



**Analyze Images** Some slave ships carried as many as 700 prisoners. **Use Visual Information** How does this image reflect the details described in the text?

Most English colonists did not question the justice of owning enslaved Africans. They believed that black Africans, as a racial group, were inferior to white Europeans. The belief that one race is superior to another is called **racism**. Some colonists believed that they were helping enslaved Africans by teaching them Christianity.

A handful of colonists spoke out against the evils of slavery. In 1688, Quakers in Germantown, Pennsylvania, became the first group of colonists to call for an end to slavery.


**READING CHECK** **Draw Conclusions** Why did many colonists believe there was nothing wrong with slavery?

## **Lesson Check**

### **Practice Vocabulary**

1. Which colony was set up as a refuge for debtors?
2. What is racism?

### **Critical Thinking and Writing**

3. **Cite Evidence** What evidence supports the claim that the planters in the southern part of the Carolinas could not make rice a profitable crop on their own?
4. **Summarize** What was the Middle Passage like for most enslaved Africans?
5. **Understand Effects** Why was South Carolina the only English colony in 1700 where the majority of the population was made up of enslaved Africans?
6. **Writing Workshop: Organize Sequence of Events** Continue adding to your ordered list of events in your  Active Journal to show what happens to your character in your narrative essay. You will use this sequence of events when you write your narrative essay at the end of the Topic.



## LESSON 6

# Colonial Society



## GET READY TO READ

### START UP


Examine the image of colonial men and women dancing. What does it tell you about colonial society?

### GUIDING QUESTIONS


- How was colonial society structured?
- What impact did the Great Awakening have on colonial society?
- How would you describe education in the colonies?
- How did art, music, literature, and ideas have an impact on colonial society?

### TAKE NOTES

#### Literacy Skills: Summarize

Use the graphic organizer in your  Active Journal to take notes as you read the lesson.

### PRACTICE VOCABULARY

Use the vocabulary activity in your  Active Journal to practice the vocabulary words.

#### Vocabulary

gentry                      apprentice  
middle class              dame school  
Gullah                      Enlightenment  
Great Awakening        libel

#### Academic Vocabulary

tolerant  
assumption

For the most part, colonists enjoyed more social equality than people in England, where a person's opportunities in life were largely determined by birth. Still, class differences existed.

### Colonial Social Classes

Like Europeans, colonial Americans thought it was only natural that some people rank more highly than others. A person's birth and wealth still determined his or her social status.

#### The Upper and Middle Social Classes

At the top of society stood the **gentry**. The gentry included wealthy planters, merchants, ministers, successful lawyers, and royal officials. They could afford to dress in the latest fashions from London.

Below the gentry were the **middle class**. The middle class included farmers who worked their own land, skilled craft workers, and some tradespeople. Nearly three quarters of all white colonists belonged to the middle class.



They prospered because land in the colonies was plentiful and easy to buy. In addition, skilled work was in high demand and paid relatively well.

**The Lower Social Classes** The lower social classes included hired farmhands and indentured servants. Far below them in status were enslaved Africans and African Americans.

Indentured servants signed contracts to work without wages for a period of four to seven years for anyone who would pay their ocean passage to the Americas. When their term of service was completed, indentured servants received “freedom dues”: a set of clothes, tools, and 50 acres of land. Because there were so few European women in the colonies, female indentured servants often shortened their terms of service by marrying. Thousands of men, women, and children came to North America as indentured servants. After completing their terms, some became successful and rose into the middle class.

**Working Life in the Countryside** From New Hampshire to Georgia, most colonists survived by farming. Men worked long hours planting crops, tending the fields, and raising livestock—pigs, cows, and other farm animals. Anything beyond what the family needed to live was taken to markets to sell. Families also traded crops and livestock with their neighbors for additional goods.

While men typically did much of the agricultural work, women often worked within the home. They worked hard taking care of the household and the family. By the kitchen fire, they cooked the family’s meals. They milked cows, tended chickens and a vegetable garden, watched the children, cleaned, did laundry by hand, and made candles, cheese, and clothes.

Life was different in the backcountry, out beyond more settled lands. Wives and husbands often worked side by side in the fields at harvest time. No one worried whether harvesting was proper “woman’s work.”

**Analyze Images** Many middle-class colonists worked in small cottage industries such as silk making. **Synthesize Visual Information** What was life like for children in this household?







▲ A basket maker keeps Gullah traditions alive in Charleston, South Carolina.

One surprised visitor described a typical backcountry woman's activities: "She will carry a gun in the woods and kill deer, turkeys &c., shoot down wild cattle, catch and tye hoggs, knock down [cattle] with an ax, and perform the most manfull Exercises as well as most men."

**Working Life in Cities** In cities, women sometimes worked outside the home. A young single woman from a poorer family might work for one of the gentry as a maid, a cook, or a nurse. Other women were midwives, who delivered babies. Still others sewed fine hats or dresses to be sold to women who could afford them. Learning such skills often required years of training.

Some women learned trades from their fathers, brothers, or husbands. They worked as printers, butchers, shoemakers, and silversmiths. A woman might take over her husband's business when he died.

Men often worked in trades, for example as coopers (who made and repaired wooden barrels), blacksmiths, and silversmiths. Most large towns in the colonies were seaports, where merchants and traders brought goods to and from Europe. As this trade grew, more men also took on jobs as bankers, lawyers, and businessmen.

Some educated men in the colonies became politicians. Others were pamphleteers, who wrote and distributed small booklets informing people on a subject. There were many doctors in the colonies, where illness was common. However, medical training varied. A surgeon might be a barber with little real medical training.

**African Influences in the Colonies** By the mid-1700s, the culture of Africans and African Americans in the colonies varied greatly. On rice plantations in South Carolina, enslaved Africans used methods from West Africa for growing and harvesting rice. For example, flat baskets holding the grains were shaken in the wind to separate the grains from leaves and other particles. Then a wooden mortar and pestle were used to clean the grains.

Language is another area where African influences were strong. In some coastal areas, enslaved Africans spoke a distinctive combination of English and West African languages known as **Gullah** (GUH luh). Parents often chose African names for their children, such as Quosh or Juba or Cuff.

In Charleston and other South Carolina port towns, some Africans worked along the dock, making rope or barrels or helping to build ships. Skilled craftworkers made fine wooden cabinets or silver plates and utensils. Many of their designs reflected African artistic styles. Although most Africans in these towns were enslaved, many opened their own shops or stalls in the market. Some used their earnings to buy their own and their family's freedom.



In the Middle Colonies and New England, the African and African American population increased during the 1700s. Africans and African Americans in the northern colonies included both free and enslaved people. Their numbers were much lower than in the Southern Colonies. However, they were still an important part of the population.

In some of the Middle Colonies, such as New York, there were even plantations that relied on slave labor. Often, these plantations produced grains and meat for sale to feed enslaved workers in the Southern Colonies or the West Indies.

**READING CHECK** **Compare and Contrast** How was working life in the countryside similar to working life elsewhere? How was it different?

## How Did Colonial Art, Literature, and Music Affect Society?

Colonists brought with them the artistic traditions of their homelands. New artistic styles also developed that reflected colonial society. Wealthy gentry decorated their homes with paintings of landscapes and religious art. Furniture, houses, and clothing were often decorated with intricate carvings or designs.

**Art Reflects Colonial Society** Paintings that celebrated important people of the time were especially popular works of art. Those who could afford it hired artists to paint portraits of their family members. These portraits showed off the family's importance and provided a valuable keepsake to be passed on for generations to come. Portraits also honored famous individuals and key events. One of the oldest surviving colonial portraits is of New Netherland Governor Peter Stuyvesant, painted in the 1660s.

Prints were also popular. Prints were made from engravings scratched into metal or carved into wood. Printmakers used the metal or wood with ink, paper, and a press to make a picture that could be easily reproduced. Many people had prints of famous figures, such as politicians or clergymen.

Many artists were self-taught. Few became wealthy from their work. They often traveled from town to town in search of people who wanted portraits done. The paintings they left behind are like time capsules. Much like photographs do today, they show how people dressed, what their tastes were like, and how their families lived.

**American Literature Emerges** Literature also developed in the colonies. The first colonial printing press was built in Massachusetts in 1640. It printed religious books and books for Harvard College. With the spread of printing, more colonists began to read.



### INTERACTIVE

The Arts in Colonial America

**Analyze Images** This portrait of Peter Stuyvesant is one of the few colonial portraits that have survived. **Synthesize Visual Information** How did the painter try to please Stuyvesant?







**Analyze Images** A colonist plays the harpsichord, an instrument commonly featured in classical pieces of the period. **Infer** How many colonial homes do you think had a harpsichord? Why?

### Quick Activity

Imagine three events that show important aspects of colonial life, and write newspaper headlines about these events in your

 Active Journal.

Colonists read reprints of European books and books by American writers. One of the most popular—and particularly American—types of stories was the captivity tale. In these stories, a white settler was captured by American Indians and had to overcome hardships in order to escape.

**Colonial Music** Music was another popular art form in the colonies. Colonists brought popular folk music from Europe. They sang and danced at weddings and other celebrations. Enslaved Africans brought musical traditions with them from Africa. These traditions combined with European traditions in musical forms such as work songs and spirituals, or religious songs.

Music was closely tied to religious life for many colonists. New organs appeared in churches. The hymns people sang grew especially popular during the Great Awakening.

 **READING CHECK** **Identify Supporting Details** What clues can we find about colonial lives in artwork such as paintings?

### What Was the Impact of a New Religious Movement?

In the 1730s and 1740s, a religious revival, or movement, known as the **Great Awakening** swept through the colonies. Its drama and emotion touched women and men of all races, ethnic backgrounds, and classes.

**Enthusiastic Preachers** A New England preacher, Jonathan Edwards, helped set off the Great Awakening. In powerful sermons, Edwards called on colonists, especially young people, to examine their lives.

He preached of the sweetness and beauty of God. At the same time, he warned listeners to heed the Bible's teachings. Otherwise, they would be "sinners in the hands of an angry God," headed for the fiery torments of hell. The powerful sermons of preachers such as Edwards were one of the main causes of the Great Awakening.

In 1739, when an English minister named George Whitefield arrived in the colonies, the movement spread like wildfire. Whitefield drew huge crowds to outdoor meetings. An enthusiastic and energetic preacher, his voice would ring with feeling as he called on sinners to repent.



After hearing Whitefield speak, Jonathan Edwards's wife reported, "I have seen upwards of a thousand people hang on his words with breathless silence, broken only by an occasional half-suppressed sob."

**The Great Awakening's Impact** The colonies were made up of many different religious groups. There were Quakers, Puritans, Catholics, Presbyterians, and more. Each group had its own ideas about the proper relationship with God.

Some groups, like the Anglicans, disagreed strongly with Whitefield. Others, like the Baptists and Methodists, found new opportunities to expand during the Great Awakening as people revisited their faith.

The Great Awakening aroused bitter debate. People who supported the movement often split away from their old churches to form new ones. Opponents warned that the movement was too emotional. Still, the growth of so many new churches forced colonists to become more **tolerant** of people with different beliefs. Also, because the Great Awakening appealed to people in all of the colonies, from different classes and ethnic backgrounds, it brought colonists together for the first time. Ties formed during the Great Awakening helped establish the groundwork for future bonds among the colonies.

In the colonies, members of most churches controlled their parishes. The role parishes played in local communities made people think about the importance of self-rule—a key factor in the development of American democracy.

### Academic Vocabulary

**tolerant** • *adj.*, willing to accept beliefs that are different from your own

### Analyze Visuals

Crowds of people gathered to hear sermons by English minister George Whitefield. **Infer** What does the artist suggest about the attitude of Whitefield's audience?





The Great Awakening contributed in another way to the spread of democratic feelings in the colonies. Many of the new preachers were not as well educated as most ministers. They argued that formal training was less important than a heart filled with the Holy Spirit. Such teachings encouraged a spirit of independence. People began to think differently about their political rights and their governments. They felt if they could figure out how to worship on their own and how to run their own churches, then they could govern themselves with those same virtues. Eventually, many colonists challenged the authority of colonial governors and the king.

**READING CHECK** **Identify Main Ideas** How did the Great Awakening change how people thought about themselves and their political rights?

## Education in the Colonies

Among the colonists, New Englanders were the most concerned about education. Puritans taught that all people had a duty to study the Bible. If colonists did not learn to read, how would they study the Bible?

**Public Schools in New England** In 1642, the Massachusetts assembly passed a law ordering all parents to teach their children “to read and understand the principles of religion.” They also required all towns with 50 or more families to hire a schoolteacher. Towns with 100 or more families also had to set up a grammar school to prepare boys for college.

In this way, Massachusetts set up the first public schools, or schools supported by taxes. Public schools allowed both rich and poor children to receive an education.

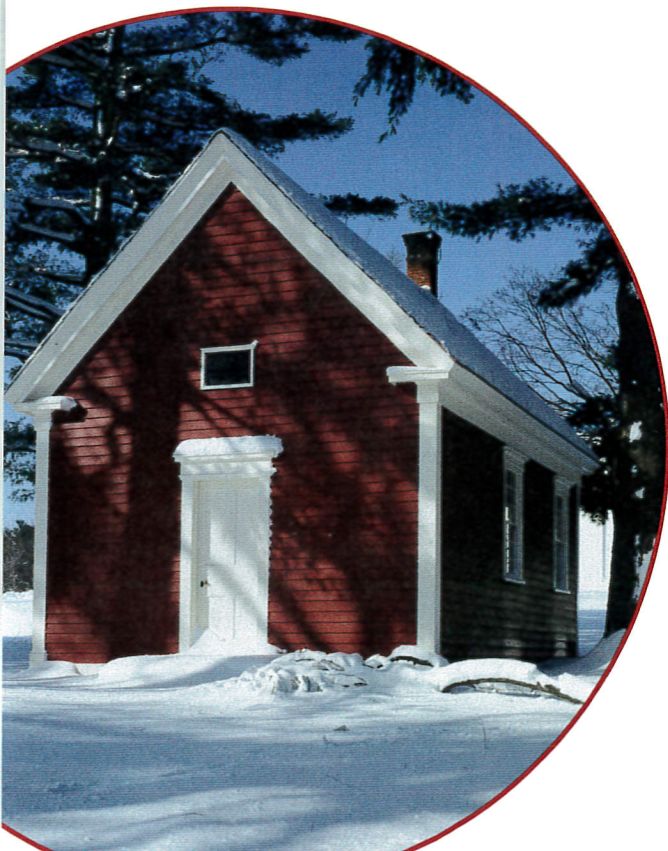
The first New England schools had only one room for students of all ages. Parents paid the schoolteacher with food. Each child was expected to bring a share of wood for the stove.

**Private Education** In the Middle Colonies, churches and individual families set up private schools. Because pupils paid to attend, only wealthy families could afford to educate their children.

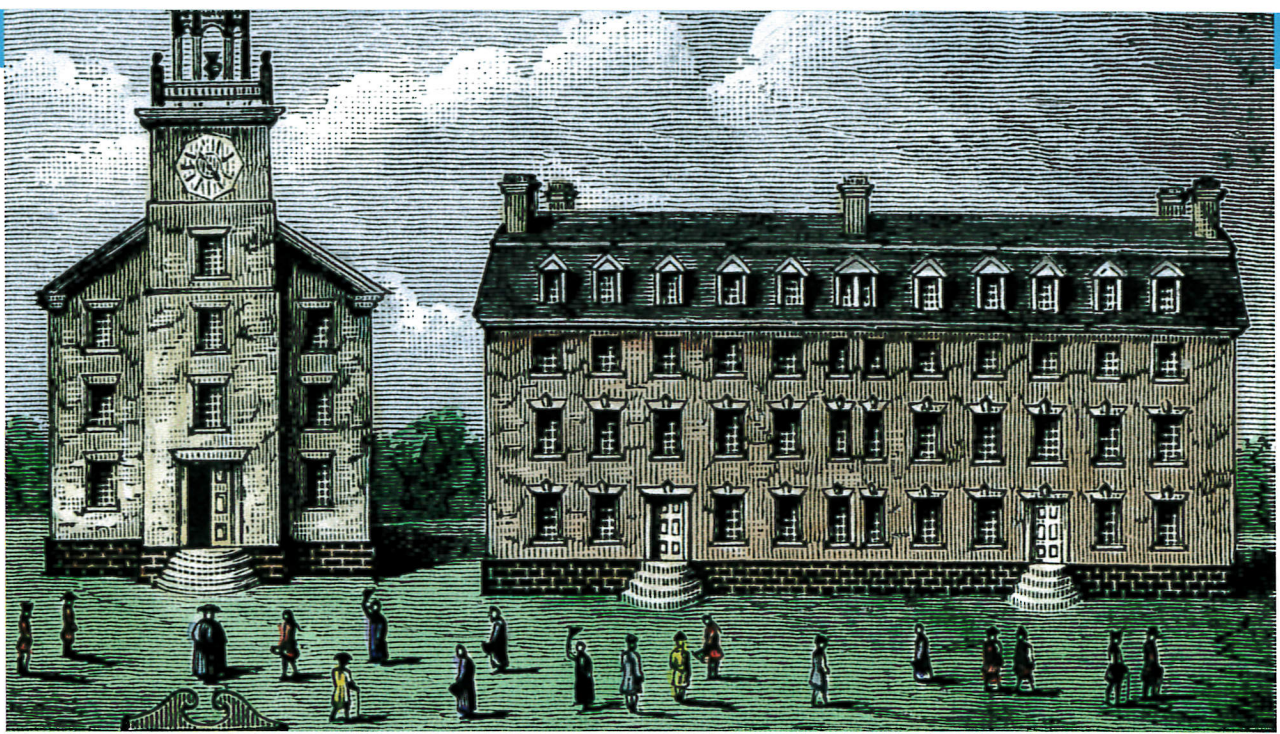
In the Southern Colonies, people often lived too far from one another to bring children together in one school building. Some planters hired tutors, or private teachers. The wealthiest planters sent their sons to school in England. As a rule, enslaved African Americans were denied education of any kind.

**Apprenticeships and Dame Schools** Boys whose parents wished them to learn a trade or craft served as **apprentices** (uh PREN tis ez). An apprentice worked for a master to learn a trade or a craft. For example, when a boy reached the age of 12 or 13, his parents might apprentice him to a master glassmaker.

▼ In colonial New England, instructors taught students of all ages in a single classroom.







The young apprentice lived in the glassmaker's home for six or seven years while learning the craft. The glassmaker gave the boy food and clothing and taught him how to read and write. He also provided him with religious training.

In return, the apprentice worked as a helper in the glassmaker's shop and learned needed skills. Boys were apprenticed in many trades, including papermaking, printing, and tanning (making leather).

In New England, most schools accepted only boys. However, some girls attended **dame schools**, or private schools run by women in their own homes. Other girls, though, usually learned skills from their mothers, who taught them to cook, make soap and candles, spin wool, weave, sew, and embroider. A few learned to read and write.

**The Growth of Colleges** In 1633, Puritan John Eliot spoke of the need for Massachusetts to establish an official college. Institutions of higher learning were held up as a way to promote European culture in the Americas. As Eliot cautioned, "if we no[u]rish not L[e]arning both church & common wealth will sinke."

Harvard College, the first college in the colonies, opened in 1638 with ten students. The goal of the college was to educate future ministers. It was modeled after English schools, where students studied six days a week in Latin and Greek. It was open only to men.

By the late 1600s, however, Harvard graduates were moving away from the ministry. Some became physicians, public servants, or teachers. The College of William and Mary opened in Virginia to prepare men for the Anglican ministry. Yale College in Connecticut aimed to educate clergymen. Gradually, nine colleges opened over the following century and expanded their areas of study.

**READING CHECK** **Draw Conclusions** Do you think children were better educated in New England than they were in the other colonies? Why or why not?

▲ Initially, colleges like Yale, shown here in a late-1700s engraving, were created to educate the clergy. Later, Yale expanded its offerings to other students.



#### INTERACTIVE

Education in the Colonies



**Analyze Images** Isaac Newton proved that white light is made up of all the visible colors. **Draw Conclusions** Why is observation crucial for science?



**Academic Vocabulary**  
**assumption** • *n.*, a belief held without proof

## How Did New Ideas Influence the Colonies?

In the 1600s, European thinkers tried to question common **assumptions** and to base their understanding of the world on reason and logic. They developed theories and performed experiments to test them. In doing so, they discovered many of the laws of nature. The English scientist Isaac Newton, for example, explained the law of gravity.

**The Ideas of the Enlightenment** European thinkers of the late 1600s and 1700s also believed that reason and scientific methods could be applied to the study of society. They tried to discover the natural laws that governed human behavior. Because these thinkers believed in the light of human reason, the movement that they started is known as the **Enlightenment**. John Locke, an English philosopher, wrote works that were widely read in the colonies. He said people could gain knowledge of the world by observing and experimenting.

In the English colonies, the Enlightenment spread among better-educated colonists. They included wealthy merchants, lawyers, ministers, and others who had the leisure to read the latest books from Europe. Urban craftsmen also heard and discussed these ideas.

**Benjamin Franklin's Thought and Inventions** The best example of the Enlightenment spirit in the English colonies was Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was born in 1706, the son of a poor Boston soap and candle maker. Although young Ben had only two years of formal schooling, he used his spare time to study literature, mathematics, and foreign languages.



At age 17, Franklin made his way to Philadelphia. There, he built up a successful printing business. His most popular publication was *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Published yearly, it contained useful information and clever proverbs, such as “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”

Like other Enlightenment thinkers, Franklin wanted to use reason to improve the world around him. He invented practical devices that helped improve daily life. For example, Franklin suffered from poor eyesight, so he invented bifocal glasses to help himself—and countless others—see better. Franklin also invented a new kind of iron stove. It was set in the middle of a room instead of in a wall, and it kept houses warmer without filling them with smoke. Another one of Franklin's inventions, the lightning rod, protected buildings from catching fire in a storm because of lightning strikes. As a community leader, Franklin persuaded Philadelphia officials to pave streets, organize a fire company, and set up the first lending library in the Americas. Franklin's inventions and his public service earned him worldwide fame.

**The Influence of Colonial Cities and Towns** While most colonists lived on farms, towns and cities strongly influenced colonial life. Through the great ports of Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Charleston, merchants shipped products overseas. Towns and cities also served as centers of a busy trade between the coast and the growing backcountry.

Culture flourished in the towns. By the mid-1700s, many colonial towns had their own theaters. Town dwellers found entertainment at singing societies, traveling circuses, carnivals, and horse races.

## 5 BIOGRAPHY Things to Know About

### Benjamin Franklin

Writer, Scientist, and Statesman (1706–1790)



- Franklin was born in Boston in 1706 and was one of the founding fathers of the United States.
- Even though he stopped going to school when he was 10 years old, he continued to educate himself and became a writer, scientist, inventor, and statesman.
- He moved to Philadelphia when he was 17 years old and later became a successful printer and publisher.
- Franklin helped create the city's first library, fire company, and police force. He also helped establish a postal service in the colonies.
- He famously (and dangerously) flew a kite in a lightning storm to show that lightning is electricity.

**Critical Thinking** Why do you think the creation of a library, fire company, and police force in Philadelphia was significant?





In 1704, John Campbell founded the *Boston News-Letter*, the first regular weekly newspaper in the English colonies. Within 50 years, each of the colonies, except New Jersey and Delaware, had at least one weekly paper.

**John Peter Zenger’s Libel Trial** The growth of colonial newspapers led to a dispute over freedom of the press. John Peter Zenger published the *Weekly Journal* in New York City. In 1734, he was arrested for publishing stories that criticized the governor. Zenger was put on trial for **libel**—the act of publishing a statement that may unjustly damage a person’s reputation. Zenger’s lawyer argued that, since the stories were true, his client had not committed libel. The jury agreed and freed Zenger. At the time, the case did not attract a great deal of attention. However, freedom of the press would become recognized as a basic American right.

**Analyze Images** John Peter Zenger celebrates after a jury found that he had not committed libel.  
**Identify Implied Main Ideas** What important tradition did Zenger help establish?

**READING CHECK Understand Effects** How did Franklin’s inventions influence the daily lives of colonists?

## Lesson Check

### Practice Vocabulary

1. Who were some of the people who were included in the **gentry**?
2. Why was John Peter Zenger found not guilty of **libel**?

### Critical Thinking and Writing

3. **Infer** Women did not have access to certain jobs in the colonies. How was access to employment restricted for women?
4. **Understand Effects** How did the Great Awakening lead to greater religious tolerance?
5. **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think enslaved Africans were generally denied an education?
6. **Writing Workshop: Use Narrative Techniques** In your Active Journal, identify and record some narrative techniques you can use to tell your story. You will use these techniques when you write your narrative at the end of the topic.