

How did slavery and servitude impact status differently for colonial Virginians?

This learning experience will support students with primary source analysis and accompanying tasks to answer the compelling question.

Virginia Studies (grade 4/5)



Homann Erben, Anville, J. B. B. D. & Marchais, R. D. (1743) *Gvinea propria, nec non Nigritiae vel Terrae Nigrorum maximapars: geographis hodiernis dicta utraque Aethiopia inferior, & hujus quidem pars australis.* [Norimbergæ: Homannianorum Heredum] [Map]. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/96687096/>.

This 1743 map shows western Africa from the territory of present-day Gabon in the south to Niger, Mali, and Mauritania in the north. This decorated and colored map illustrates the dress, dwellings, and work of some Africans. The map also reflects the international interest in the African trade by the use of Latin, French, and Dutch place names. Many of the ports are identified as being controlled by the English (A for Anglorum), Dutch (H for Holland), Danish (D for Danorum), or French (F). The map was published in Nuremberg, Germany, and it is based on an earlier work by the great French mapmaker Jean Baptiste d'Anville (1697-1782). The illustration at the lower left depicts an African village.

Task Overview:

During this learning experience, students will explore the ways in which slavery became codified into law and tied to race through a series of laws in colonial Virginia.

Targeted SOLs:

VS.4 The student will apply history and social science skills to understand life in the Virginia colony by

- c. Distinguishing between indentured servants and enslaved people, including how European countries traded for, transported, and sold Africans to be enslaved to British North America beginning in the 17th century
- d. Describing the laws that established race-based enslavement

Unpacked Standards:

Students will know (facts)	Students will understand that... (concepts)	Students will be able to (Do) (skills)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Slavery was not an official, codified system in Virginia until the mid-1600s. New laws were written during that time to establish different treatment of people based on the color of their skin. ● Indentured servitude differentiated from slavery in that servants worked for a period of time and were then free to leave and in some cases be compensated. ● In 1705, another series of laws established race-based enslavement, where people were held in bondage for life and bought and sold as property. 	<p>(From Learning for Justice) Hassan, J. K., Meredith, M. L., Margaret, N., Sarah, S. B., Christina, S., & Ebony, T. E. (n.d.). <i>Teaching Hard History: A K-5 Framework for Teaching American Slavery</i>. Learning for Justice. https://www.splcenter.org/presscenter/splc-project-expands-framework-teaching-american-slavery-k-5-students/.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Slavery and race are intimately connected. Slavery came to be associated with blackness, and people developed racist ideas to justify enslaving people of color. ● Enslavers adopted and spread false beliefs about racial inferiority, including many that still impact us today. ● Ideas about race and 	<p>Analyze information sources to distinguish between indentured servants and enslaved people.</p> <p>Use information sources, perspectives, and narratives to analyze the laws that established race-based enslavement.</p>

	skin color developed over time to justify the system of slavery.	
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Instructor Directions:

This learning experience is designed for approximately 45-70 minutes of instructional time.

Teachers may choose to facilitate this learning experience over the course of 2 instructional periods. Additionally, the teacher may choose to consider alternative structures for facilitating the learning experience: Gallery Walk, Jigsaw, collaborative group, etc.

Teacher Background Information:

Virginia history provides a unique lens into questions about how the system of slavery in the 13 colonies and, eventually, the United States came to be. Through a series of significant laws passed in the Virginia colony, historians can see the formation of ideas about race and how the status of Africans would be determined. Teachers are invited to read more details in this article about [Colonial Virginia](#) (the section with the subheading *Slavery* speaks most to these details).

Culturally Responsive Considerations

Teaching about Slavery

The cruel institution of slavery, which was once legal in Virginia, remains a sensitive topic and can be challenging for teachers and students. However, Virginia’s past and present *cannot* be understood without careful study of the context, impact, and legacy of slavery. The frameworks linked below will support your understanding of the origins of American slavery, the cultures of enslaved Africans, the hardships that slaves faced over hundreds of years, and the resistance that led to the abolition of slavery in and beyond Virginia. For additional guidance and resources, go to:

- [A Framework for Teaching American Slavery \(Teaching Tolerance\)](#)
- [Tongue-Tied - Tips for teaching about slavery \(Teaching Tolerance\)](#)

Important Note about Language:

Students may encounter the use of the word “Negro” in primary sources. “Negro” is an outdated term once used to refer to Black or African American people. For some students, this term will be completely new; for others, it may evoke the history of past and present racial injustice. Consider what supports or scaffolds your particular students might need when they encounter words in sources.

Part 1: Staging the Question (Activation/Hook)

- 👉 Teachers can use this [slide deck](#) to view and present information sources.
- 👉 Students will use the [Investigation Journal](#) to document their thinking.

1. Students will view the map [image](#). In small groups or pairs, students will discuss answers to at least 2 of the following questions (from the [Library of Congress “Analyzing Maps” tool](#)):
 - a. What on the map looks strange or unfamiliar?
 - b. What place or places does the map show?
 - c. What does this map tell you about what the people who made it knew and what they didn’t know?
 - d. What do you see, think, or wonder about the image in the bottom left corner of the map?
2. The teacher will lead a brief discussion of the map image, providing select context:
 - a. From Library of Congress:
 - *During the 1700s when the Atlantic slave trade was flourishing, West Africans accounted for approximately two-thirds of the African captives imported into the Americas. The coastal ports where these Africans were assembled, and from where they were exported, are located on this mid-18th-century map extending from present-day Senegal and Gambia on the northwest to Gabon on the southeast.*
 - *This decorated and colored map illustrates the dress, dwellings, and work of some Africans. The map also reflects the international interest in the African trade by the use of Latin, French, and Dutch place names. Many of the ports are identified as being controlled by the English (A for Anglorum), Dutch (H for Holland), Danish (D for Danorum), or French (F).*
 - b. Use this as an opportunity to contextualize and remind students that Africans had rich civilizations and meaningful lived experiences, skills, etc. prior to enslavement

Part 2: Exploration & Source Analysis

👉 [Use the slide deck to view and present information sources.](#)

- The teacher will present the supporting question: **How was indentured servitude different from slavery?**
- The teacher will present two different runaway advertisements from the [Virginia Gazette](#) with the following guiding questions:
 - What clues can tell historians whether this person was looking for a runaway servant or a runaway slave?
 - Possible answers:
 - The word “slave” is explicitly used
 - The word *mulatto* ([define for students](#) - a person of mixed race who has at least one African ancestor, typically a grandparent or parent; considered offensive to many today)
 - The word “servant” is explicitly used, and their job/profession is listed (“Taylors” - *sic*)
 - What kind of details are included when the runaways are being described?
 - Hair textures and colors (e.g., “...long, bushy hair)
 - Skin tone or color (e.g., “mulatto”)
 - Details about size (e.g., “large, well-made)
 - Clothing
- The teacher will provide necessary context in a brief discussion, noting that running away was common for both indentured servants and enslaved people, and that these kinds of runaway ads and the ensuing arrangements, rewards, and penalties give historians a lot of details about how these two categories of laborers were thought of and treated in 17th and 18th century Virginia ([more teacher background info](#)).
- Using the provided [Investigation Journal and guiding questions](#) , students will examine three sets of primary sources and excerpts:
 - **Source 1:** [Indentured Servitude contract for Williams Buckland](#)
 - **Source Set 2:** [John Punch Case](#) - Detailing different penalties for running away for enslaved man, John Punch, versus the indentured servants with whom he escaped; [Selections of runaway ads](#)
 - **Source Set 3:** [Timeline excerpt](#) (differentiating white indentured servants from Black people who were enslaved for life); Timeline of Virginia Laws (source materials linked [here](#) and [here](#)).
- Students will use the [Circle of Viewpoints](#) Thinking Routine to process what they have found and analyzed in the primary source sets and how they responded to the prompts in their Investigation Journal.

Part 3: Demonstration of Learning/Assessment

- Students will respond to the compelling question using one of three formats:
 - **Museum Exhibit**
 - Choose 1-3 primary source images and at least three primary source quotes (can be summarized) to describe how life was different for indentured servants and enslaved people, and how the laws in Virginia slowly defined slavery as permanent and race-based.
 - **Podcast (record via Flipgrid or another chosen platform):**
 - Choose 3-5 primary sources (quotes, excerpts, or summaries) to analyze how life was different for indentured servants and enslaved people, and how the laws in Virginia slowly defined slavery as permanent and race-based. Create a script that includes an introduction, scripted questions, and responses that use primary source evidence.
 - **Notes from the Field: Report**
 - As a historian, you have just completed your investigation and now must share your findings with other scholars. Use the [Claim-Evidence-Reasoning graphic organizer](#) to plan and build your report. Develop 1-3 questions you'd like to ask your fellow historians to help you find more evidence for your report or answer lingering questions.
- [Rubric and Criteria](#)

Resources

Student Resources (linked)

- *The Virginia gazette*. [Image]. (1738). Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84024739/1738-09-29/ed-1/>.
- Sone, Gyles. *Contract and recommendation for William Buckland* (1755; 1759). *Encyclopedia Virginia*. <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/primary-documents/contract-and-recommendation-for-william-buckland-1755-1759>.
- General Court. *General court responds to runaway servants and slaves* (1640). *Encyclopedia Virginia*.

Teacher Resources (linked)

- Jeffries, H. K., McCoy, M.L., Newell, M., Shear, S.B., Snyder, C., & Thomas, E.E. (n.d.). *Teaching hard history: A K-5 framework for teaching American slavery*. Learning for Justice. <https://www.splcenter.org/presscenter/splc-project-expands-framework-teaching-american-slavery-k-5-students/>.
- Wolfe, B. (2025). *Colonial Virginia*. *Encyclopedia Virginia*. <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/colonial-virginia/>.
- Costa, T.. *Runaway enslaved people and indentured servants in colonial Virginia*.

<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/primary-documents/general-court-responses-to-runaway-servants-and-slaves-1640>.

- Costa, T. (2007). *Runaway from the subscriber: Runaway slave advertisements 1745-1775: A selection*. In *The Geography of Slavery in Virginia*. National Humanities Center. <https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text8/virginia runawayads.pdf>
- *Virginia records timeline* (n.d.). In *Thomas Jefferson Papers, 1606 to 1827*. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/thomas-jefferson-papers/articles-and-essays/virginia-records-timeline-1553-to-1743/1640-to-1699/>.
- Hening, W. W. (1809). *The statutes at large: Being a collection of all the laws of Virginia, from the first session of the legislature, in the year 1619*. In *Virtual Jamestown*. <https://www.virtualjamestown.org/laws1.html#10>
- General Assembly. “*An act concerning Servants and Slaves*” (1705). In *Encyclopedia Virginia*. <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/primary-documents/an-act-concerning-servants-and-slaves-1705>.

(2020). *Encyclopedia Virginia*.

<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/runaway-slaves-and-servants-in-colonial-virginia>.

- Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education (2019). *Project Zero’s thinking routines toolbox*. <https://pz.harvard.edu/resources/circle-of-viewpoints>.

