

Learning from Historical Documents

The illustrations on pp. 69 and 79 reproduce parts of two colonial documents: excerpts from an indentured servant's contract and some pages from children's school materials. By carefully examining even these small partial documents, you can learn more about early colonial culture and ideas.

Answering the following questions will illustrate the kind of information that historical documents can provide.

1. What are the principal goals that both the master and the indentured servant are seeking in the contract?
2. What potential problems does each side anticipate?
3. What does the reference to the mother's consent suggest about this servant's condition?

PART III: APPLYING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

1. How did the factors of population, economics, disease, and climate shape the basic social conditions and ways of life of early Americans in both the South and New England?
2. What was the underlying cause of the expansion of African slavery in English North America?
3. Could the colonies' "labor problem" have been solved without slavery?
4. How did African Americans develop a culture that combined African and American elements? What were some of the features of that culture?
5. How did the numbers and condition of women affect family life and society in New England, among southern whites, and among African American slaves? Compare and contrast the typical family conditions and ways of life among various members of these three groups.
6. How did the harsh climate and soil, stern religion, and tightly knit New England town shape the "Yankee character"?
7. Compare the conditions of seventeenth-century social, economic, and religious life in New England and the Chesapeake region.
8. How did the Salem witch episode reflect the tensions and changes in seventeenth-century New England life and thought?
9. In what ways did the English and Africans who came to America in the seventeenth century have to shape their society and way of life to fit the conditions they faced in the New World?