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## Virginia

Virginia is located on the central Atlantic Coast of the United States and has a distinctive triangular shape. North Carolina and a small part of Tennessee are south of Virginia. The southern tip West Virginia along with a piece of Kentucky forms the angular western border of Virginia. Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean are east of Virginia while Maryland lies to the northeast. The southern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula, called the Eastern Shore, belongs to Virginia. The Delmarva Peninsula is across Chesapeake Bay from the Virginia mainland and is named for the three states that occupy it: Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

### Early History

Archaeologists have found human bones that date to 15,000 BCE in southern Virginia and historians call these early people Paleo-Indians. Paleo-Indians hunted the now extinct mastodon. As the climate on earth changed, so did human activity. The next era of humans are called the Archaic people. Archaic people were no longer nomadic hunters. Instead, the Archaic people developed the ability to farm crops like squash and sunflowers and created settlements of about 50 residents.

The Woodland culture was the next to develop, around 1200 BCE. Woodland people flourished until about 1600 BCE. These people lived in villages and had a structured society led by a chief. Woodland people traveled by canoe and established an active trade network of finished goods like baskets among the villages. Historians estimate that there were about 50,000 Woodland people in Virginia.

After the Woodland period, the coastal plain of Virginia was occupied by the Algonquian people. The Algonquian people settled across the northeastern region of the present United States, especially around New York State. Algonquian people spoke languages united by a common root and lived similar lifestyles. At the beginning of the 1600s BCE, over thirty groups of Algonquian people, including those residing in Virginia, formed a confederation under a single chief. Native Americans called Powhatans lived along the Virginia coast when Europeans first arrived.

In 1607, English settlers who were organized by the Virginia Company of London came to Chesapeake Bay primarily in search of gold. They created a

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settlement on the Virginia mainland that they named Jamestown after the king of England. Captain John Smith was their leader. Smith returned to England in 1609 for supplies and during his absence the colonists nearly starved. In spite of hardships, in 1619 colonial landowners joined with appointees from the Virginia Company to form a House of Burgesses, equivalent to a House of Representatives, to govern the colony.

Also in 1619 a Dutch ship brought 20 Africans who were traded as indentured servants in exchange for supplies for the ship. Indentured servants worked without pay for a number of years and then were allowed to leave. However, the first slave auction of Africans as permanent property in Virginia was held in 1638. In 1662, Virginia passed a law that any child of a slave woman was also a slave.

### **Towards Statehood**

In 1698, the House of Burgesses authorized moving the colonial capital from Jamestown to Middle Plantation, later renamed Williamsburg in honor of King William III of England. Middle Plantation already had a school of higher learning; the College of William and Mary was founded in 1693.

Tobacco quickly became the major crop of the Virginia colony. Wealthy plantation owners on the fertile coastal plain in the east used African slaves to work in the tobacco fields. However, small farmers and their families lived a modest lifestyle in the western regions of Virginia. During these colonial years Virginia extended much further to the west, including parts of present-day Michigan. In 1775, the citizens in western Virginia first petitioned the government to become a separate colony called Westsylvania. Finally in 1861, at the outset of the Civil War, was West Virginia granted statehood.

The large and intact Virginia colony was the first British colony in North America. By 1775 there were thirteen British colonies along the Atlantic coast of North America and by that time the colonies wanted independence from Great Britain. Many of the great leaders during Revolutionary War times came from the wealthy aristocracy of Virginia including Patrick Henry, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

Most of the Revolutionary War was fought in the northern colonies and Virginia was spared during the early stages of the war. However, the final battle of

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the war centered on the Virginia port city of Yorktown. In June 1781, British General Charles Cornwallis had 10,000 troops there. In late summer General George Washington laid siege to the city for weeks with 20,000 American troops. The troops fired on the city in the Battle of Yorktown while the French fleet prevented the British from escaping by sea. When General Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, the Revolutionary War ended and the colonies gained their independence.

Virginians remained at the forefront of the government for the independent colonies. Virginian James Madison is called the Father of the Constitution. He and representatives from twelve of the former colonies wrote the Constitution in the summer of 1787. The Constitution is the document that established the government for the United States. All the former colonies needed to approve or ratify the Constitution in order to become states. Virginia ratified the Constitution in June 1788, becoming the tenth state.

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Circle True or False after analyzing each of the following statements.

1. True False The Delmarva Peninsula is across Chesapeake Bay from the Virginia mainland and is named for the three states that occupy it: Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.
2. True False The first inhabitants of the land called Virginia today were Paleo-Indians, Archaic people and Woodland people, in that order.
3. True False Woodland people traveled by canoe and established an active trade network of finished goods like baskets among the villages.
4. True False Algonquian people settled across the southeastern region of the present United States, especially around Virginia.
5. True False In 1607 the first British settlers came to Virginia to set up a farming community that they called Williamsburg.
6. True False The first local government in the British colonies was called the Virginia House of Representatives.
7. True False In the 1600s during the early years of the Virginia colony, plantation owners used African slaves to cultivate tobacco and cotton which were exported to Great Britain.
8. True False Because of major differences between plantations in the east and family farms in the west, citizens in western Virginia wanted to create a separate colony to be called Westsylvania.
9. True False Many of the great leaders during Revolutionary War times came from the wealthy aristocracy of Virginia including Patrick Henry, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.
10. True False Virginian James Madison is called the Father of the Constitution and he persuaded Virginia to become the first state to ratify the Constitution.

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### Answers

1. True
2. True
3. True
4. False
5. False
6. False
7. False
8. True
9. True
10. False