

A Voice in Virginia

Read how the General Assembly began representative government.

VS.3.g “identifying the significance of establishing the General Assembly (1619), the first representative legislative body in English America.”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show how colonists had a voice in the General Assembly. Circle the sentence that explains why establishing the assembly was significant.

The First General Assembly

- ① In 1619, Governor Sir George Yeardley called leaders to meet at Jamestown, Virginia. Each settlement chose two men, called burgesses, to speak for its people. These elected burgesses met with the governor and his council. The meeting was called the General Assembly. It was the first representative legislative body in English America. The group first met on July 30.
- ② Before this meeting, Virginia was mainly governed by the governor and council, who were appointed by the Virginia Company. The General Assembly changed how colonists could take part in government. Burgesses could bring concerns from their settlements and help make local laws. This did not mean that everyone could vote or serve. Participation was limited to certain men.
- ③ Establishing the General Assembly was significant because it began representative government in English America. People in each settlement had chosen burgesses, so the assembly included voices beyond the governor and council. The assembly did not give equal political rights to all people, but it created an important example. Later representative governments in America continued the idea that elected people should help make laws.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 What was the General Assembly, and where did it first meet?

2 How were burgesses selected, and whom did they speak for?

3 How did the General Assembly change government in Virginia?

4 Why was establishing the General Assembly significant, even though not everyone could vote or serve?

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write exactly three sentences for a younger student. Explain how choosing burgesses gave colonists representation, and include one limit on who could take part.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show how colonists had a voice in the General Assembly. Circle the sentence that explains why establishing the assembly was significant. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What was the General Assembly, and where did it first meet?	It was the first representative legislative body in English America. It first met at Jamestown, Virginia.
2	How were burgesses selected, and whom did they speak for?	Each settlement chose two burgesses. The burgesses spoke for the people in their settlements.
3	How did the General Assembly change government in Virginia?	Before the assembly, the appointed governor and council mainly governed Virginia. The assembly allowed elected burgesses to bring local concerns and help make laws.
4	Why was establishing the General Assembly significant, even though not everyone could vote or serve?	It began representative government in English America and created an example of elected people helping make laws, although participation was limited to certain men.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

When a settlement chose burgesses, it selected people to speak about local concerns. Those elected burgesses helped make laws in the General Assembly instead of leaving decisions only to appointed leaders. Still, many people could not vote or serve, so representation was limited.

Accept responses that explain that elected burgesses represented settlement concerns and helped make laws. The response must also name the limit that only certain men could vote or serve.