Overview:

As part of a Virginia Studies curriculum, students are required to understand the role that Virginia played in the early development of our nation. Students will understand the driving factors behind the initial colonization of the North American continent by the British. Students will look at pieces of the Virginia Company's charter to understand why the British government decided to begin the colonization process.

Prior to this unit students have learned about the geography of Virginia and the early inhabitants of Virginia. This is important because it is the interactions with the Native Americans in the area (esp. the Powhatans) that really ensured the survival of the colonists. In the long run it also ensured cultural conflict and backlash, but without the knowledge that the colonists gained from the Powhatans, they wouldn't have had enough food to survive. Students will explore this relationship with documents that detail the colonists’ interaction, including George Percy's journal.

The geography of the initial colonization process is also set up in the prior unit. Students will learn that the colonists explored the Chesapeake Bay region, settled on the James River on a peninsula, and were in the coastal plain region. These are all terms that the students will build on based on their previous learning experience. Students will compare and contrast what they have learned about the current day region using maps (esp. John Smith's) from that era.

Historical Background:

The early beginnings of America are rooted in trial and hardship. The Spanish had begun colonizing the South American continent almost 100 years before the English became involved. They had used the exploitation of the Native peoples that they encountered to expand their empire. It is only through the fluke of the Spanish Armada being defeated by the British Navy and Sir Francis Drake that the reign of Spanish naval power came to an end. With the defeat of the Armada in 1588 it becomes more feasible for England to become involved in the Imperial Enterprise.

Britain's first attempts at colonization were failures. Attempting to establish colonies in present day North Carolina three times, Sir Walter Raleigh eventually gave up after the last wave of colonists disappeared without a trace. It wasn't for almost 20 years that another such venture was attempted. With the rise of the stock system and corporations
in Europe rose the Virginia Company. This company's goal was to establish a British colony in North America for profit. The investors were looking for the fabled wealth that the Spanish had found, an easier way to Asia, and a source of raw materials. The king was looking for a place to sell goods and a way to prevent France and Spain from monopolizing the continent. This led to the drafting of the Virginia Charter in 1606, and the setting sail in December of that year of colonists bound for the New World.

The colonists’ initial experiences in the New World were appalling. Having few supplies and not enough willing people to work to provide food, the colonists starved to death in droves. In addition, the location of the fort was on a brackish river, and they were dying of salt water poisoning and mosquito-carried diseases. Lastly, the poor leadership of the colonists and the insatiable lust for easy gold led to almost mutinous relationships among the colonists. In addition, the first winter that the colonists were there has proven to be one of the coldest in Virginia's history.

Jamestown was initially saved by the leadership of John Smith. After befriending Pocahontas, daughter of the Powhatan, or leader of the Powhatan federation, a shaky alliance was formed. The Natives shared food with the colonists, taught them to grow corn and tobacco, and how to find other food sources in the area. The relationship was tenuous at best, but it helped to ensure the survival of a few colonists. John Smith also instituted martial law, mandating that any colonist that didn't work wouldn't be allowed to eat. After John Smith was injured and had to leave Virginia, things became even grimmer. The stores of food that the colonists had grown under his leadership were destroyed by rats and mold, and the alliance with the Powhatans disintegrated. The Starving Time (the winter of 1609-1610) included such horrific acts as cannibalism and the eating of corpses. Many colonists deserted to the Natives as well. With only about 60 some colonists left, they decided to abandon the fort. As the colonists were leaving with Sir Thomas Gates (who had arrived with new colonists), they were stopped by the arrival of Lord De LaWarr and provisions. The arrival of the new colonists (including John Rolfe) and provisions allowed the failing colony to begin again.

In 1612, John Rolfe began experimenting with Caribbean tobacco, which was sweeter than the traditional Native American tobacco. This became an important commodity, and was even grown in the streets. This ensured a cash crop for the colony. New arrivals of indentured servants, and eventually slaves and women in 1619-20 allowed the colony to feel some type of permanency.

Finally, in 1619, the Virginia General Assembly met for the first time. This was a combination of the Governor's council and elected representatives, called Burgesses, and is the first example of representative government in present-day United States. This institution, though in a different form, is still in existence today.

Timeline for Teacher Reference:

1492: Columbus discovers the North and South American continents while attempting to find a western route to Asia
1585: Sir Walter Raleigh attempts to create a colony in "Virginia" (present-day North Carolina). The colony mysteriously disappears.
1588: Spanish Armada is defeated by England's Navy
1606: King James grants a charter to the Virginia Company
1607: Jamestown Colony is founded in Virginia
1607-1608: Freezing Time
1608-1609: Starving Time
1609: Captain Newport arrives with new colonists and supplies
1610: John Rolfe begins experimenting with new tobacco in Virginia
1613: Pocahontas converts to Christianity
1614: Pocahontas marries John Rolfe
1619: House of Burgesses, The Virginia General Assembly, meets for the first time, and the first Africans arrive in Virginia as indentured servants
1620: The Bride Ship arrives in Virginia
1676: Bacon's Rebellion
1699: Capital is moved from Jamestown to Williamsburg

**Major Understanding:**

Jamestown was the first permanent English settlement. The colonists struggled to survive and the Native Americans in the area helped them. It is only through the knowledge gained from the Powhatans and the interactions of the colonists and the natives that the colonists were able to survive.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

1. Use primary documents, including maps, tables, and diaries to understand the historical importance of the Powhatans to the survival of Jamestown. In order to do this, students will learn:
   a. Why England chose to establish a colony in Virginia
   b. Why the colonists chose the location of the Jamestown fort
   c. About the hardships faced by the colonists
   d. Why the colonists eventually turned to slave labor for survival.

**Standards of Learning:**

**Skills**

VS.1 The student will develop skills for historical and geographical analysis including the ability to:

   a) Identify and interpret artifacts and primary and secondary source documents to understand events in history;
c) Compare and contrast historical events;
d) Draw conclusions and make generalizations;
g) Interpret historical ideas and events from different historical perspectives
i) Analyze and interpret maps to explain relationships among landforms, water features, and historical events.

Content

VS.3 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the first permanent English settlement in America by:

a) Explaining the reasons for English colonization;
b) Describing how geography influenced the decision to settle at Jamestown;
c) Identifying the importance of the charters of the Virginia Company of London in establishing the Jamestown settlement;
d) Identifying the importance of the Virginia Assembly (1619) as the first representative legislative body in English America;
e) Identifying the importance of the arrival of Africans and women to the Jamestown settlement;
f) Describing the hardships faced by settlers at Jamestown and the changes that took place to ensure survival;
g) Describing the interactions between the English settlers and the Powhatan people, including the contributions of the Powhatans to the survival of the settlers.