

Charter of the Dutch West India Company, June 3rd, 1621.

- New Netherland
- Trade
- Mercantilism
- Colonization

- Gathering & Interpreting Evidence
- Close Reading

Middle & High School
Level

- The origins of the Dutch West India Company
- The structure of joint stock companies as groups of investors cooperating to help reduce the individual financial risks in colonizing the Americas
- The colonial aspirations of the company to settle Dutch colonists and police the colony in order to negotiate and trade with Native Americans
- The absolute authority granted to the company by the Dutch States-General [Congress] to govern the colony

Essential Question:

Why was the Dutch West India Company established and what role did it play in the formation of New Netherland?

Historical Context:

Soon after Henry Hudson explored North America on behalf of the newly independent Holland in 1609, wealthy Dutch businessmen founded the Dutch West India Company. The company was a joint stock company composed of wealthy investors like Kiliaen Van Rensselaer and Willem Usselinx seeking profits in the Americas. The company derived its governing authority from a charter with the Dutch States-General (or Congress). The company established Fort Nassau near modern day Albany in 1614, and replaced it with Fort Orange in 1624, which later became Albany. The company also established Fort Amsterdam, now known as New York City, on the southern tip of Manhattan island, which became the colony's capital. The company claimed a monopoly of the fur trade in North America until 1629 when the Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions was adopted, after which the company unsuccessfully regulated and taxed the fur trade for its own revenues until the British invasion of New Amsterdam in 1664. The company went nearly bankrupt in the 1640s as private fur trading and warfare with neighboring Native American nations bled the company of its profits.

Document Analysis:

1. Introduce the unit by showing your students Len Tantillo's painting *Fort Orange, 1635*. Set the stage by introducing Fort Orange as the predecessor to Albany, and inform students that they are looking at the Hudson River in this painting. <https://www.albany.org/event/a-small-fort-which-our-people-call-fort-orange/26113/>
2. Ask students to write a 2-3 sentence creative response identifying the people in the painting and predicting what their life might be like living at Fort Orange. Frame their responses by dividing out the different groups present in the painting (i.e. settlers on land, Native Americans in a canoe, and merchants aboard a DWIC sloop).
3. After students volunteer at least three responses, identify for the class the Dutch West India Company flag aboard the sloop. Provide a brief overview of the Dutch West India Company to your class and define joint-stock companies and their hopes to reduce financial risk.
4. Use a sample of a corporate mission statement in your description of joint-stock companies, comparing them to modern corporations and contrasting them from sole-proprietorships.
5. Hand out the Dutch West India Company Charter and ask for volunteers to read aloud sections of the first article from one set of ellipsis to the other. Answer the guiding questions accompanying the first article as a class and instruct students to highlight or underline key phrases or sentences that help them to answer each question. Repeat the process with the second article.
6. Divide class into groups and assign each group one of the 4 remaining articles of the charter. Instruct the groups to read, develop and answer questions, and summarize their assigned article collaboratively.
7. Following this activity, reassign students into jigsaw groups with at least one student who has read each article. Assign each jigsaw group to write a 1 paragraph summary, in the form of a mission statement, of the West India Company charter to be submitted as an exit ticket.
8. Conclude the lesson by reconvening class and posing the question of whether or not their understanding of the DWIC has changed their own answers from the introductory activity regarding *Fort Orange, 1635*. Be sure students understand that the colony is governed by a company, a complex arrangement common for the Seventeenth Century.

Optional Extension Activity:

The following activity could be completed in order to extend students' thinking and encourage them to make connections.

Ask students to think about parallels between the Dutch West India Company and corporations in today's global economy. What seems familiar about the DWIC and what seems unique? Present these responses before the next lesson on the Ordinance Prohibiting Freemen & Private Traders from coming with their Vessels Within the Limits of the Colony Oct. 10th, 1642.

Charter of the Dutch West India Company. June 3rd, 1621. [abridged, Articles I-VI]
Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York. Vol. II. pp. 553-57.
E.B. O'Callaghan, History of New Netherland Vol. I, 112-120.

JUNE 3, 1621

The States-General of the United Netherlands, to all who shall see these Presents, or hear them read, Greeting.

Be it known, that we knowing the prosperity of these countries, and the welfare of their inhabitants depends principally on navigation and trade[...]not only be preserved in their former navigation, traffic, and trade, but also that their trade may be increased as much as possible in special conformity to the treaties, alliances, leagues and covenants for traffic and navigation formerly made with other princes, republics and people[...]without the common help, assistance, and interposition of a General Company, the people designed from hence for those parts cannot be profitably protected and maintained in their great risque from pirates, extortion and otherwise, which will happen in so very long a voyage...

Who wrote this charter? How do they relate to the West India Company?

II. That, moreover, the aforesaid Company may, in our name and authority, within the limits herein before prescribed, make contracts, engagements and alliances with the princes and natives of the countries comprehended therein, and also build any forts and fortifications there, to appoint and discharge Governors, people for war, and officers of justice, and other public officers, for the preservation of the places, keeping good order, police and justice, and in like manner for the promoting of trade; and again, others in their place to put, as they from the situation of their affairs shall see fit: Moreover, they must advance the peopling of those fruitful and unsettled parts, and do all that the service of those countries, and the profit and increase of trade shall require: and the Company shall successively communicate and transmit to us such contracts and alliances as they shall have made with the aforesaid princes and nations; and likewise the situation of the fortresses, fortifications, and settlements by them taken...

List a few of the responsibilities mentioned above. How important is the Dutch West India Company to New Netherland? Support your conclusions with references to the text.

III. Saving, that they having chosen a governor in chief, and prepared instructions for him, they shall be approved, and a commission given by us, And that further, such governor in chief, as well as other deputy governors, commanders, and officers, shall be held to take an oath of allegiance to us and also to the Company...

IV. And if the aforesaid Company in and of the aforesaid places shall be cheated under the appearance of friendship, or badly treated, or shall suffer loss in trusting their money or Goods, without having restitution, or receiving payment for them, they may use the best methods in their power, according to the situation of their affairs, to obtain satisfaction...

V. And if it should be necessary for the establishment, security and defence of this trade, to take any troops with them, we will, according to the constitution of this country, and the situation of affairs furnish the said Company with such troops, provided they be paid and supported by the Company...

VI. Which troops, besides the oath already taken to us and to his excellency, shall swear to obey the commands of the said Company, and to endeavour to promote their interest to the utmost of their ability....

Imagine you are an investor in the West India Company. What factors are you going to take into consideration when investing your wealth in this company? How will you earn money from this investment and how might you lose money?

Vocabulary:

States-General: Dutch governing body similar to Congress.

Welfare: Wellbeing **Covenant:** An agreement

Extortion: The practice of forcibly obtaining a payment

Commission: Command or order from a higher authority

Restitution: The return of something lost, typically in monetary value

Furnish: To provide **Endeavor:** To attempt