Letter from Jamestown

*Standards: 8.2*

**Richard Frethorne, A Letter Home, 1623**

*[Note: Richard Frethorne came to Jamestown as a young indentured servant. We have no record of his age when he arrived. Richard wrote a letter home to his parents on March 20, 1623 three months after landing in Virginia. In those three months two-thirds of his shipmates died. Richard described life as an indentured servant in Jamestown and begged his father to pay the money owed for his passage to America so that he can return home.]*

Loving and kind father and mother I am writing to let you understand that I, your child, am in a serious danger. This country causes much sickness. We have all sorts of diseases that make our bodies weak. When we are sick we have no medicine or anything to help us get well. Since I got off the ship, I never ate anything but peas and a watery boiled cereal. Since I arrived here I have never seen deer. There are some chickens but we are not allowed to go and get them. We must work hard from early morning to late in the evening for a meal of watery cereal and a mouthful of bread and a little beef. People cry out day and night, Oh that they were in England. They would rather be at home without an arm or leg even if they had to beg from door to door. Here we live in fear of the enemy every hour. We are in great danger, for our colony is very weak.

There is nothing here but sickness and death. I am not half, not even a quarter, as strong as I was in England because we have so little food. . . . I have eaten more in a day at home than I eat here for a week. . . . If you love me you will pay the company for my passage to America immediately. I beg you. Good father, do not forget me, but have mercy and pity my miserable case. I know if you could see me now you would cry seeing how bad off I am. The answer of this letter will be life or death for me; therefore, good father, send for me as soon as you can. . . .

Questions

1. What is Richard asking his father to do?

2. How bad are conditions in the Virginia colony?

3. Do you believe that Richard is exaggerating the conditions in Jamestown? Why or why not?

4. How can you tell if Richard is accurately describing life for an indentured servant in Virginia?

5. What additional evidence do you need to find out if Richard was being truthful?