

GRADE 4: MODULE 2A: UNIT 2: LESSON 8

The Wheelwright's Role in a Colonial Village

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When colonial people needed wheels for their wagons and carriages, they saw the wheelwright. Wheelwrights made wheels from wood then added an iron hoop called a tire. Colonial roads were very rough and bumpy, so the wheels the wheelwrights made had to be strong.

The wheelwright was very careful in his work so that the wheels he made were perfectly round. Wheelwrights started a wheel by carving the center of the wheel, called the hub. The wheelwright used a chisel to create at least 12 openings in the hub for long pieces of wood called spokes. Spokes were made from strong wood such as ash. The spokes were then connected to curved pieces of wood, which were joined together in a circle.

The wheelwright got an iron hoop from the blacksmith that was just a tiny bit smaller than the wheel he was making. He heated the hoop slightly, which made it expand, or grow slightly larger, so that it could be pounded onto the wheel. Then the wheel was put in, or splashed with, cold water. This made the iron hoop shrink to fit the wheel very tightly.

Most wheelwrights were men, but a woman married to a wheelwright might help him run his shop by cleaning up sawdust or greeting customers. African American men, many of whom were slaves, were also wheelwrights. Wheelwrights sold their wheels directly to people who needed one and to carriage- and wagonmakers. Sometimes wheelwrights and carriage- and wagonmakers shared a shop. Wheelwrights also traveled to farms to fix broken wheels.