

Dig deeper into the *Archaeology of Resistance: Life in the Great Dismal Swamp* For Students

More FAQs

Q. How long have archaeologists been working in the Great Dismal Swamp?

A. It's been almost 20 years since archaeologists first started looking for evidence of Maroons in the National Wildlife Refuge. Even though there are no active excavations right now, archaeologists, historians, geologists, anthropologists, geographers, and others continue to research the lives of the people – Native Americans and Maroons - who lived in the Swamp. Check out the [Swampscapes](#) blog for behind-the-scenes peaks at the expedition on which this comic is based.

Q. Are there other similar places we know Maroons lived?

A. Almost everywhere people were enslaved in the 16th – 19th centuries, resistance communities formed in the hinterlands. Some of the most famous are in Brazil, Haiti, Jamaica, and Suriname but communities smaller than that of the Dismal Swamp existed in the U.S. in many locations for shorter periods of time.

Q. How many people may have lived in the swamp (Native Americans or Maroons)?

A. We're still learning how many people lived there in any given year but over the centuries, thousands of people found refuge in the Dismal.

Q. When did people leave the swamp?

A. Most enslaved and Maroon people left the Great Dismal Swamp around the time of the US Civil War. Later, laborers returned to the Swamp, working for the lumber companies. The land was protected as a National Wildlife Refuge in 1974 and nobody has lived there long-term since.

Q. I want to be an archaeologist. How do I start?

A. Not all archaeologists dig in the dirt – some work underwater or in museums, and many make amazing discoveries by analysing artifacts in the lab. Check out the National Park Service's [Archaeology for Kids](#) website or the Society for American Archaeology's [Archaeology as a Career](#) page. And, many State Archaeology Societies, local history museums and natural history museums offer public dig opportunities so you can try it out for yourself. Always remember to respect any artifacts and archaeology sites you find. It is illegal to remove artifacts from public lands without a permit.

A Few Links to Learn More about Archaeology and the Great Dismal Swamp



[The Secret Society of the Great Dismal Swamp](#)
(5:28, TED-Ed)



[Life in the Great Dismal Swamp](#)
(The Archaeological Conservancy)



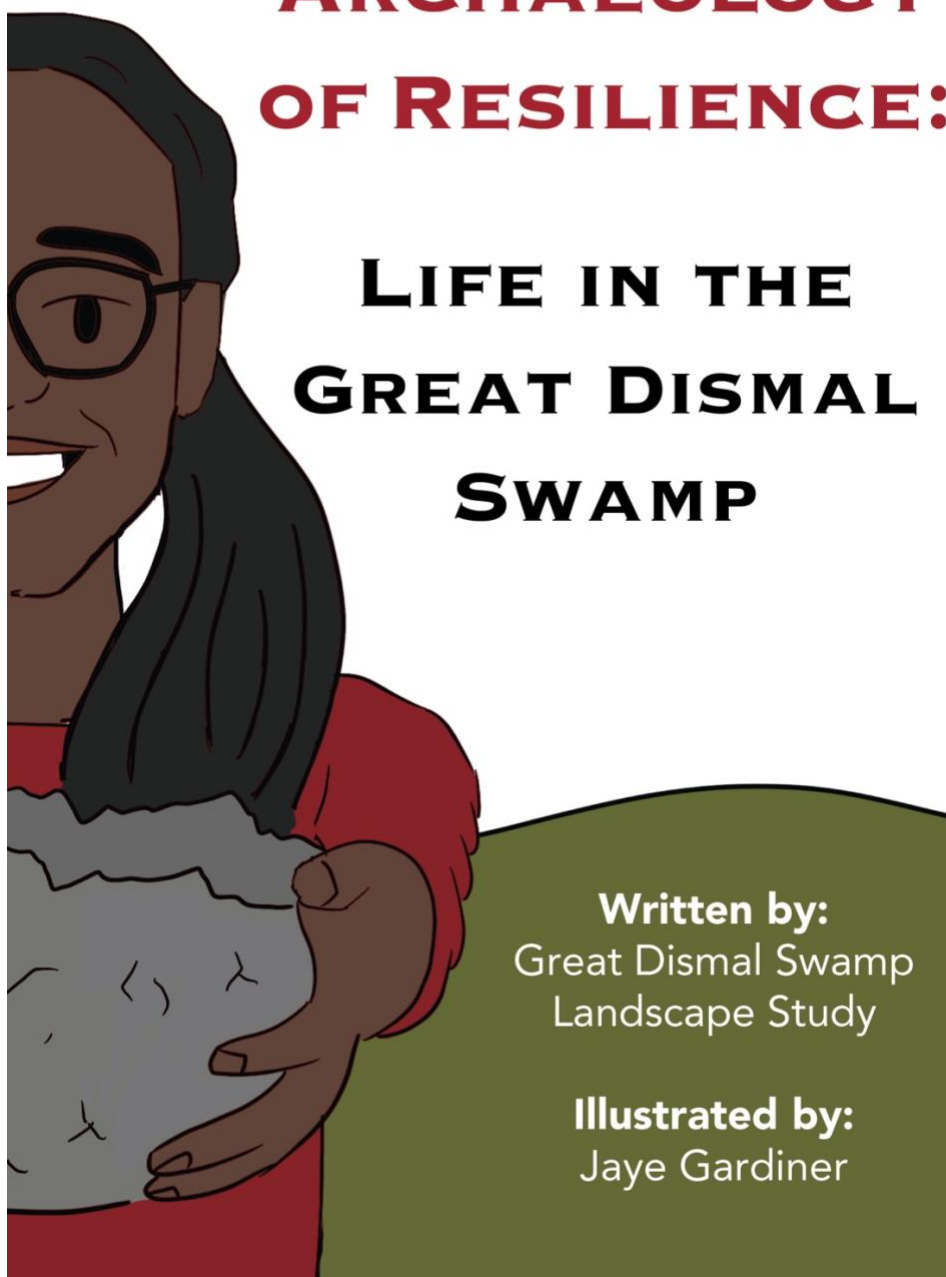
[A Bug-Filled Journey Through the Great Dismal Swamp](#)
(6:04, WFAE Charlotte NPR)



TEACHER'S GUIDE
Extra Resources for the Comic
Version 1.0

**ARCHAEOLOGY
OF RESILIENCE:**

**LIFE IN THE
GREAT DISMAL
SWAMP**



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Great Dismal Swamp
Landscape Study

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VIRGINIA STANDARDS OF LEARNING (SOL) TIE-INS

The following standards of learning are drawn from the 2020 report of the [Virginia African American History Education Commission \(AAHEC\)](#).

Virginia Studies	VS.2e, VS.4e, VS.5b, VS.7a, VS.7c, VS.7c
United States History to 1865	US1.5d, US1.6c, US1.9b
Virginia and United States History	VUS.2a, VUS.6e,
2018 Science SOLs	3.1, 3.5, 4.1, 4.5, 5.1, ES.9, LS.11, 6.7

EXPANDED FAQS

Q. Where are the artifacts from the Great Dismal Swamp now? Can I see them?

A. The [US Fish and Wildlife Service](#) is responsible for the artifacts. A few artifacts from a Dismal Swamp Maroon settlement are on permanent display at the [Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture](#). The Hampton History Museum in Hampton, Virginia, included several objects from the Great Dismal Swamp Collection their 2017-2018 exhibition *“Give Me Liberty”*. The rest are temporarily at [American University](#) in Washington, DC, and will eventually be curated by the [Virginia Department of Historic Resources](#), so researchers can study them and museums can borrow them for exhibits.

Q. How long have archaeologists been working in the Great Dismal Swamp?

A. It’s been almost 20 years since archaeologists first started looking for evidence of Maroons in the National Wildlife Refuge. Even though there are no active excavations right now, archaeologists, historians, geologists, anthropologists, geographers, and others continue to research the lives of the people – Native Americans and Maroons - who lived in the Swamp. Check out the [Swampscapes](#) blog for behind-the-scenes peaks at the expedition on which this comic is based.

Students might be interested to research some of the other scholars whose works can be found online.

Q. Are there other similar places we know Maroons lived?

A. Almost everywhere people were enslaved in the 16th – 19th centuries, resistance communities formed in the hinterlands. Some of the most famous are in [Brazil](#), Haiti, Jamaica, and Suriname (where their [descendants still identify as Maroons](#)) but communities smaller than that of the Dismal Swamp existed in the U.S. in many locations for shorter periods of time.

Q. How many people may have lived in the swamp (Native Americans or Maroons)?

A. We’re still learning how many people lived there in any given year but over the centuries, thousands of people found refuge in the Dismal.

Q. When did people leave the swamp?

A. Most enslaved and Maroon people left the Great Dismal Swamp around the time of the US Civil War. Later, laborers returned to the Swamp, working for the lumber companies, but most of them lived outside the Swamp and only came in for their work shift (Figure 1, see also the blog entry [Needles and Haystacks](#)). The land was protected as a National Wildlife Refuge in 1974 and nobody has lived there long-term since.



Figure 1: In 2016, while exploring the Swamp for islands Maroons might have lived on, archaeologists stumbled across this 1914 Tredegar Rail chassis. It is a remnant of the early 20th century logging industry and the temporary railroads the logging company laborers built as they harvested timber from different areas in the Swamp. This chassis must have gotten bogged in the mud and left behind.






Q. Where can I learn more about the Nansemond and other Indigenous people?




A. *The Nansemond Indian Nation is, and has been, centered around the Dismal Swamp for centuries. The tribe was officially recognized by the state of Virginia in 1985 and by the federal government in 2018. You can read more about their history and their present on the official tribal website: <https://nansemond.org/>*

Q. My students are interested in archaeology careers. Where can we learn more?

A. *Not all archaeologists dig in the dirt – some work underwater or in museums, and many make amazing discoveries by analysing artifacts in the lab. [Trowelblazers](#) is a great place to explore profiles of real women in archaeology and other “trowel” fields. Check out the National Park Service’s [Archaeology for Kids](#) website or the Society for American Archaeology’s [Archaeology as a Career](#) page. And, many State Archaeology Societies, local history museums and natural history museums offer public dig opportunities so you can try it out for yourself. Always remember to respect any artifacts and archaeology sites you find. It is illegal to remove artifacts from public lands without a permit.*

QUICK LINKS TO OUTSIDE RESOURCES

Great Dismal Swamp History and Archaeology	
	<u><i>The Secret Society of the Great Dismal Swamp</i></u> (5:28, TED-Ed, animated, 2021)
	<u><i>Inside the Historic Swamp Refuge for African-American Slaves</i></u> (3:53, The Great Big Show, 2018)
	<u><i>Freedom and Slavery in the Great Dismal Swamp</i></u> (19:55, American University, 2016)
	<u><i>History of the Great Dismal Swamp</i></u> (4:18, 13News Now, 2019)
	<u><i>The Great Dismal Swamp</i></u> (4:06, BBC Travel Show, 2020) Ecology-focused
	<u><i>Did you know? Maroon Communities</i></u> (4:52, Visit Chesapeake, 2021)
	<u><i>Escape to the Great Dismal Swamp</i></u> (44:00, Smithsonian Channel, 2018) May require subscription
	<u><i>A Bug-Filled Journey Through the Great Dismal Swamp</i></u> (6:04, WFAE Charlotte NPR)
	<u><i>Life in the Great Dismal Swamp</i></u> (The Archaeological Conservancy)
	<u><i>Deep in the Swamps, Archaeologists are Finding How Fugitive Slaves Kept Their Freedom</i></u> (Smithsonian Magazine, 2016)
	<u><i>The Dismal Swamp: One Road Out of Slavery Took You Straight to the Boggiest Place You've Ever Been</i></u> (National Endowment for Humanities, 2017)
People Fleeing Enslavement	
	<u><i>Freedom on the Move</i></u> online database from Cornell University of "runaway ads", includes an educator portal of K-12 resources in collaboration with <u><i>Hard History</i></u>
Archaeology	
	<u><i>The Society for Black Archaeologists</i></u> network of archaeologists that promotes more people of African descent to enter the field of archaeology, and highlights the past and present achievements and contributions people of African descent have made to the field of archaeology
	<u><i>Trowelblazers</i></u> profiles of historical and modern women working in the 'trowel fields'
	<u><i>Archaeology for Kids</i></u> Information and activities from the National Park Service
	<u><i>Archaeology in the Community</i></u>

	<p><i>This award-winning organization based in Washington, DC, promotes public understanding of archaeological heritage.</i></p> <p>Four introductory lesson plans can be found here</p> <p>And a K-12 reading list in archaeology can be found here</p>
Women in Science	
	<p style="text-align: center;">IF/THEN Collection</p> <p><i>profiles of more than 120 women in dozens of science fields and educational resources</i></p>
Teaching with Comics	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Comics in the Classroom</p> <p><i>From San Diego County Office of Education, this presentation helps teachers incorporate reading and making comics into student activities</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Women in Comics</p> <p><i>A short article about comic artists who are women of color</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Jaye Gardiner, PhD</p> <p><i>Website of our illustrator, cancer researcher Dr. Jaye Gardiner</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Questions to Encourage Thinking While Reading Comics</p> <p><i>Also from SDCOE, this bookmark lists general questions to ask before during and after students read a comic.</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Comic Creation Exercises from Trevor Getz</p> <p><i>Trevor Getz is a professor at San Francisco State University who creates and teaches with graphic histories. These lesson plans get students quickly creating their own comics</i></p>

NOTES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This section has notes for specific pages or frames in the comic.

Page 2

Join our team of archaeologists as we uncover the fascinating story of the lives of the people and **resilient** communities they built here.



This story will change the way you know the Great Dismal Swamp, life in the colonial South, and maybe even your town!

Yes! These are real people. They are only four of the many, many people who help us learn about the past, present, and future of the Great Dismal Swamp.

Archaeologists must obtain proper permits before starting any archaeology work. Depending on where the dig happens, you might need permission from the landowner, the local, state or federal government, the tribal government, or descendant communities.



- What should you do if you find an artifact?
- Who “owns” the artifacts? Who do you think should “own” them? Why?
- For some people, the Swamp was a stop on the [Underground Railroad](#). Why might others flee enslavement but stay in the Swamp?

Page 3



Page 4

We found clues in runaway slave ads from the 1800s, stories about the time, and examples of Maroons in other places.



The NWR protects about 190 square miles of Swamp today and small pockets remain outside the Refuge.



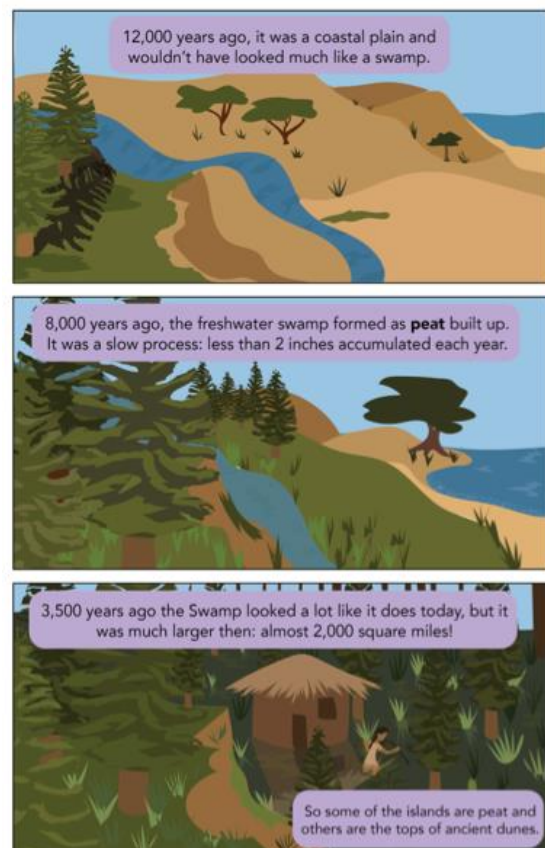
- How has the terrain changed where you live over the last 12,000 years?
- Where else in the world is peat found?
- If peat accumulated at a steady rate of 2 inches per year, how thick would it be now?
- Why might it not actually be that thick everywhere in the Swamp today?
- What happened to the rest of the Swamp?

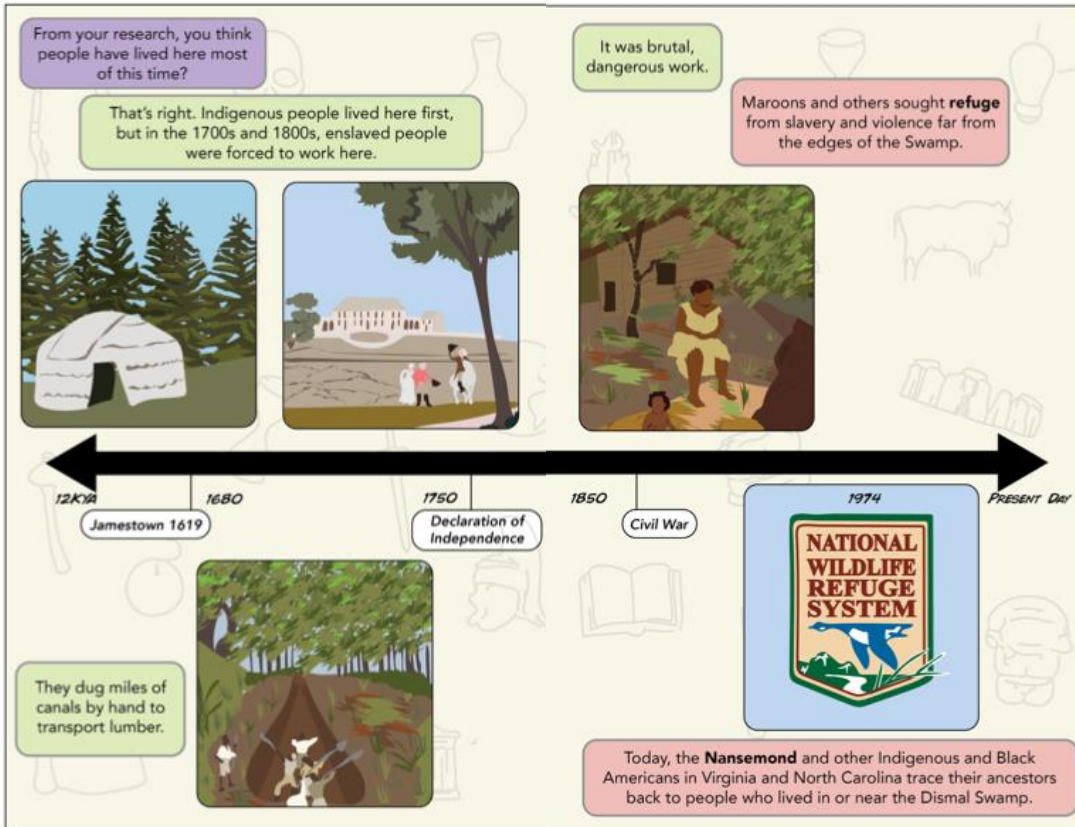
Find runaway slave ads from historic newspapers on [Freedom on the Move](#) from Cornell University.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's [Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp](#) is a fictionalized account of the Swamp.

In 1988, [Elaine Nichols](#) conducted one of the first archaeological searches for Maroon communities in the region. She worked on an island outside the NWR. Her results were inconclusive in part because the landscape has been changed so much for agriculture. As a PhD student at William and Mary, Dan Sayers picked up the thread and began to look within the protected NWR.

Page 5





This timeline only shows a few key events.

- What else happened in Virginia, in North Carolina, in your local area, or across North America during this time?



Charley's story can be found in the March 8, 1859 issue of Frederick Douglass' Paper and in James Redpath's "Talks with Slaves from the Southern States" (1859).

The story is transcribed in the vernacular and as such may be challenging for younger students but great for discussion with older students. See [this blog entry](#) for brief comments on Charley's story.

"Dismal Swamp is divided into tree or four parts. Whar I worked da called it Company Swamp. When we wanted fresh portk we goed to Gum Swamp, 'bout sun-down, run a wild hog down from de cane-brakes into Juniper Swamp, whar dar feet can't touch hard groun, knock dem over, and dat's de way we kill dem."

This page shows the basics of an excavation. Once we start digging, it is impossible to put everything back exactly as it was so we must take lots of notes and photographs. In addition to the low-tech methods shown here, we sometimes use specialized methods like photogrammetry to build 3D models of excavations or artifacts.

Features are collections artifacts (rocks forming a hearth, bricks in a wall) or patterns in the soil (stains left from decomposing wood posts from a fence) that are not portable. For example, if you remove the rocks forming the hearth, you no longer have a hearth, you just have a pile of rocks.

Soil colors are described using the [Munsell system](#).





Archaeology is a team sport! Collaboration is key to successful research. Some archaeologists specialize in animal bones, others in plant remains or ceramics or stone tools or lab analysis or mapping.



- Why is collaboration important in archaeology?
- With what other fields might archaeologists want to collaborate? Why?

For pictures of other artifacts found in the excavation, see these blog entries:

- [3D scanning](#)
- [Glass](#)
- [Video of artifacts](#)

Not all archaeologists do fieldwork and lab analysis is a very important part of understanding the artifacts. This [blog entry](#) describes work in the Dismal Swamp lab.

This story is based on a real artifact – here's the [blog entry](#) from the day we found it -

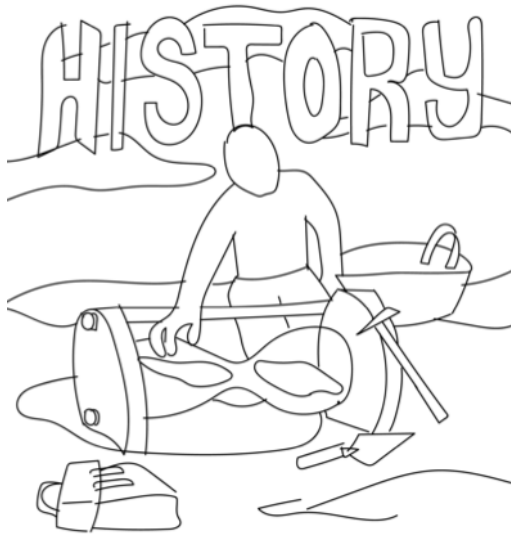


- What personal objects are meaningful to you?
- What do those objects reveal about you that a tool (or practical object you use everyday) might not?



Page 14

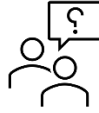
The story of the Maroons of the Great Dismal Swamp is one of resiliency and survival; persisting despite the risk of enslavement and living in a challenging landscape.



Archaeology lets us reach back in time and learn about real people whose stories are left out of our history books.

End.

Coloring page. We'd love to see your and your students' artwork on this page of the comic.



- Can you picture yourself as an archaeologist?
- What other tools do archaeologists use?
- What technologies are useful in archaeology?
- What group of people from the past would you like to learn about from an archaeological excavation?

Page 16

People often ask, "Who pays for the excavations?"

The excavations depicted in this story were supported by grants from:

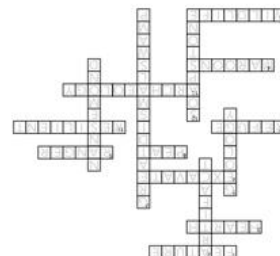
- [American University](#)
- [The Explorers Club Washington Group](#)
- [The Archaeology Society of Virginia](#)
- [WINGSWorldQuest](#)



- Why do think these groups help pay for archaeology research?
- Who do you think should pay for it?
- Is it a good use of money? Why or why not?

Acknowledgements

This IF/THEN® She Can Change The World Project was made possible with the support of Lyda Hill Philanthropies as part of the AAAS IF/THEN® Ambassadors Program. Thank you to the many researchers, land managers, students, and volunteers who collaborated with the Great Dismal Swamp Landscape Study and Swampscape project over the years. Thanks to RSG for the comic idea. To the Indigenous, enslaved, and Maroon people of the Dismal Swamp of the past: We may never know your names but we see the evidence of your lives. Deepest respect and gratitude to you and to your descendants.



COMICS ACTIVITIES FROM TREVOR GETZ

