfied their wants and needs in the Williamsburg marketplace.
- / Students learn how 18th-century Virginia producers used human, natural, and capital resources to produce goods and services.
- / Students learn about consumption of goods and services by comparing and contrasting 18th-century consumers and today's consumers.
- / Students learn about the coins used for purchasing goods and services in the Colonial marketplace.

Time Required

4 Four days

Materials

- 2 Chart of economic concepts
- 2 Chart of 18th-century goods and services
- 2 Chart showing Colonial coins used in Virginia
- 2 HANDOUT 1: **Colonial Coins and Their Values/For Sale**
- 2 Bags of paper coins—each bag should include two of each coin listed on HANDOUT 1
- 2 HANDOUT 2 **Colonial Shopping Spree**

Suggested Children's Literature

- / *Historic Communities: Colonial Life*, by Bobbie Kalman, Crabtree Publishing Company, 1992.
- / *If You Lived in Williamsburg in Colonial Days*, by Barbara Brenner, Scholastic, Inc., 2000.
- / *Mary Geddy's Day: A Colonial Girl in Williamsburg*, by Kate Waters, Scholastic, Inc., 2002.

Day 2

The students have learned that the colonists produced tobacco and exported it exclusively to England. In exchange the colonists were allowed to import goods from England. Colonists also desired products made locally. Skilled craftsmen provided goods and services for households.

Explain to the students that today's discussion will focus on producers in the shops of 18th-century Williamsburg and the crafts involved. Prepare a chart on the board or on poster board for this activity. Use the chart to list 18th-century shops and crafts. (Possibilities include apothecary, milliner, blacksmith, silversmith, barber/wigmaker, printer, weaver, bootmaker, baker, cooper, tailor, harnessmaker, wheelwright). Discuss goods and services. How is producing goods different from providing services? Tell which goods and services are produced at each shop. Lead the class in a discussion of human, natural, and capital resources. On the same chart, list the resources necessary for production in each of the shops.

Explain the difference between needs and wants. Show how goods and services were used to satisfy needs and wants in the 18th century as compared to today. For example, the 18th-century lady might have wanted a dress. She would buy fabric, order the dress from the milliner, and often wait a month for the dress to be made. Today, the lady who wants a new dress goes to the department store or specialty dress shop and buys a ready-made dress with no waiting. Examples of other goods include books, furniture, paper, and shoes. What were the needs of colonists? (Medicine, basic clothing.) What were the wants of colonists? (Wigs, silver teapots)

Discuss other ways in which colonists could get the goods and services they needed and wanted. Many goods had to be imported from England because the English Parliament prohibited colonists from manufacturing many finished goods. Also, colonists produced a lot of the goods and services they needed and want-



ed at home. Trading with Native Americans or other neighbors was another way of acquiring what was needed. Why were some goods and services produced at home or traded when others were imported or produced in shops?

Encourage students to think about how producing goods has changed since Colonial times. Help the students see the impact of technology (phone, FAX, internet, U.S. mail) on the process and length of time involved. Ask the students if all the goods and services produced then are still produced now. For example, we still have pharmacists (although we don't call them apothecaries), but we don't have many wheelwrights. Ask the students why they think this has changed.

Ask the students, in groups of three, to research 18th-century crafts and services and demonstrate their knowledge through a presentation to the class. For example, they could create a poster on bootmaking including information such as why people needed or wanted

boots. What resources did bootmaking require? How has the production of boots changed?

Day 3

Tell the class that today they'll learn about money used in the 18th century. They will "become" 18th-century consumers, purchasing goods and services in the Williamsburg marketplace.

Display the chart showing the names of coins and their values. Distribute **HANDOUT 1, Colonial Coins and Their Values**. Discuss the origins of the various coins and why they would be in circulation in the colony. (People brought coins to the colony from England, Spain, France, Holland, and Portugal.) Why aren't there any "Virginia" coins? (The colonists weren't allowed to make any and they couldn't import money from England.)

Explain to the class that they are going to participate in an activity to become familiar with Colonial coins and their values as well as items





Colonial shoppers would have purchased.

On the board or on poster board, write the items for sale and prices (see **HANDOUT 1, For Sale**). Have the students create a shopping list, based on the discussion of needs and wants on the previous day, and a bag of pretend Colonial coins. Help the students form partnerships to take turns buying the items on their shopping list, selling, and making change. Ask the students to record their experience on **HANDOUT 2, Colonial Shopping Spree**. When everyone has had a chance to play both roles, gather the class together for a discussion of purchases and comparison of worksheets. What did they buy?



What shops did the goods come from? How did their shopping lists differ from shopping lists of today? What might the colonists have thought about the coins we use?

Day 4

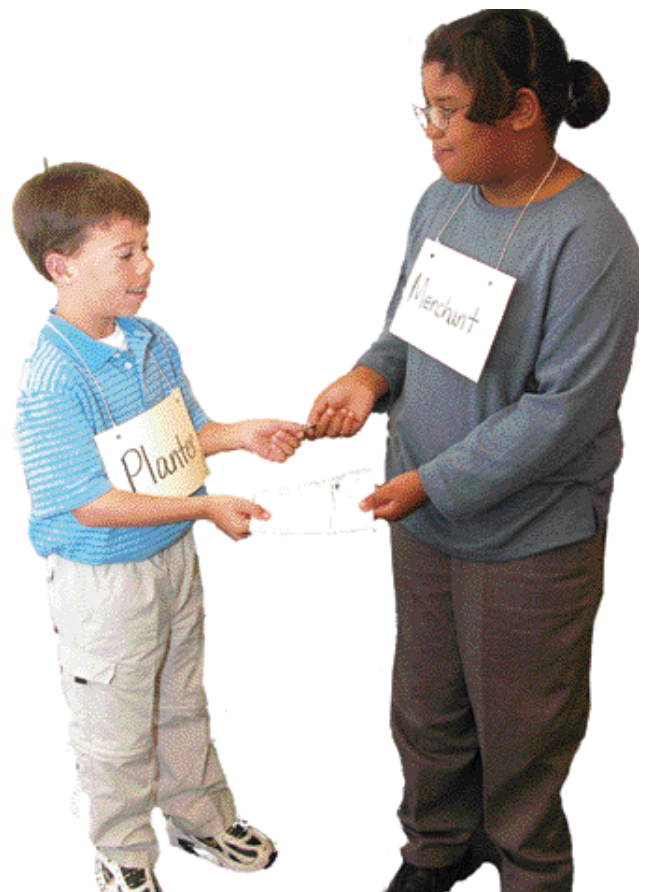
Divide the students into groups. Ask each group to present a demonstration or poster and report the group's findings about 18th-century shops, money, goods, and services in Colonial Virginia. Proudly display the findings in the classroom.

Conclusion

Children love to learn through simulations, role play, and hands-on tasks. By participating in creative activities, children obtain a solid understanding of economics concepts and gain an appreciation for the producers and consumers of the 18th century.

Colonial Background

After Jamestown burned in 1676 and again in 1698, the capital of the Virginia Colony was moved to Middle Plantation. Renamed Williamsburg, it became the capital. A well-planned town sprang up, and by 1750 Williamsburg had become the most important city in the Virginia Colony. Williamsburg was a major business center, where tobacco planters, farmers, craftsmen, shippers, and merchants came to buy, sell, and trade.





Williamsburg was the capital, and therefore the political center of the Colony. Government affairs were conducted there, and laws made and enforced in the court affected everyone in the Virginia Colony and beyond.

During the 1760s, Great Britain placed a number of taxes on the American Colonies. The Stamp Act of 1765 required Americans to buy stamps and place them on all official documents and newspapers. Taxes were also put on paper, molasses, tea, and other items that were imported into the Colonies. The taxes angered the colonists because they felt the taxes were unfair. Laws banned the colonists from buying many items from non-British nations.

Although there were never more than a handful of extremely wealthy plantation owners in Colonial Virginia, these were the people who held the most power. Most plantations specialized in the production of tobacco. As plantations were built along rivers, ships could anchor at private docks. Tobacco was loaded onto the ships for exportation to England by merchants who would sell it there. Both plantation owners and merchants profited from the sale of tobacco.

Plantation owners imported many items from England, not only because the quality was superior to products manufactured in Virginia, but also because they liked to copy the lifestyle of the wealthy English aristocrats.

In order to produce profitable tobacco crops, many farmers and plantation owners used slave labor. Slaves were utilized for the planting, harvesting, packing, and delivering of the crop for shipping.

Eighteenth-century colonists prospered because of their hard work and abundant natural resources. Skilled craftsmen, on plantations and in towns, produced increasingly fine quality goods and services. Williamsburg became the commercial center of Virginia, and business people came from all over Virginia as well as from other colonies to buy, sell, and trade merchandise.

Economic Concepts

Capital Resources Resources made and used to produce goods and services, for example, tools and machinery.

Coin A flat, typically round, piece of metal with an official stamp, used as money.

Consumer A person who uses goods and services.

Goods Objects that satisfy people's wants and needs.

Human Resources Quantity and quality of human efforts directed toward producing goods and services.

Money Anything widely accepted as final payment for goods and services.

Natural Resources Resources that are present without human intervention; land, water.

Needs The desire for goods or services that are generally considered required for everyday life, such as food, housing, education, medicine.

Producer A person who makes goods or provides services.

Services Work done for a customer other than manufacturing; includes legal services, medical services, entertainment, etc.

Wants Desires that can be satisfied by consuming a good, service, or leisure activity.



HANDOUT 1

Colonial Coins and Their Values

Coin	Value
Spanish Peso	5 shillings
French Louis d'or	1 pound
English Shilling	1 shilling
Portuguese Johannes - "Joe"	2 pounds
Dutch Gulden	2 shillings

For Sale

Sugar	1 shilling
Cornmeal	2 pence
Apples	2 shillings/bushel
Oranges	3 shillings/doz.
Men's Hats	10 shillings
Ladies' and Girls' Caps	4 shillings
Ribbons	1 shilling
Lace	4 shillings
Knitting Needles	4 shillings
Tobacco	1 shilling
Clay Pipe	2 shillings
Inkwell	5 shillings
Ink Powder	5 pence
Soap	2 shillings
Dice	4 pence
Marbles	4 pence
Playing Cards	7 pence
Whistle	6 pence
Ball and Cup Toy	8 pence
Candles	1 shilling each
Seal and Sealing Wax	10 shillings
Nails	8 shillings/pound

12 pence = 1 shilling

20 shillings = 1 pound

