LESSON PLAN
Virginia Company Instructions to the Colony

Level:
Upper Elementary, Middle

Objective:
Students will utilize map-reading skills to gain understanding of how and why Jamestown was selected as the settlement site and what role the Virginia Company of London had in that selection.

Standards of Learning:
Virginia SOLs: VS.1a,b,d,h, VS.3a,b,c, USI.1a,d,e, USI.4a,b
National Standards of History: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

Materials Needed for Activity:
John Smith’s Map of Virginia (projected or printed)
Contemporary map of the United States (not included on the CD)
Excerpts from the Virginia Company’s Instructions by way of advice for each student
Educational Adventures video, Discovering Jamestown: Voyage to Virginia

Additional background readings for teachers:
Essays – John Smith; The Virginia Company of London; Company Charters and Challenges

Additional teacher resources (on CD and at www.historyisfun.org):
Jamestown Chronicles: James I
Audio file: Virginia Company of London
Quadricentennial Minute: John Smith

Teacher Background:
William Hole engraved and printed a map of Virginia (1612) in England, based on Captain John Smith’s explorations of the Chesapeake Bay and the Tidewater area between 1607 and 1609. Explorers and mapmakers like John Smith sometimes relied on natives to provide information about the geography, resources and inhabitants of areas they explored. The Jamestown colonists often employed Powhatan guides. On John Smith’s Map of Virginia, crosses (★) form a perimeter indicating how far the English had explored. All landforms, villages, and bodies of water beyond these crosses are described entirely through information gathered from Indian guides and informants.

The original map measures 12.5 by 16.25 inches, and has a scale of 2-11/16 inches to 15 leagues (one league = approximately three miles). Unlike the orientation of modern maps, north is to the right and west is to the top of this map. Reprinted several times and widely distributed, this is considered the most accurate map made of Virginia in the early years of English settlement, depicting important features of the shorelines, rivers and creeks of
its day. It is also one of the only records of the location of the Indian tribes of Virginia in
the early 17th century, and has helped modern archaeologists locate Indian settlement
sites today for further exploration.

Procedure:

Step 1- Discussion starter: Have you ever been on a trip to somewhere you have never
been before? Review with students the tools and technology we have today to help us get
to an unfamiliar location (maps, verbal instructions, telephone, GPS, Internet research,
road signs). Which of those resources could people use 400 hundred years ago? Establish
that the English coming to Virginia were unfamiliar with this area, and an important
component of their exploration was to record information for themselves and future
colonists. John Smith’s Map of Virginia was one of the most important primary sources
produced in the first years of colonization.

Step 2: Distribute copies (or project electronically) and examine John Smith’s map.
Ask students the following questions:

- Why would European explorers make maps of the areas they visited? (To
  navigate, document discovery and make claim to the land.)

- How would the English feel about the land after they had made a map of it?
  (Mapping helped reinforce the claim of ownership.)

- How do you think John Smith got information to create this map?
  (Point out the crosses and explain their meaning.)

- If you were an investor in the Virginia Company, what information would you
  want to know about Virginia? (What resources were available? How much land is
  there? Is the climate good for habitation? Are the rivers and harbors good for
  ships?)

- Why would John Smith include details about forests and Powhatan villages?
  (Wood is an important resource for building and maintaining the settlement and a
  possible commercial resource. The English expected to trade with the Powhatan
  Indians.)

Identify the compass rose (note the unusual orientation of the map, with north indicated
by the fleur de lis), the latitude markings and the key to the symbols (upper right corner)
on John Smith’s map. Have students look at a contemporary map of the United States to
locate the similar area on a contemporary map. Point out the Chesapeake Bay on both
maps. Review the names of the four major rivers (James, York, Rappahannock and
Potomac) and identify them on the contemporary map.

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Step 3: To provide background on the Virginia Company and the Jamestown colony, show the Education Adventures video Discovering Jamestown: Voyage to Virginia (5:16 minutes).

Distribute copies of excerpts from the Virginia Company’s Instructions given by way of advice.

Explain that after receiving a Charter from King James, the leaders of the Virginia Company in London wrote a letter with instructions for Captain Newport and others to follow when choosing the place to make their settlement. Note that spelling, punctuation and capitalization were not standardized as they are today.

Have a student read the bolded section of the instruction and, as a group, answer the following questions by referencing the map:

1. “...do your best endeavor to find out a safe port in the entrance of some navigable river making choise of such a one as runneth furthest into the land"  
   - Can you find any navigable rivers on the map? (Define navigable as deep and wide enough for a ship to sail up.)
   - Which rivers flow “furthest” inland? (Have students identify the major rivers of Virginia on this map.)

2. "make choise of that which bendeth most towards the northwest, for that way shall you soonest find the other sea."  
   - Which “other sea” have European explorers been trying to reach for more than 100 years before Jamestown was established? (Pacific) Why? (They were looking for a new route to Asia for valuable trade goods)
   - Why wouldn’t the English in 1607 know how far away the Pacific Ocean is? (No one had crossed the continent yet and it would be about 200 more years until Lewis and Clark brought back the definitive answer that there was no water route across the country.)

3. “such a place you may perchance find a hundred miles from the rivers mouth and the farther up the better for if you sit down near the entrance except it be in some island that is strong by nature an enemy that may approach you on even ground may easily pull you out…”  
   - Why would putting the colony about 100 miles from the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, unless they find a defensible island, make it safer? (Less threat of Spanish attack, more hidden from other ships sailing up the coast, more warning time for approaching enemies.)
• Why do you think an island is recommended? (Possibly to see approaching enemies, to enable the English to control all the land near their settlement, to give them quick access to boats or ships.)

• Locate Jamestown on the John Smith map. Do you think the colonists hid the settlement well?

4. "...you must in no case suffer any of the natural people of the country to inhabit between you and the seacoast for you cannot carry yourselves so towards them but they will grow discontented with your habitation, and be ready to guide and assist any nation that shall come to invade you..."

• Who are the natural people? (Powhatan Indians) Were the colonists able to follow this instruction? (See Indian settlements on the map that are between Jamestown and the Chesapeake Bay.)

• Do you think the English were more worried about Indian or Spanish hostility? Why? (The Spanish had the same kind of weapons as the English and a prior history of conflict with the English in the New World. The Powhatan Indians outnumbered the English and knew the land better, but did not have guns or armor.)

• Why do you think the Indians might “grow discontented” with the English living near them? (Too many requests for food, threat of more powerful weapons, taking land …)

• Where else should the colonists erect fortifications to have advance warning of approaching enemies? (Closer to the mouth of the river.)

Summary Activity:
The final Instructions asked the colonists “to send a perfect relation by Captain Newport of all that is done, what height you are seated, how far into the land, what commodities you find, what soil, woods and several kinds, and so of all other things else to advertise particularly…”

Have students write a report to the Virginia Company leadership in England detailing how successfully they followed the Company instructions for settlement, why they think the James fort location is a good choice, any problems that might arise due to location, and what the land and people are like.