*Jamestown and the Growth of Virginia*

1607 was the year it all started

‘Farewell to ye Englishmen’, said as they departed

Across the vast sea, the great Atlantic Ocean

Towards the unknown land that had caught their emotion

Now the land of itself, people had been here before

For in 1492, Columbus discovered the shore

Still, plenty more came, in the decades thereafter

Rewriting the history, thereby closing a chapter

For it the natives who had been here, for 1000s of years

Yet the next couple centuries would be centuries of tears

Slaughtered, and massacred, lives filled with misery,

So many lives lost, mainly due to disease

But 1607 was a new beginning indeed

For a new group of Europeans from across the vast sea

The journey was tiresome, great dangers faced each day

Until their arrival at the Chesapeake Bay

Up the river of James, they continued to sail

Named after the King, who allowed this to prevail

Upon leaving the boat, the men established their ground

England’s first permanent settlement; a place called Jamestown

144 men arrived, all with hopes of great riches!

Unaware of the troubles, the tribulations, the glitches

Indeed, as they arrived upon the Jamestown shore,

They had no idea of the nightmares in store.

Unprepared to work, over half the men died

There were plenty of conflicts with neighboring tribes

Almost no food at all, for the sake of survival

The Nightmare in Jamestown, so encumbered with trials

‘Starving time’ was the time that put lives at risk

Until the emergence of one Captain John Smith

‘If you don’t work, you don’t eat’, a harsh policy, indeed

But despite the man’s harshness, it was what they would need

It was Smith’s leadership that proved to be in need

Just as was John Rolfe’s discovery of the tobacco seed

A seed which grew great in the rich, fertile soil,

To those who farmed the crop, would now go the spoils

Plantation life in Virginia, soon became common ground,

And with it, the need for labor began to compound  
At first indentured servitude had landowners in cheers,  
“I’ll pay for your passage, if you work seven years.”

So indentured servants came, in hopes of new land,  
Unable to pay their passage, they’d work for another man  
At the end of seven years, they would be sent on their own,  
To farm their own land, and to build their own home

By 1619, as plantations grew even more large,

A new system of labor began to take charge,  
For something was developing—triangular trade,  
Which included America’s first import of slaves

The middle passage was the journey, made by so many  
Who once had their freedom, but no longer had any,  
Sold in their shackles, their lives changed forever,  
To work for the white man and fulfill his endeavors

As the colony grew larger, it was necessary to create  
A government to make laws, to tax, to debate  
The House of Burgesses was created, to fulfill the order,  
Representatives would meet, from all county borders.

Two burgesses from each county must be elected,  
Male land owners over 17 were the ones to be selected,  
Raising taxes and creating laws, were the powers they held,  
The power of the wealthy, continued to swell

Though Jamestown’s fate could have been terrible, indeed,  
The colony was saved by John Rolfe’s tobacco seed,  
As time went by, it continued to grow great,  
Until it became one of the most powerful states.

***Key terms to know***: John Smith, John Rolfe, King James, Tobacco, “Don’t work, don’t eat,” disease, indentured servants, 1619, representative government, House of Burgesses, seven years

***Essential Questions to consider***:   
How did John Rolfe and John Smith contribute towards the survival of the Jamestown colony?  
How did indentured servitude differ from slavery?  
What were some of the things that made life in Jamestown so difficult?  
What is a representative government, and why would Virginia have needed that over a direct democracy?  
Who was eligible to be elected into the House of Burgesses?