

Early Jamestown: Why Did So Many Colonists Die?



Overview: In May 1607, about 110 Englishmen arrived at the mouth of a great bay on the coast of Virginia. It was to be the first permanent English colony in what is now the United States. The first years of settlement were not easy. This Mini-Q asks why so many colonists died.

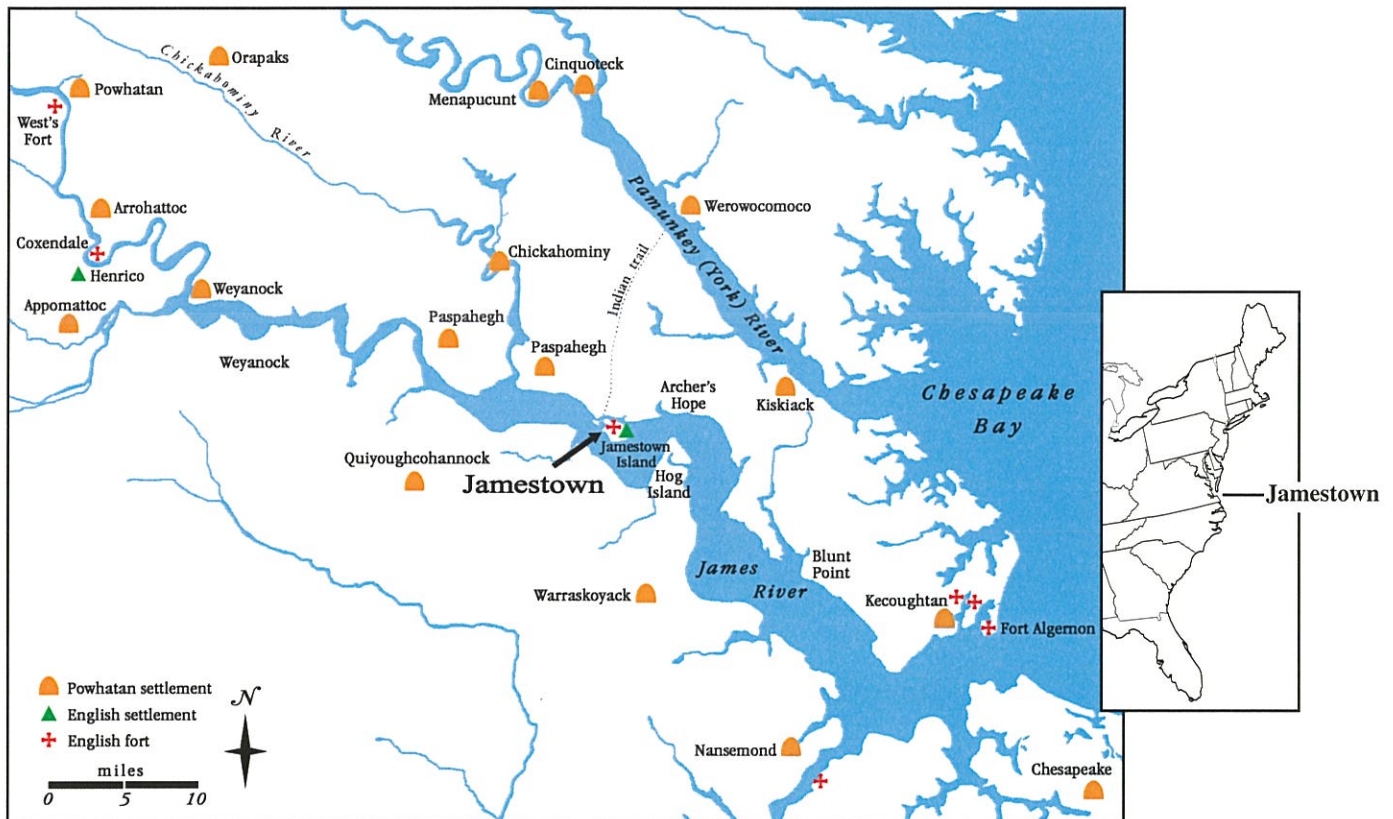
The Documents:

- Document A: Jamestown's Environment
- Document B: Rainfall in Jamestown
- Document C: Occupation List of the First Settlers
- Document D: Grain Trade With the Powhatans
- Document E: Chronology of English Mortality

Directions: Examine the map, and with a partner, discuss the answers to the questions below.
Be ready to share your thinking with the class.

Source: James Horn, *A Land as God Made It*, Basic Books, A Member of Perseus Books Group, New York, 2005.
Drawn by Rebecca L. Wren.

Principle Powhatan and English Settlements, 1607-1611



Questions

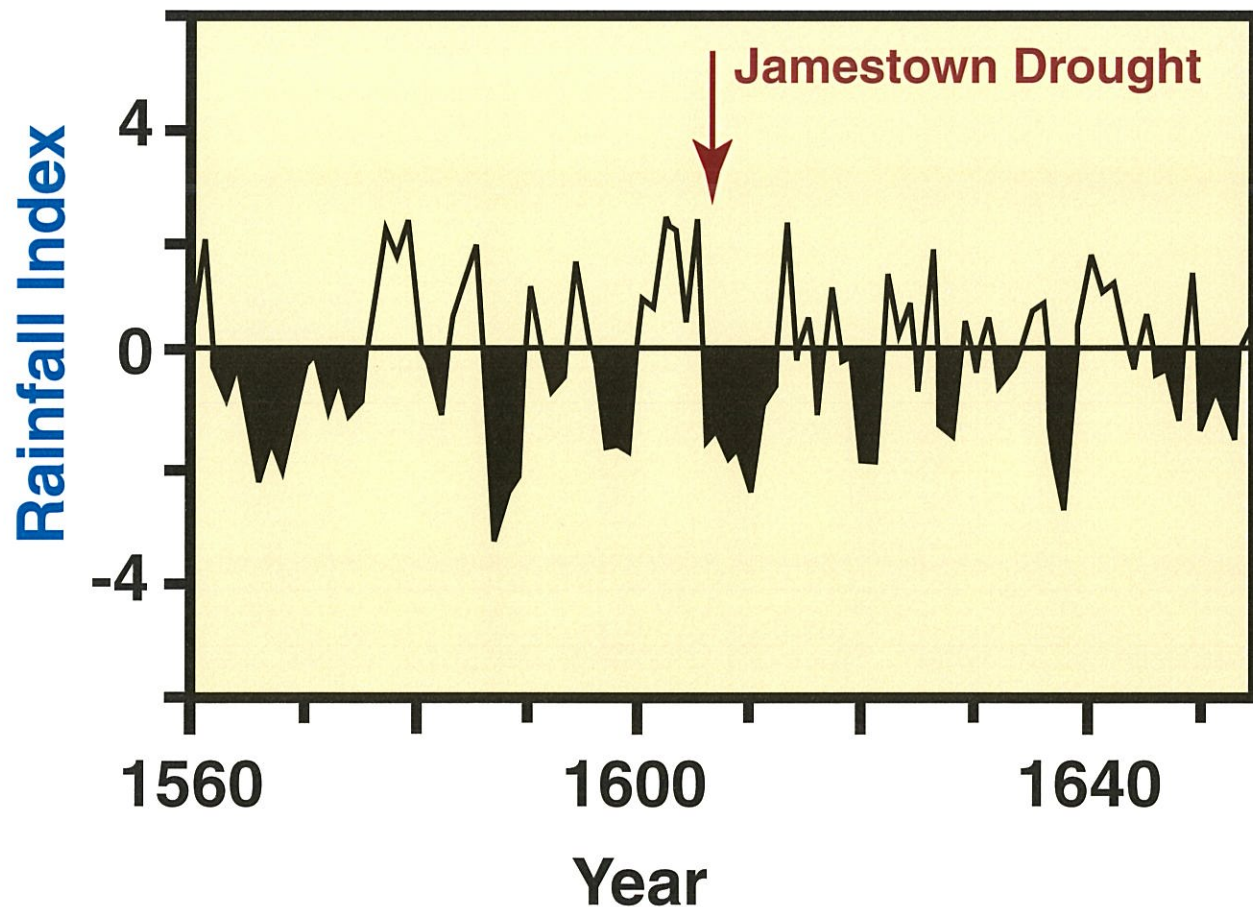
1. In what modern-day state is this region located?
2. What can you infer about who lived in this area before the arrival of the English?
3. Why do you think the English would choose to settle here?
4. Is there any evidence that the English expected trouble?
5. Is there any evidence that the English may have been too confident?
6. Just by looking at this map, can you make any predictions why so many colonists died at Jamestown?



Roanoke: Arrival, 1590. The Granger Collection, New York

Source: Adapted from "The Lost Colony and Jamestown Droughts," *Science*, April 24, 1998.

Note: This study determined rainfall amounts by examining tree-ring patterns in old cypress trees growing near Jamestown. Every year leaves a growth ring inside the trunk of a tree. A wider ring indicates plenty of rainfall and good growth. A narrow ring usually means less rain. "0" on the chart means average tree-ring size and therefore average rainfall.



First and Second Jamestown Ship Lists

Occupation	Original Settlers May 1607	1st Resupply January 1608
Council (governors)	6	1
Gentlemen	47	28
Labourers	12	21
Cooper (barrel maker)	0	1
Carpenter	4	0
Blacksmith	1	1
Sailer (sail maker)	1	0
Barber	1	0
Bricklayer	1	0
Mason	1	0
Tobacco pipe maker	0	1
Tailor	1	6
Drummer	1	0
Preacher	1	0
Boyes	4	0
Jeweler	0	1
Refiners and goldsmiths	0	4
Gunsmith	0	1
Perfumer (wig maker)	0	1
Apothecaries (druggists)	0	2
Surgeon	1	1
Occupation unknown	28	51
TOTAL MALE	110	120
TOTAL FEMALE	0	0

Note: A gentleman was a person of wealth who was not used to working with his hands.

Source: Adapted from John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles, Book III*, 1624.

Chronology of English Mortality in Virginia, 1607-1610

	1607	Total Population
14 May	104 colonists disembark at Jamestown Island	104
26 May	2 die in first Indian attack on Fort James	102
June-Aug.	At least 3 more die in Indian ambushes	99
Aug.-Oct.	Summer sickness kills half the colonist	49
Nov.	Capt. George Kendall is executed for mutiny	48
Dec.	Pamunkeys kill 2 colonists in capturing Capt. John Smith, and, at year's end, the English in Virginia "were but fortie in all"	40
1608		
2 Jan.	Capt. Newport arrives with 100 men (1st Supply)	140
10 Apr.	Capt. Nelson brings 20 in Phoenix; 2 depart	158
7 Sept.	Smith reports "many dead, some sick"	130
8 Oct.	Newport arrives with 70 colonists (2nd Supply)	200
1609-1610		
Winter 1608-09	Only 8 die during well-provisioned winter	192
Mid-Jan.	11 colonists die in boating accident	181
Summer	Disease returns, 100 at Jamestown "sickened and half the number died"	131
11-18 August	6 ships bring some 250 people (3rd Supply)	381
Aug.-Oct.	Of 120 men stationed near the falls, the Indians kill "neere halfe"	330
Aug.-Oct.	Of 100 men at Nansemond, Indians kill 50	280
Nov.-May 1610	Powhatan's siege of Jamestown (the "Starving Time") kills some 110 colonists from famine and disease; another 33 slain; 37 desert	90

Source: Adapted from J. Frederick Fausz, "An Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides: England's First Indian War, 1609-1614," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, January 1990.