

**Title:** Indentured Servants in Maryland

**Grade Level:** 4/5

**Topic:** United States History to 1790

**Lesson Duration:** 60 minutes



**Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC):**

**Economics Standard:** Students will develop economic reasoning to understand the historical development and current status of economic principles, institutions, and processes needed to be effective citizens, consumers, and workers participating in local communities, the nation, and the world.

4.A.4.b Explain the consequences of specialized work on interdependence, trade and economic growth in Colonial America (Grade 4)

**History Standard:** Students will examine significant ideas, beliefs, and themes; organize patterns and events, and analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time in Maryland, the United States, and around the world.

5.A.1.a Explain how and why the Maryland colony was established, including political and economic motives for coming to the New World (Grade 4)

5.B.2.a Describe the religious, political and economic motives of individuals who migrated to North America and the difficulties they encountered (Grade 5)

**Social Studies Skills and Process Standard:** Students shall use reading, writing, and thinking processes and skills to gain knowledge and understanding of political, historical, and current events using chronological and spatial thinking, economic reasoning, and historical interpretation, by framing and evaluating questions from primary and secondary sources.

6.F.1 Interpret information from primary and secondary sources (Grades 4 & 5)

**Objectives:**

- Students will analyze the motives of the indentured servants for migration to the colonies and how their migration resulted in economic growth for the colonies.
- Students will explain why people chose to become indentured servants
- Students will describe how the work of indentured servants led to colonial trade and economic growth.

**Materials**

**Teacher:**

- Transparency or large chart of “Early Advertising,” Resource Sheet 3.
- Transparency or chart of “Reasons for Migrating to the Colonies,” Resource Sheet 2
- Transparency of chart of “An Indentured Servant’s Contributions,” Resource Sheet 5

**Student:**

- One copy of “Indentured Servants,” Resource Sheet 1, pp. 1-2
- One copy of “Reasons for Migrating to the Colonies,” Resource Sheet 3
- One copy of “Who Were They?” Resource Sheet 4

- One copy of “An Indentured Servant’s Contributions,” Resource Sheet 5
- One copy of “Indentured Servants in Maryland,” Resource Sheet 6
- One copy of “Forty Dollar Reward,” Resource Sheet 7
- One copy of “A direction for choice of Servants.” Resource Sheet 8 (also available as the original document from Maryland State Archives: *Documents for the Classroom* MSA SC 2221-19-12-2 <http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/speccol/sc2200/sc2221/000019/000012/html/0000.html>)

## Lesson Development

**Motivation:** Find out if any students in the class have moved from a different place. Have the students identify some reasons why they moved. Then have students give reasons for why people might leave one country and move to another country. Display the vocabulary word **immigration**. Explain that the reasons why people move can be either a **pull**, a reason that makes someone want to move there, or a **push**, a reason that makes someone want to leave. Have students think of pushes that might make people leave their country, and pulls that might make people want to move to America.

### Procedures:

1. Have students think about the colonists who moved to America or the New World. For a minute or two, have students brainstorm some reasons why people long ago might have decided to migrate.
2. Display a transparency or large chart of the broadside/ad “Early Advertising,” Resource Sheet 3. This resource sheet is a copy of the original advertisement, which is a primary source. Have students identify the “pulls” to migrate presented on the ad.
3. Display a transparency or large chart of “Reasons for Migrating to the Colonies,” Resource Sheet 2 and record the reasons or “pulls” from the ad.
4. Have students identify people who might have wanted to move to Virginia and why they might decide to move. Then have students think about how much it might cost to travel across the ocean to the New World. Have students also think about the supplies someone might need to take along, and what goods you might need in the new colony. Discuss ways that supplies would be obtained by the settlers.
5. Ask students if all people would have the financial resources to pay for the trip and supplies. Then have students discuss how people who really wanted to leave and move to the new colony could pay for the trip. (Students might recall that the New England Company financed the Puritans.)
6. Introduce the vocabulary words, **indentured servant**. Discuss the meaning of servant and the kind of work they might perform. Then explain that **indentured** meant that a person had signed a contract to work for a “master”

for a given number of years to repay a debt. After the years of work were completed, the **indentured servant** was free. Tell students that this system of servitude was a way for poor people to move to America and pay for the trip and supplies they needed.

7. Have the class read “Indentured Servants,” Resource Sheet 1, p. 1, and highlight reasons why people wanted to leave England and migrate to the colonies. Have students identify the reasons as a “pull”, something that made the people want to come to the colonies, or a “push”, something that made the people want to leave their home. Record student responses on “Reasons for Migrating to the Colonies,” Resource Sheet 2. Have students circle the reasons that were related to economic issues, or financial reasons. Possible responses include owning land; escaping debts; getting a job; learning a trade; having food; getting clothes, tools and guns. For information related specifically to the Maryland colony, have students read “Indentured Servants,” Resource Sheet 1, p. 2 and highlight reasons for servants to choose to migrate to Maryland.

8. Have students think about indentured servants and what jobs they might have performed in the colonies. Then have students read “Who Were They?” Resource Sheet 4. Have students list some of the specialized jobs performed by these indentured servants. Have students discuss the importance of these specialized workers to the trade and economic growth of the colony by asking these questions.

*What goods or services did indentured servants provide for the colonists?*

*What resources did England want from the colonies?*

*What goods or services did England want from the colonies?*

*How did the colonies and England depend on each other?*

9. In small groups, have the students examine various primary sources about being an indentured servant. Each student in the group may read one or two of the documents and then discuss the information with the group. Distribute copies of the following Resource Sheets.

“A letter from John Chisholm to his mother and brother,” RS 6

“Forty Dollar Reward,” RS 7

“A direction for choice of servants,” RS 8

Have students highlight or use small sticky notes to identify ways that the servants were involved in producing goods or services for the colony and how these goods or services might have been traded.

12. Then have the group record the different goods and services that the servant produced on “An Indentured Servant’s Contributions,” Resource Sheet 5. Ask students to identify ways that their services or goods might have been traded and how their work contributed to the prosperity and economic growth of the colonies.

13. Display a transparency of “An Indentured Servant’s Contributions,” Resource Sheet 5. Have the groups share findings with the class and record key ideas on the class transparency.

**Closure:** Ask students to review some of the specialized work or trades in which the indentured servants worked. Have students describe the interdependent relationship between the colonies and England for settlers, workers, and resources. Have students review some ways that the indentured servant contributed to the economic growth and prosperity of the colonies.

**Assessment:**

In a journal or on lined paper, have students write a paragraph to explain how the indentured servants contributed to increased colonial trade and economic growth of the colony.

**Extension Activities**

- Have students interview someone in the community who has immigrated to the United States from another country or interview someone who has moved to their community from another place in the United States to find out the person’s reasons for moving. Then have students identify whether any of these reasons were economic motives similar to those of the colonial era. (Possible responses might include job opportunities, owning a home, make more money in a better job, or starting a business.)
- Have students examine the original documents, “A direction for choice of servant” MSA SC 2221-19-12, p. 1 and “The forme of binding a servant” MSA SC 2221-19-12, pp. 2-3, that are available from the Maryland State Archives: Education and Outreach, *Documents for the Classroom*: “The Strength of Our Diversity- Multiculturalism in Maryland History” at <http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/speccol/sc2200/sc2221/000019/000012/html/0000.html>.
- Have students read about John Halfhead, an indentured servant at St. Mary’s City, Maryland using teaching materials available at <http://www.stmaryscity.org/LearningActivities/Halfhead.htm>.
- Additional information and links to indentured servitude and early colonial life. <http://www.smcm.edu/academics/EdStudy/WebQuests/srrice/t-process.htm>

**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources:**

“Advertisement,” Primary Source #4 (AD/BROADSIDE), *Encountering Maryland, Vol. 2: Turning Points in History*. A Primary Source Kit from the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD

“Forty Dollar Reward,” An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broad­sides and Other Printed Ephemera, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

“A direction for choice of Servants,” and“ ‘The forme of a binding servant,’ 1635,”  
Maryland State Archives: Education and Outreach, *Documents for the  
Classroom*, “The Strength of Our Diversity-Multiculturalism in Maryland History”  
MSA SC 2221-19-12-2, pp. 1-3

[http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/speccol/sc2200/sc2221/000019/000012/  
html/0000.html](http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/speccol/sc2200/sc2221/000019/000012/html/0000.html)



## Indentured Servants



In 1609, the Virginia Company began sending indentured servants to Virginia. These servants signed an indenture, or agreement, promising the company five to seven years of unpaid labor. In return the servants received free passage across the ocean. At the end of their service, the servants got 100 acres of land and their "freedom dues," usually clothing, tools, and a gun.

Due to the high death rate of colonists, there was always a shortage of settlers in the colony. By 1616 the Virginia Company promised 100 acres of land, plus 50 acres for every indentured servant that the settler brought along, to get people to move to the colony. Wealthy men came across the Atlantic Ocean with many indentured servants.

Within nine years, indentured servants made up more than 40 percent of the population in Virginia. The indentured servants made up about 35 percent of the workers in New England colonies. Between 1630 and 1700 half of all the immigrants who came to the colonies were indentured servants. However, although many Europeans came to the colonies as servants, they became free people after their term of servitude, usually in 4-7 years.



### Why would people be willing to leave their homes?

There were economic problems in Europe. Many people were very poor. The weather had been bad, and farm crops had been ruined. People were forced to leave their farms and move to the cities to find work, but there were few jobs in the cities. These rural people could not find work or earn money in the cities, and now they could not grow their own food. These people lived in terrible conditions.

In those days the law said that people who owed money to someone and could not pay the debt were put in debtors prison. But once a man or woman was in jail, it was impossible to earn money to pay off the debt. So many people were in jail and their families were starving because they had no money and no work.

The colonies in America offered a way out of their economic trouble. Wealthy people would pay the cost of the trip to America. In exchange, poor people signed a contract called an "indenture." They agreed to work for free for several years to pay off the cost of the trip. The contract stated the number of years of work that were required to work to pay the cost of their trip. After the contract was completed, indentured servants were freed and received their promised land and "freedom dues."

## Maryland: A Case Study

When the Calvert family was starting the colony of Maryland, they granted some wealthy colonists large pieces of land that they used to start tobacco plantations. These tobacco plantations required a lot of laborers. Most of these workers came to Maryland as indentured servants who agreed to work on the plantations for the colonists. Many of the indentured servants were Europeans who wanted to move to the colonies but had little or no money to pay for their travel. Most of these indentured servants were men between the ages of 18 and 22. Some Africans also came to Maryland with indenture papers. By 1700, four out of five immigrants to Maryland were indentured servants.

The indentured servants that came to Maryland fared better than those who went to other colonies. Colonial leaders in Maryland helped them start their own farms by giving them 50 acres of land, a suit of clothes, an ax, two hoes, and three barrels of corn when their contract was completed. Some freed servants worked for wages at skilled crafts such as carpentry or blacksmithing, and others owned small farms where the whole family worked together. Many former indentured servants eventually had indentured servants of their own.



## Reasons for Migrating to the Colonies

Pushes

Pulls

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# EARLY ADVERTISING

## NOVA BRITANNIA. OFFERING MOST

Excellent fruites by Planting in  
VIRGINIA.

Exciting all such as be well affected  
to further the same.



LONDON  
Printed for SAMVEL MACHAN, and are to be sold at  
his Shop in Pauls Church-yard, at the  
Signe of the Bul-head.

1609.

## Who Were They?

Indentured servitude was a common experience for people in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Most of these indentured servants were young, unmarried men. Many of these men had been servants or apprentices working in skilled jobs.

Although indentured servants were thought of as beggars, thieves, and riffraff, they actually represented a broad range of working people from English society. The desperately poor as well as those from the middle class migrated to the colonies as indentured servants. Although many did not register a skill or occupation on the ship's registry, a large portion of those traveling as indentured servants were farmers, textile workers (weavers, spinners, tailors), and workers skilled in other trades.

Information taken from advertisements for runaways indicate that the male indentured servants were highly skilled, specialized workers, holding jobs as bricklayer, joiner, plasterer, cook, clerk, gardener, coachman, butch, blacksmith, and musician. Female servants generally performed domestic chores like laundry, sewing, and housekeeping.

Many people who had little chance for riches in their homeland were lured to the colonies by stories of individuals striking it rich through tobacco and sugar. In Europe in the 1600s it was common for people to leave the place of their birth and look for work in nearby areas, and then later go on to look for work in a more distant place, or in one of the growing cities. As the need for labor grew overseas, the workers followed and went to America where work was available. The search for work and a way to escape poverty may have pushed people to migrate, even more than the desire to go to the colonies.



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## An Indentured Servant's Contributions To Colonies

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**Goods or Services Produced**

**Contribution to Trade or Economic Growth**

## A Letter from John Chisholm to his mother and brother

Cecil County was an area that belonged to farmers and landholders. These colonists had learned to live peaceably with the area's Native American tribes. In Maryland, the largest Native American group was the Algonquin family; Chapotank, Nanticoke, Pocomoke, and Assateague were tribes that lived in the region. Many of the tribes had helped the settlers farm the land and learn how to use the abundant resources found in the Maryland colony. The colonists and the Native Americans traded and gradually developed a thriving economy that helped to enhance trade with the British.

November 25, 1751

.....my desire to return is no less strong than yours is to have me but as end my days in my own Country, but as affairs now stand I cannot, .....Contentment dwells with me and therefore there is none exceeds me in Riches; .....

Sincerest Respect your most Dutiful Son  
JOHN CHISHOLM

John Chisholm to James Chisholm (on same sheet as letter to his mother)

Dear Brother,

The Opportunity more than anything else engaged me to write to you having writt you about two months ago, but because I can remember before I came from home that we used all to be glade when my uncle received a Letter so I imagine it is a Singular Pleasure to you and my Mother if it is to nobody else, ....

.... I am in good health.....The Vessell that brings this is called the John and James, built here at this place, .....and is the first Vessell that loaded with Flax seed for Ireland from this place, you may perhaps wonder that a Vessell should load with Flaw-seed, but it is surprising to see what Quantities are shipped from Philadelphia to Ireland in a Season. It is hoped that this Town will draw a great deal of the trade from Philadelphia in a little time, .....

The West India Commodities are Bread and Flower and the Irish commodities, Flaw-seed, Pipe staves, and Walnut timber.

The returns from Ireland are chiefly Felons, transported for Seven years and sold by the Captain of the Ship for about 15 pounds Str. And a little Irish linens it being unlawful to transport Woolens and other Goods from Ireland here.

Most of the Inhabitans about the head of Chesapeak Bay are originally those Transported Felons and consequently are people of bad Principles, .....are much given to drinking and are so strongly addicted to the love of Money, Very Nasty and Generally unhospitable in their houses, quite reverse to the Virginians.....

They grow Barley and Oats and Wheat here as in Scotland but no peas nor Beans, except in Gardens.....Cyder and Water and Punch being their usual Drink, Turnips, Pottatoes Butter and Cheese in great plenty and all kinds of Tame Fowls, Wild Ducks and Geese plenty; Fish plenty also, but few deer, .....

*(his letter continues with a description of the Natives of the area and questions about his home)*

Your affectionate Brother  
JOHN CHISHOLM

Excerpted from Primary Source # 24, MS 2018 from the Maryland Historical Society, Encountering Marylands's Past, Volume 3: Frontiers in History

## Forty Dollar Reward

**BALTIMORE COUNTY, October 5, 1777**

***RAN*** away, last night, from the subscriber, an English servant man, names Samuel Phillips, a Weaver by trade, about 26 years of age, 5 feet 5 or 6 inches high, has grey eyes, short straight light hair, which has been cut off the top of his head, red beard, pale complexion, down look is greckled, and most of his teeth are couble. Had on an old black and white linsey under jacket, without sleeves, a country linen shirt, trousers and apron, old shoes, tied with strings, and have straps and some iron nails in the heels, an iron collar, and a small shackle on his left leg, with a ring to it. It is probably he will steal other clothes. He ran away in April last, and was taken up in May, in Bush River Neck, where he had set in for weaving, and committed to Harford gaol....**WHOEVER** takes up the said servant, and secures, him, so that his master gets him again, shall have Ten Dollars; if 30 miles from home, Twenty Dollars; if 50 miles, Thirty Dollars; and if 80 miles, the above reward, and reasonable charges, if brought home, paid by  
*William Goodwin*

**N.B.** As he can write, he may forge a pass.

**BALTIMORE:** Printed by M.K. Goddard



## A direction for choice of servants.

This is a retyping of the original document. It is available as an original document from Maryland State Archives: Education and Outreach, *Documents for the Classroom*, “The Strength of Our Diversity-Multiculturalism in Maryland History” MSA SC 2221-19-12-2, p. 1)

In the taking of servants, he may doe well to furnish himselfe with as many as he can, of usefull and necessary Arts: A Carpenter, of all others the most necessary; A Mill-wright, Ship-wright, Boate-wright, Wheele-wright, Brick-maker, Brick-layer, Potter; one that can cleave Lath and Pale, and make Pipe-stave, etc. A Joyner, Cooper, Turner, Sawyer, Smith, Cutler, Leather-dresser, Miller, Fisherman, and Gariner. These will be of most use; but any lusty young able man, that is willing to labour and take paines, although he have no particular trade, will be beneficiall enough to his Master.

And in case any Adventurer shall be unprovided of such men to supply his number, hee may have directions at the place where these bookes are to bee had, how and where hee may provide himselfe of as many as hee please.

Original available at “A direction for choice of servant” MSA SC 2221-19-12, p. 1  
<http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/speccol/sc2200/sc2221/000019/000012/html/0000.html>