

Colonial Work and Wealth

Compare how geography, trade, and labor shaped three colonial regions.

SS.8.A.2.3 "Differentiate economic systems of New England, Middle, and Southern colonies including indentured servants and slaves as labor sources."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each economic activity, circle each labor source, and write 1, 2, or 3 beside details about New England, the Middle Colonies, or the Southern Colonies so you can compare their systems.

Three Regional Economies

- ① New England's rocky soil and long winters limited large cash-crop farms. Many families worked small farms that supplied food for their households and nearby towns. Coastal communities earned income through fishing, shipbuilding, lumber, and Atlantic trade. Merchants, artisans, sailors, and wage workers helped these businesses operate. Enslaved people lived and worked in New England, but slavery was less central to the regional economy than it was farther south. Family labor and paid work were common in this diverse economy.
- ② The Middle Colonies had fertile soil and a milder climate, so farmers raised wheat and other grains for sale. Flour mills turned grain into products that merchants shipped from busy ports. The region also included small farms, shops, and skilled crafts. English, German, Dutch, and other settlers added to its population. Some wealthy farmers and merchants used enslaved labor, while others hired wage workers or relied on family members. Indentured servants also worked for a set number of years in exchange for passage, food, and shelter.
- ③ In the Southern Colonies, warm climate and long growing seasons supported tobacco, rice, and indigo. Large plantations grew these crops for export to Britain and other markets. At first, many Chesapeake planters used indentured servants. After completing a contract, servants became free, unlike enslaved Africans and their descendants, who were legally forced into lifelong labor. Over time, plantation owners increasingly depended on enslaved labor, especially in tobacco and rice regions. This system created great wealth for some owners while denying freedom and rights to enslaved people.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How did New England's geography help create an economy different from the Southern Colonies' economy?

2 Describe the Middle Colonies' economy. Include one product or business and two kinds of workers.

3 What was one major difference between an indentured servant and an enslaved person after a servant's contract ended?

4 Which region depended most heavily on enslaved labor over time, and what type of economy caused that dependence?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Choose one colonial region and write a five-sentence trade report recommending it to a merchant. Name its major economic activity, identify its labor sources, contrast it with another region, and explain how geography or trade supported your recommendation.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each economic activity, circle each labor source, and write 1, 2, or 3 beside details about New England, the Middle Colonies, or the Southern Colonies so you can compare their systems. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did New England's geography help create an economy different from the Southern Colonies' economy?	New England's rocky soil and long winters limited large cash-crop farms, so fishing, shipbuilding, lumber, trade, and small farms were important. The South's warm climate and long growing seasons supported plantation cash crops such as tobacco, rice, and indigo.
2	Describe the Middle Colonies' economy. Include one product or business and two kinds of workers.	The Middle Colonies grew wheat and other grains, used flour mills, and traded through ports. Workers included family members, wage workers, indentured servants, and, in some places, enslaved people.
3	What was one major difference between an indentured servant and an enslaved person after a servant's contract ended?	An indentured servant became free after completing a contract. Enslaved Africans and their descendants were legally forced into lifelong labor.
4	Which region depended most heavily on enslaved labor over time, and what type of economy caused that dependence?	The Southern Colonies depended most heavily on enslaved labor over time because large plantations produced export crops, especially tobacco and rice.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A merchant should invest in the Middle Colonies. Fertile soil allows farmers to sell wheat, and mills can make flour for port trade. Families, wage workers, indentured servants, and, in some places, enslaved people could supply labor. Unlike New England, whose rocky soil encouraged fishing and shipbuilding, the Middle Colonies could export large grain harvests. Its farms, mills, shops, and ports create a mixed economy.

Accept equivalent comparisons that accurately connect regional geography to economic activities and labor. For the trade report, require all four named elements and a historically accurate distinction between the chosen region and another region.