

Virginia Slave Laws Assignment:

This is a week-long assignment, which involves both group and individual work, and takes place in and outside the classroom.

1. On Monday, I deliver a brief lecture on the settling of Jamestown and the forms of labor used in the colony. I describe the transition from indentured servitude to enslaved labor, which occurred gradually over the course of the 17th century.
2. After class on Monday, students are given a group assignment, which they are to complete in Google Docs. They may do this in-person, or online. It is due Thursday evening. The assignment is as follows:
 - a. Read the source titled: Virginia Race Laws. These laws were passed by the Virginia government in the 1600s and deal specifically with the rights of African slaves.
 - b. As a group, summarize the meaning of each law in modern English. You should do this using Google Docs.
 - c. In the same Google Doc, write an introductory paragraph in response to the following essay prompt: How did the life of a slave in Virginia change over the course of the 1600s?
 - i. Your paragraph should contain a brief thesis statement (this is your argument in response to the question), and 1-2 sentences explaining how you will go about defending your argument in the body of your paper. You DO NOT have to actually write the paper, just the introductory paragraph.
3. Friday's class is devoted to discussing these laws in detail.
 - a. Students are asked to share their translations of the laws, which I list on the dry erase board. This provides us with an accurate translation of each law.
 - b. I then ask each group to share their introductory paragraphs and as a class we decide which is the best one. The goal here is for students to recognize the historical idea of "change over time" and to see that the life of a slave worsens over the course of the century. I also want them to see how race and racism develops in Virginia society during this period.
 - c. Once we agree on this thesis, I ask students to identify how the laws (our evidence) prove our thesis.
 - d. During this discussion, we also take time to think about what else these laws can tell us about 17th century Virginia society.
 - e. I reserve the last 10 minutes of class to have students think about the impact of these laws on American society today.