

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

An Indentured Servant Writes Home (1623)

Crafted (by Pringle 2016)

By 1618 the struggling Jamestown colony of the London Company had discovered a cash crop. Tobacco grew well in Virginia and found a ready market back home. To encourage the production of tobacco the Company offered a liberal headright system to new settlers. Persons who relocated to Virginia received 50 acres of land for each "head" transported, and this included their indentured servants as well as themselves. In return for free passage to Virginia, indentured servants contracted to serve their master for seven years. Only at the end of the seven years were they free to pursue their own fortunes in the New World. Even in the 1620s conditions were harsh and dangerous in Virginia, and the death rate from disease and malnutrition was very high. In 1623 indentured servant Richard Frethorne wrote his mother and father complaining of the bitter hardships he was enduring in Jamestown. Frethorne's woeful letter survives in the records of the London Company, but nothing more is known of the young man or of what ultimately happened to him. The chances are high that he too perished in 1623. As you read this excerpt, consider what Richard Frethorne was trying to accomplish with his letter home.

Loving and kind father and mother my most humble duty remembered to you hoping to God for your good health. This is to let you understand that I your Child am in a most heavy case by reason of the nature of the country. It causeth much sickness, such as the scurvy and the bloody flux, and diverse other diseases, which maketh the body poor, and weak. And when we are sick there is nothing to comfort us; for since I came out of the ship, I have nothing to eat but peas. As for deer or venison I never saw any since I came into this land. There is indeed some game fowl, but we are not allowed to hunt. Instead we must work hard both early, and late for a mess of gruel, and a mouthful of bread, and beef. People cry out day, and night.

I have nothing to comfort me, nor there is anything to be gotten here but sickness, and death. I have nothing at all, no not a shirt to my back and but one pair of shoes and one cap. My Cloak was stolen by one of my own fellows, and to his dying hour would not tell me what he did with it. Some of my fellows saw him have butter and

beef, which my cloak, I fear, paid for. But I am not half a quarter so strong as I was in England, and all is for want of victuals, for I do say unto you, that I have eaten more in a single day at home than I have here in a week.

Good father do not forget me, but have mercy and pity my miserable case. I know if you did but see me you would weep. For God's sake pity me, I pray you to remember my love to all my friends, and kindred. I hope all my Brothers and Sisters are in good health. Therefore, good father, send as soon as you can; and if you send me anything let this be the mark.

<i>Why did Richard Frethorne write this letter home?</i>	
<i>What were all the things that bothered Richard? What do you think bothered him the most?</i>	
<i>If Richard Frethorne life was so difficult, how do you think that they managed to convince him to come to the colonies?</i>	