HISTORY: Elizabeth River Boats and Ships

SOL: Science L.S.5
History USI.1, USII.1, CE.1

BACKGROUND MATERIAL:
The Elizabeth River has always been an integral part of the transportation system of the Tidewater region. Beginning with dugout canoes of the Native Americans who hunted and fished along the shores, hundreds of kinds of vessels have traveled the Elizabeth River. They have been used for every possible purpose: people transport, cargo shipment, commercial fishing, fighting wars, and recreation. Some boats are unique to the Elizabeth River and the Chesapeake Bay and are found in old pictures of local wharves such as: Gosport at the foot of High Street, Scott’s Creek where Norcom High School now stands, and the foot of Market Street where Waterside is now built. If you look across the Elizabeth River from the Barge and toward the mouth of the River, you will be looking toward the site of Fort Norfolk that protected the settlements along the Elizabeth River since the American Revolution.

How has the Elizabeth River been important to commerce and transportation throughout history?

MATERIALS:
• Ship cards
• Ship Key (student copies and large poster size for wall)
• Posters of ship terms

ACTIVITY: “Ships of the Elizabeth River”
Adapted from The Changing Chesapeake, Valerie Chase, Cynthia A. Belcher

Teacher Notes: This activity uses a flow chart key to identify ships of the Elizabeth River. Students may need examples of how to move through the key. Posters of ship terms will assist students in interpreting the key.

1. Have students look out of windows and identify boats seen passing and their purpose such as:
   yachts/recreation, tugboats/transportation of cargo, cruise ships/recreation, naval vessels/defense, coast guard vessels/defense and rescue, ferries/transportation, container ships/transportation of cargo, etc.

2. Hang the Habitat Key on the wall

3. Review and hang posters of ship terms:
   • BOW  front of the boat (forward)
   • STERN  back of the boat (aft)
   • MASTS  vertical poles that hold sails
   • SLOOP  boat with one mast
   • SCHOONER  boat with two or more masts
   • RAKED MASTS  masts slanted backward (toward the stern)

4. Give 11 volunteer students one ship card each. Give all students a set of the information about the 11 ships so they can help.

5. The student with the ship card should walk through the key with other students helping in the decision making process. Start at the left-hand side making a choice between the first two descriptions. Follow the choice to the next two descriptions and make a selection. Continue until reaching the identity of the boat pictured and described. Place the picture beside the name.
Additional Information about the Historical Vessels:

1. **DEADRISE** Named for the flat bottom, straight from the center to side of the bottom. These boats are the most common watermen workboats rigged for crabbing, oystering, and clam dredging. In between times they are used for fishing.

2. **SKIPJACK** Historical sailing oystering boats that were made for dredging. These boats with a retractable centerboard instead of a deep keel could be sailed by a small number of crew (2-4 men) over oyster beds. With only about 20 licensed to dredge it is the last commercial sailing fleet in the US.

3. **SAILING LOG CANOE** These ships evolved from the log canoes made by Native Americans and are rigged with sails. These boats are fast and still used in racing today.

4. **BALTIMORE CLIPPER** Fast and graceful ships patterned after those used by privateers and blockade runners during the Revolutionary War. They were common in the first half of the 19th century used to carry cargo but were replaced by steam ships and trains.

5. **LOG CANOE** These were made by Native Americans from a single log. A slow process of repeatedly burning and then scraping the burned area hollowed them out. They could be as much as 50 feet long.

6. **YAWL BOATS** These small boats were carried by large sailing ships to be rowed ashore in waters too shallow for the larger boats. They also worked as mini tugboats, pushing or pulling the sailing ships to maneuver them. On Skipjacks, these little boats were equipped with a motor and fit into the stern of the Skipjack to power it to the oyster beds.

7. **RAMS** These were narrow Schooners were little more than sailing barges used to carry cargo. Some brave sailors also sailed them in the ocean.

8. **BUGEYE** These ships were rigged for oyster dredging in the spring and the fall. They were used to haul vegetables, lumber and coal during other months. They were also sailed by pirates and whiskey smugglers. They evolved from log canoes but had a covered deck and cabin.

9. **PUNGY** These fast sailing vessels were designed after the Baltimore Clippers. They were used to carry cargo, frequently perishables from port to port. They were the first ships used for oyster dredging but their deep keel kept them from sailing in shallow waters. They were painted pink and green.

**COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What are some historical uses of the Elizabeth River by humans?
2. In the past what were the most important uses of the Elizabeth River?
3. What are the current uses of the Elizabeth River?
4. Compare and contrast the current and historical uses of the Elizabeth River?
5. What affects might these uses have on the watershed? How might the effects differed through history?
6. What are some environmentally friendly alternatives?