

The Apprentice System

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Sciences



European colonists left behind all the comforts of home to come to North America. There was no longer a corner store where they could shop for groceries or get a newspaper. If their tools or equipment broke, there was no place to buy new ones. This was a harsh reality in a world where they had to fight for their own survival.

More settlers came to the English colonies than to the French or Spanish colonies. When the settlers arrived, they were ready to work hard for themselves and their community members. They had to help each other, or they would surely die. Families up to that point were mostly self-sufficient. All of the family members helped each other get what they needed. In the colonies, they had to reinvent some of that family-style teamwork and join together for the good of the entire group.

It was not long before people began to take on new work responsibilities. Those who knew how to make things by hand were called **artisans**. Their work on things such as nails, horseshoes, barrels and even homes was critical to the success of their colony. Because their skilled work was so necessary, they began to train younger workers. They needed others who could take over their duties if death, disease or old age made them unable to continue. Artisans often had several such helpers of different ages. These helpers were called **apprentices**.

Apprentices were commonly sent to live with the artisan. The young apprentices provided their labor in exchange for food, shelter, clothing and training in the craft. Experienced apprentices became artisans and took apprentices of their own to train. In this way, the colony would have skilled workers long into the future.

Name: _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) Most apprentices were between eight and 10 years old when they went to live with an artisan. How would you feel about becoming an apprentice now? Why?

2) What is an artisan?

3) What did an apprentice receive in exchange for his labor?

4) What was the goal for an apprentice?

5) How did the apprentice system help the community?
