



Preservation Virginia

Dragon Run: Strategy and Survival During Bacon's Rebellion

4th Grade - Virginia Studies

The story of Bacon's Rebellion is often told through the lens of the English colonists involved, but it was the Indigenous people of Virginia who were most heavily targeted by Nathaniel Bacon and his supporters. This lesson invites students to think outside the box by considering Indigenous experiences of the Rebellion, as well as how Virginia's tribes were affected long-term.



Lesson Details

This lesson meets the following Virginia Standards of Learning:

- VS 2a. describing how archaeologists have recovered artifacts from important places in the history of Indigenous people including, but not limited to Werowocomoco;
- VS 2c. describing the diversity among the Indigenous nations;
- VS 2d. describing the relationships and interactions of Virginia's Indigenous People and their environment, circa 1600; and
- VS 2e. describing the lives and cultures of Virginia's Indigenous People leading to the present day.
- VS 3d. describing the interactions between the English colonists and the Indigenous people, including the role of the Powhatan in the survival of the colonists;
- VS 3e. describing the hardships faced by colonists at Jamestown and the changes that took place to ensure survival including, but not limited to trade with the Powhatan, the leadership of Captain John Smith, land ownership, and the successful commercial cultivation of tobacco;

Skills:

- VSa. developing questions, enhancing curiosity, and engaging in critical thinking and analysis;
- VSb. using evidence to construct timelines, classify events, and distinguish fact from opinion;
- VSc. comparing and contrasting people, places, and events;
- VSd. identifying cause-and-effect relationships to clarify and explain content.

Essential Guiding Questions:

- How did Bacon's Rebellion change relations between Indigenous Americans and English colonists?
- How did Cockacoeske influence the outcome for her own tribe, Bacon, and other Indigenous communities?
- Why is Bacon's Rebellion influential in Virginia history?
- How do typical timelines of Bacon's Rebellion leave out Indigenous American groups?

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the basic facts about Bacon's Rebellion, including the major actors both English and Indigenous.
- Students will be able to construct a basic timeline of the events leading up to, during, and immediately following the Rebellion.

- Students will understand the impact of the Rebellion on Virginia and Maryland's Indigenous communities and nations both in the immediate aftermath and in larger colonist-Indigenous relations.
- Students will understand the violent and genocidal goals set by Nathaniel Bacon against the Indigenous communities.
- Students will understand and be able to describe the agency, autonomy, politics, and strategies of the Indigenous communities during the Rebellion and be able to identify the significance of Cocakoeske, Dragon Run, and the Treaty of Middle Plantation.

Lesson Outline

Slides:

[Bacon's Rebellion: 4th Grade](#)

Slide 1: Introduction

Slide 2: What was Bacon's Rebellion?

Bacon's Rebellion was a conflict led by Nathaniel Bacon in 1676 (100 years before the American Revolution).

Nathaniel Bacon and many other colonists were angry because they felt the colony's governor, Sir William Berkeley, wasn't doing enough to stop violence between Indigenous tribes and English colonists. Bacon wanted to start a war against all Indigenous people in Virginia. The Governor largely disagreed with this plan, since he benefited greatly from trade deals and alliances with Virginia's tribes.

Since the Governor did not give him permission, Bacon launched his own attack with militias. These militias were made up mostly of poorer men from the countryside and frontier, who volunteered to fight for Bacon.

Slide 3: Timeline of Bacon's Rebellion

1607

- Jamestown, the first successful English colony in North America, is established.

1609-1646

- The Virginia colony grows quickly. Colonists and Indigenous people fight several wars over land. These are called the Anglo-Powhatan Wars.

1675

- Virginia colonists on the frontier, including Nathaniel Bacon, begin attacking Indigenous people following an argument with the Doeg tribe over payment for trade goods.

1676

- Nathaniel Bacon asks Governor Berkeley for permission to attack more Indigenous communities.
- Governor Berkeley refuses because he wants to keep peace with tribes that were **allies** and important trading partners.
- Bacon and hundreds of armed followers march without the governor's permission.
- They attack several Indigenous communities, including some that were allies with the English, like the Pamunkey.
- Bacon's followers burn down their own capitol at Jamestown.
- The rebellion ends after Nathaniel Bacon dies from disease.
- Indigenous leaders push for new protection agreements from the English.

Slide 4: Agency and Making Choices

Agency is making choices for yourself, even when you can't control everything happening around you.

Bacon's army attacked many Indigenous communities. The Indigenous people could not control that Bacon attacked them. But they still showed **agency** by choosing where to go and how to respond.

What kinds of choices do you think tribal leaders had to make? What might happen based on those choices?

Teacher Notes:

At this point, hand out the Decision-Making worksheet. This gives students an opportunity to think critically about the choices of Indigenous people during Bacon's Rebellion. Students can work in groups, pairs, or individually to consider the pros and cons of different strategies.

The goal of this activity is to introduce students to the concept of agency, so they are able to understand that Indigenous people were not passive victims of Bacon's Rebellion, but rather made choices and used strategies to protect themselves and their rights during and after the Rebellion.

Slide 5: Dragon Run

Cockacoeske (pronounced Cock-a-co-ess-kay) was the Queen of Pamunkey, an Indigenous tribe in eastern Virginia who were targeted by Bacon. To keep her people safe, she chose to evacuate Pamunkey families from their homes and lead them into Dragon Run, a large wetland. To the Pamunkey, Dragon Run was a familiar part of their homeland, but to the English, the swamp was a confusing place filled with dangerous wildlife.

Look at the map. Using the four cardinal directions (North, East, South, and West), where is Dragon Run relative to Jamestown? Where is Dragon Run relative to your school?

- *Play the video clip of Dragon Run.*

Who do you think would have an easier time surviving in Dragon Run: English colonists or the Indigenous people?

When Bacon and his army tried to follow the tribes into the swamp, they became lost, tired, sick, confused, and very hungry. By the time Bacon gave up and left the swamp, he had lost hundreds of soldiers, and only managed to capture a few Indigenous people. Cockacoeske's plan had worked.

Slide 6: The Treaty of Middle Plantation

After Bacon's Rebellion, Cockacoeske came back to Jamestown to create a treaty with other Indigenous leaders and the English in 1677. The treaty created new agreements between Indigenous communities and the English government. Again, leaders like Cockacoeske had to make hard choices to protect their communities.

Treaties are not perfect. Often, one side has to compromise. This means that even though they gain important things, they may lose other things in exchange.

Teacher Note:

Read through the excerpts with the class and have students consider what the tribes gained in the Treaty of Middle Plantation versus what they lost.

Slide 7: Wrap-up

In times of hardship, leaders have to think about pros and cons before they make decisions. The choices they make can have long-lasting consequences. What does good leadership look like?

What were some choices Nathaniel Bacon made before and during Bacon's Rebellion?

What were some choices that Cockacoeske made during and after Bacon's Rebellion?

How did their choices affect the people who followed them?

How can we still see consequences of their choices today?

Teacher Note:

We can still see consequences of Bacon's choices in the books and museum exhibits about his rebellion, as well as in the stories that survive from his victims and followers. We can still see consequences of Cockacoeske's choices in Virginia's tribal reservations, tribes' ability to use their traditional lands, and in the tribute ceremony at the Governor's Mansion in Richmond every year.