

# Comparison of American Colonies

## General Background

Colonial development along the eastern seaboard was strongly influenced by the geography of the regions settled and the ethnic makeup of the colonists. Generally, the colonies may be best understood as being divided in the following way: New England (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island), Middle (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware), and Southern (The Carolinas, Georgia, Maryland, Virginia). While these colony groups had many things in common, they also had their own distinctive features. Colonists brought traditions from their home countries and developed new ways of life in North America as they responded to the unique demands of climate, economics, and belief systems. The following is an overview of the unique characteristics of the 3 different colony groups.

### New England

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- The first colonists were Separatist Puritans (Pilgrims).
- They settled in New England to gain religious freedom.
- The religious freedom they sought was not readily granted to others outside their faith.
- Most colonists grew their own food.
- The soil was too thin and rocky and the climate too harsh for the colonists to grow cash crops.
- They turned to fishing, lumbering, fur trading, and metal working to nourish their economy.
- These items were sold to other colonies and to England.
- New England colonies also participated in the selling of slaves to the southern colonies.
- Most luxury goods had to be bought from England.

### Middle

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- The first colonists were Dutch and settled at the mouth of the Hudson River.
- Their goal was to farm in order to make money.
- When the English took “New Amsterdam” from the Dutch, they called it New York.
- Quakers seeking religious freedom settled Pennsylvania.
- Land was more fertile than in New England and promoted farming of cash crops: corn/wheat/fruit.
- An abundance of rivers allowed for transportation of goods between the colonies.
- Mills to grind grains developed and supported local economies.
- Relationships with Native Americans were better in these colonies than in the others.
- This area was also the most ethnically diverse.

### Southern

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- The first colonists were English and settled in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607.
- Their goal was to find gold in order to obtain wealth as rapidly as possible.
- This goal was not obtained. The Jamestown settlement was almost abandoned.
- John Rolfe discovered that tobacco grew well in the southern climate.
- Tobacco and rice became the major cash crops of the southern colonies.
- These cash crops were grown on large plantations of land that needed large numbers of workers.
- Indentured servants were first used. As their numbers dwindled, slaves were used.
- A small number of people owned large amounts of land.
- Religion and religious freedom were not large concerns for most southern colonists.
- In 1619 the House of Burgesses was formed (the first example of representative government in America.)

# Elementary School – Colony Posters

## Introduction

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Two helpful resources are *Sarah Morton's Day* and *Samuel Eaton's Day* by Kate Waters. These two books detail the life of a real child from the early days of Plymouth Plantation.

## Objectives

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- ▶ cite 2 unique characteristics of each of the three colony groups.

## Vocabulary

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New England

Middle

Southern

colony

## Primary Source Reading Materials

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- “Diary of Anna Green Winslow,” 1772

## Activities/Procedures

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1. This activity will be most effective in cooperative learning groups of 3-5 students; assign each group a colony or a colony group (New England, Middle, Southern).
2. Students should be provided with library time and/or supplemental material in order to identify the following information about their colony or colony group:
  - Name of colony or colony group
  - Date(s) settled
  - Name of colony founder
  - Geographic features
  - Major cities
  - Climate
  - Major cash crops
  - Where the colonists came from and why they came
  - Religious influences
  - Role and views of slavery
  - How the colony was governed
  - Any additional information students find interesting or relevant
3. Posters may be made using pictures and illustrations of the information obtained in Step 2. These posters should be accompanied by oral reports from group members.
4. Alternative: Teacher may also present the information to younger students and outline it on the blackboard.

## Extension Activity

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Once students have given a report on their colony group, they can present an oral report summarizing their findings or produce a play that dramatizes leaving the “old country” and arriving in a new one.

# Middle School and High School – “Jigsaw” Research

## Introduction

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### A Note on the “Jigsaw” Method

“Jigsaw” is a term used for one type of cooperative learning. During a jigsaw, students become experts in a particular area of a larger topic being studied. When students have acquired the essential information about their portion of the topic, they come together and share information, concepts, etc. with other students who have become experts in other areas of the topic being studied. This is an effective way to have students learn from one another and break down the teaching and learning of a large topic into manageable learning tasks.

## Objectives

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- ▶ summarize the similarities and differences between the American colonies, relating to economics, politics, and social life.

## Vocabulary

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commerce                      cash crop

## Primary Source Reading Materials

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- “Report on Pennsylvania,” William Penn, 1685
- “The Founding of Georgia,” James Oglethorpe, ca. 1732
- “Diary of Anna Green Winslow,” 1772

## Activities/Procedures

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1. Divide the class into three groups. One group will investigate and represent the New England Colonies, the second group will investigate and represent the Middle Colonies, and the third group will investigate and represent the Southern Colonies.
2. Each group should receive one of the primary source reading materials.
3. Students should read their primary sources and any supplemental materials that have been made available. Have each group identify the following information about their colony group:
  - Name of colony or colony group
  - Date(s) settled
  - Reason(s) settled
  - Geographic features
  - Climate
  - Major cash crops
  - Ethnic makeup of colonists
  - Religious influences
  - Role and views of slavery
  - How the colony was governed

4. Have the students “jigsaw” with triads of students — one from each group — getting together to discuss their different perspectives. Students should take notes as each person reports on the ten topics assigned in Step #3.
5. Finish with a general class discussion on the similarities and differences students found among the three colony groups.

### **Extension Activities - Middle School**

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Option 1: Using the information acquired from the primary source readings and supplementary research, have your students create one-page newsletters. Each newsletter should reflect the colonial characteristics of the New England colonies, the Middle colonies, or the Southern colonies. Articles should address weather conditions, local economics, religion, etc.

Option 2: Have students create thematic maps based on colonial geographic features, crops, religion, or climate.

### **Extension Activities - High School**

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Option 1: Choose one of the following colonial characteristics: geographic features, climate, or ethnicity/religion. Research one of these characteristics across all three colony groups and determine what role it played in the formation of each colony.

Option 2: Have a three-way debate between each of the colony groups about which group was the most essential to the development of the United States. Arguments should be structured with economic, political, religious, and geographic factors in mind. Arguments must be backed up with convincing evidence.

## **Newspaper in Education Activity**

### **What makes your hometown unique?**

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Read through the regional or local section of your newspaper. Find articles about your hometown or region. Make a list of the titles and subjects of each article that you read. Discuss with your teacher and classmates what makes your hometown or region unique. Is it industry? Weather? Sports? People? Make a list of your hometown’s traits.