

**LESSON E**  
**TOBACCO ROAD**

**Standards:** Economics Standard Three: Students will understand different types of economic systems and how they change.

**Objectives:** 1) The students will examine court records to learn that tobacco was used as a source of currency in early Delaware history.

2) The students will choose something in their culture to use as currency instead of money.

**Materials:** 1) *Lesson E, Delaware Public Archives, Court Record, RG 4000 (image gallery)*

2) 12 x 18 white drawing paper (1 per group)

3) Markers and/or crayons

**Procedures:** 1) Begin discussion of the lesson with the following questions:

What is the meaning of the word "economy?" (Economy is the way a country uses its scarce resources to produce and distribute goods and services.) When you buy an item in a store - what do you use to pay for it? (money, check, etc.) Before the colonists came to Delaware they were accustomed to using gold and silver as their money. However, when they came to this new land, gold and silver were scarce. What do you think they used in its place? List responses on blackboard. Explain to students that these items are called "commodity money".

Commodity money has a value as a commodity, or good, in addition to its value as money.

2) Let's take a look at what the colonists used! Project the court record revealing tobacco being used as money. Read the entries in the court record aloud. Why do you think they used tobacco as a form of money? (Tobacco was used as currency because it was grown by many farmers and it was abundant. Tobacco was the most wanted item being produced in the American colonies. It was in great demand in England and the rest of Europe. The colonists sold their tobacco to England in exchange for supplies needed in the colonies. Tobacco had value because of people's willingness to accept it as payment.)

3) Divide the class into groups of four. Instruct the class that the supply of money in Delaware has become scarce. A substitute is needed in

order for the economy to prosper. Each group is responsible for coming up with a product that can be used to substitute for money in an economy for this grade level. This substitute should meet all of the characteristics of money. This means it should be durable – won't easily break or fall apart, portable – easy to carry around, acceptable – can be used to purchase goods and services, rare – hard to find, and finely divisible – easy to make change with. Examples could be marbles, macaroni noodles, M & M's, sand, etc. Each group must come to an agreement on the item chosen. Groups will then create a poster showing a sketch of the item they have chosen along with a written explanation of how this item meets each of the five characteristics of money.

- 4) On the following day, each group will orally present its money substitute and the reasons for choosing it. After the completion of group presentations, each student will vote on which substitute currency he/she would choose. Work toward a consensus for the entire class.
  
- 5) To summarize learning, have students complete the following sentence stem: A pencil would be a good form of money because...*(Student responses should include the five characteristics of money and how a pencil meets each of those characteristics.*

### **DOCUMENT TRANSCRIPTION**

The Court find Robert Bracey for not Appearing and not giving his Attendance as A Jury man After warned, one hundred and fifty pounds of Tobacco / I say 150

The Court find William Carter for not giving his Attendance After sworn A Jury man, one hundred and fifty pounds of Tobacco; / I say 150

Robert Hignett was find by the Court for Telling and Learning of John Johnso A Curlous and base disgracefull song Reflexing on severall person, Two hundred pounds of Tobacco; / I say 200

The Court find Cornelous Verhoofe for nedglexting to Com to the Court house and keeping the books and Records soe that the Court and Countrey waited for him near halfe a day befor he Cam, five hundred pounds of Tobacco; / I say 500

The Court find John Vines for smoking Tobacco in the Court Contrary to an order of Court, fifty pounds of Tobacco / I say 050

The Court fine James Welles for smoking Tobacco in the Court fifty pounds Tobacco 050

The Court fine Cornelous Verhoofe for writing Whoorekill instead of Deale Contray to an order of Court, fifty pounds of Tobacco 050

The Court fine Luke Wattson, Gent{tleman}, fifty pounds of Tobacco for smoking Tobacco in the Court / I say 050

## **BACKGROUND**

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, Delaware colonists began to grow tobacco in great abundance. Since gold and silver were so scarce in America during the early colonial era, tobacco became a source of currency. Like other English colonies in the area, Delaware was bound to England's mercantile system. This economic arrangement allowed for England to receive raw goods from the American colonies, turn them into finished goods, and then sell the final product on the global market. However, the colonies were not allowed to enter into any production or trade agreements with other foreign countries.

With England's insatiable appetite for colonial tobacco and the colonies' need for more supplies, Americans began to use this crop as a type of currency to buy goods from England as well as to buy items in the colonies. Tobacco was seen as the safest, most stable currency in the colonies of the Mid-Atlantic region. Not only was tobacco used to purchase goods, it was also used to pay court fines and taxes. (The document reproduced for this lesson is an example of this type of usage.) In many instances, those individuals who were not farmers by trade - clergy, innkeepers, artisans, etc., would tend a small patch of tobacco in their spare time in order to pay for goods at the store or to pay taxes.

Although tobacco was essential to the Delaware economy for many years, it started to be replaced by other crops by the mid-eighteenth century. Tobacco was extremely harsh on the land and exhausted the soil of its nutrients after only three years of harvesting. The land would need a fallow period of nearly twenty years to allow the soil to re-energize itself. Other crops such as wheat and corn did not have the same devastating effect on the soil. In addition, the quality of Delaware tobacco did not match that of other English colonies in the region, such as Maryland and Virginia. Therefore, it was less in demand by England and the rest of the global market. By the time of the American Revolution in 1775, most Delaware farmers had abandoned tobacco production and returned to growing grain and other crops.

## **DOCUMENT BACKGROUND**

This document is part of the Sussex County Court Docket 1680 - 1699 (Record Group 4000). The proceedings recorded in this document were taken from the 1680 December session of the Deale County Court. Deale was the new name given to the county now known as Sussex. Before this time it was known as Whorekill. Note that one of the entries fines Cornelous Verhoofe for writing Whorekill instead of Deale. At the time of this court session, Delaware was controlled by the English under the Duke of York. Within two years William Penn would take control of the area.

\*\* An interesting footnote to this document is the manner in which it became part of the Delaware Public Archives collection. In 1948 a Dover couple found a set of papers hidden under the eaves in the attic while they were preparing their house for renovations. Upon confirmation that these documents were court proceedings from the seventeenth century, the couple donated the papers to the Archives.\*\*