

The First and Second Voyages of Christopher Columbus (1492-1493)

NCSS Thematic Strand: Time, Continuity, and Change

Grade Level: 7-12

Class Periods Required: One 50 minute period.

Purpose, Background, and Context

In 1492, Christopher Columbus took three Spanish ships and sailed to the West Indies in search of wealth. On his first voyage, he claimed possession of the New World and encountered peaceful native people. He discovered some gold and took a few native people back with him to Spain. He wrote extensively about this voyage and these are the sources students read and discuss to attain the lesson's goals. From analyzing Columbus' writings historians and students discern how he regarded the native people whom he encountered. By reading Columbus's views on taking some of taking native people back to Spain as slaves, students attain insight into the late 15th century mindset of, not only Columbus, but those of Spanish conquistadores who followed him.

On his second voyage Columbus took significantly more ships and soldiers. From reading primary source excerpts from the second landing, students discover the brutality of Columbus and his men. From analyzing these primary sources, students complicate the prevailing view that Columbus as a hero discoverer of America. Instead they will recognize that Columbus's encounters with the New World came at terrible costs to Native populations, and set the state for European genocide and slavery in the North and South America.

Objectives & Student Outcomes

Students will:

- ❖ Compare historiographical interpretations of a period or event by explaining differences among historians in their purpose, perspective, and use of evidence. (NCSS Standards, p. 131);

- ❖ Research and analyze past periods, events, and recurring issues using a variety of primary sources, as well as secondary sources. (NCSS Standards, p. 131);
- ❖ Understand that the beginnings of the slave trade come out of Columbus' voyages. The brutality of Spanish colonialism begins here as well.

Materials:

The Landing of Columbus, 19th Century. Put on projector.

Oil painting depicting cruelties against natives, 16th century. Put on projector

The Columbus Letter, translated, 1493. Provide one to each student.

Procedures:

Procedure 1:

Do a question and answer session to discuss how there were earlier discoverers of the American continents, as well as mentioning the Native people. After this is discussed, ask the students: “So why is Columbus the one everyone remembers?”

Put the painting, *The Landing of Columbus*, on the projector screen. Have the students view the painting and ask the questions:

- ❖ What do you see in this painting?
- ❖ What are the individuals in the painting doing?
- ❖ Who is at the center of the painting?
- ❖ Who is on the margins?
- ❖ What was the artist trying to convey by depicting this event in such a way?
- ❖ How does this painting reflect what you have learned about Columbus in the past?

After the students have responded to these questions, select a student to summarize the purpose of the painting and the artist's purpose for painting it. Transition to the next procedure by saying:

“OK, let's move on to a primary source to see if we agree or disagree with the artist's depiction of Columbus's landing.”

Return to the following question after viewing the second painting and reading primary source descriptions of Columbus' second voyage:

- ❖ Was Columbus's landing and discovery a heroic enterprise that glorified European civilization?

Procedure 2:

Hand out *The Columbus Letter* to each student and briefly explain the letter's historical backdrop: Columbus wrote it in 1493 prior to his second voyage. It was addressed to the treasurer of King Ferdinand of Spain.

Give the students time to read the letter.

Procedure 3:

Put students in carefully constructed small groups. Distribute a copy of the following questions to group members:

- ❖ What did Columbus think of the Native population in such categories as physical fitness, religion, society, worth to the King of Spain, and relationship to European explorers?
- ❖ What was Columbus plan for the islands he visited?
- ❖ How does he think his plans will affect the Native populations?
- ❖ How does he use Christianity to justify his actions?
- ❖ How does this letter and painting differ in its' depiction of the landing from the painting we look at earlier?

At this point, also project the second oil painting on the screen for student reference in small group and in large group discussion (procedure 4). Give students time to answer the questions and designate one member of each group to be the recorder.

Procedure 4:

In large group, students answer the above questions. Move from one group to another with the recorders of each group contributing answers to the central questions.

Write students' answers on the board. Instruct students to take notes in preparation for tomorrow's fifteen minute essay writing exercise.

Assessment:

In the beginning of class tomorrow, ask the students to take out a piece of paper for a short writing exercise that will be based on yesterday's lesson. The question they

will answer by means of essay is: **How would you interpret the consequences of Columbus's landings?**

Extensions and Adaptations:

This lesson leads into a lesson on the conquistadors. The conquistador lesson includes a part about Bartolome de las Casas and his condemnation of Spanish colonialism.

After both of these lessons are completed, students participate in a skit that has them probe controversies surrounding the Spanish conquest including Bartolome de las Casas's early condemnation of Spanish cruelty toward Native-Americans.