

Critical Thinking About the Arrival of Columbus

Model Social Studies Curriculum

Developed for the Office of Public Instruction

Grade Level: Can be adapted for 4th – 8th Grades

Standards:

- Investigate, interpret, and analyze the impact of multiple historical and contemporary viewpoints concerning events within and across cultures, major world religions, and political systems.
- Explain how and why events may be interpreted differently according to the points of view of participants, witnesses, reporters, and historians.

Guiding Questions for Assessment: Did students demonstrate accurate historical information about the arrival of Columbus? Did students demonstrate a critical analysis of reference materials?

Title of Lesson 1: **Journaling for Points of View**

Measurement Tools for Assessment: journal entries and writing assignments, teacher’s anecdotal notes regarding students’ participation

Activities:

- Ask students, “What do you know about Columbus’ arrival?”
- Do a know/learn (K/L) chart. Students brainstorm ideas about what they already know or have heard about Columbus in order to access prior knowledge. List students’ perceptions on the left side of chart paper with the title: What we know. The right side is titled, “What we have learned.” Leave right side blank until end of unit.
- Read aloud the first four chapters of Michael Dorris’ Morning Girl (this will give the students insight into the life of the Taino people pre-Columbus).
- Using the following journal entries from the teacher resource, *Rethinking Columbus*, have students paraphrase to create a timeline display of Spain, Columbus, and the Tainos.
- Using information from Morning Girl and the timeline, have students write journal entries to describe their thoughts *in the role* of Columbus’ men or the Tainos.

Timeline: Spain, Columbus and Native Americans

Approximately 8 B.C.: The People who call themselves Taino, or “men of good,” arrive in the region. With great care for the earth, the Tainos are able to feed millions of people. No one in a community goes hungry. They play sports and recite poetry. They are great inventors and travel from island to island. One Spanish priest reported that he never saw two Tainos fighting.

1451: Columbus is born probably in the Italian port city, Genoa. At the time of his birth, there may be as many as 70 to 100 million people living in what will one day be called the Americas. They are of many nationalities, with perhaps 2,000 different languages.

1484: Columbus first presents his idea to the king of Portugal for reaching the Indies by sailing west. The plan is rejected.

April 1492: Ferdinand and Isabella agree to Columbus's westward voyage to the Indies. They also agree to his demands: ten percent of all the wealth returned to Spain, the title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea, governor, and viceroy to all the territory he discovers.

August 3, 1492: Columbus departs from Palos.

October 12, 1492: Juan Rodriguez Bermejo, a sailor on the Pinta, shouts, "Land, Land!" Columbus later claims he first spotted land and thus will collect the lifetime pension promised. The ships arrive at the island, Guanahani, where Columbus takes possession of the island for Ferdinand and Isabella. Columbus receives presents from the people he encounters and gives them some red caps, glass beads, and "many other things of little value."

The first thing he tries to ask the people is "if they have gold."

October 14: Columbus's thoughts turn to slavery: "... When your Highnesses so command, they [the Indians] can be carried off to the Castile or held captive in the island itself, since with 50 men they would all be kept in subjection and forced to do whatever may be wished."

December 9: Columbus sails into the harbor of the island the Taino people call Bohio. Its plains are "the loveliest in the world." It reminded Columbus of Spain. He calls the island Espanola.

October/November/December: Columbus's every move is determined by where he believes he can find gold. On December 23 he writes in his journal: "Our Lord in His Goodness guide me that I may find this gold, I mean their mine, for I have many here who say they know it." Still, by mid-December Columbus has found very little gold.

December 26: Realizing he will have to leave men behind, Columbus orders a fort and tower built. He writes that it is necessary to make the Indians realize that they must serve Spain's king and queen "with love and fear."

January 2, 1493: Columbus prepares to leave Bohio. He leaves behind 39 men and orders them "to discover the mine of gold."

February 15: Columbus returns with relatively little of value.

May 28, 1493: The king and queen confirm that Columbus, his sons and his heirs will be Admiral and Viceroy and Governor of the islands and mainland discovered "now and forever."

Approximately September/October 1493: The men left behind at La Navidad brutally mistreat the Tainos. They steal, take slaves and rape women. In response, the Taino cacique, Caonabo, kills all the Spaniards on the island.

September 25, 1493: Columbus's second voyage begins. His fleet includes 17 ships and between 1,200 and 1,500 men (no women). Pressure is high for Columbus to make good on his promises.

November 3, 1493: Columbus lands on Dominica. On Guadeloupe, his men go ashore "looting and destroying all they found."

Early February 1494: Columbus sends 12 of the 17 ships back to Spain for more supplies. Several dozen Indian slaves are taken aboard, "men and women and boys and girls," he writes. He justifies this by writing that they are cannibals and thus slavery will more readily "secure the welfare of their souls."

Columbus recommends to the king and queen that supplies needed in the Indies could be paid for in slaves.

September 14: Columbus heads to Puerto Rico to raid for Carib slaves. However, he becomes ill and his officers return the ships to Isabella.

November 1494: Returning to Spain, mutineers against Columbus complain to the king and queen. They say there is no gold and that the enterprise is a joke.

February 1495: Columbus rounds up 1,600 Tainos - the same people he had earlier described as "so full of love and without greed." Some 550 of them - "among the best males and females," writes colonist Michele de Cuneo - are chained and taken to ships to be sent to Spain as slaves.

1495: Columbus establishes the tribute system. Every Taino, 14 or older, is required to fill a hawk's bell full of gold every three months. Those who comply are given copper tokens to wear around their necks. Where Columbus decides there is little gold, 25 pounds of spun cotton is required. The Spaniards cut the hands off those who do not comply; they are left to bleed to death. As La Casas writes, the tribute is "impossible and intolerable."

March 24, 1495: Columbus and his brothers Diego and Bartolome, who had arrived earlier, send an armed force to the mountains to put down Taino resistance to Spanish brutality.

October 1495: Responding to reports of Columbus's misrule, the king and queen send an investigator to Espanola.

March 1496: Columbus departs for Spain. Two ships make the journey. Onto them, Columbus forces 30 Taino prisoners. Columbus arrives and awaits an answer from the king and queen to his request for a third voyage.

May 30, 1498: Columbus's third voyage begins.

Mid-August 1498: Columbus lands in Espanola. The admiral finds a rebellion against his brothers' rule.

1500: By now the Spaniards have established at least seven forts in Espanola and at least 340 gallows.

August 1500: The king and queen, upset over the negative reports of Columbus's bad government, though not his mistreatment of Tainos, sends a commissioner to take charge in Espanola. The commissioner arrives amid another uprising against the Columbus brothers. He arrests them and in October sends them to Spain for trial.

Late October: Columbus arrives in Cadiz in chains. A few months later, he presents his case to the king and queen. He demands he be reinstated governor. He will make one more voyage but will never regain his power.

May 20, 1506: Columbus dies in Valladolid, Spain.

1542: Bartolome de la Casas writes that a mere 200 Tainos still live in Espanola. One scholar recently estimated that perhaps more than three million Tainos lived there when Columbus first arrived.

Title of Lesson 2: **Class Role-Play**

Activities: Students will participate in a mock trial.

- Present information and have students practice the basic principals for oral presentation (speaking clearly, enunciation, body language, etc).
- Students research and role-play the parts of Columbus, Columbus' men, the king and queen, the system of the empire, the Tainos.
- Research justice system of Spain during the 1500s.
- Use this process in a class play to bring Columbus to trial.
- Perform on Columbus Day for other classes and community.

Title of Lesson 3: **Opposing Viewpoints**

- Read aloud the following to the students, the interview with Suzan Shown Harjo called "We Have No Reason to Celebrate an Invasion" and the editorial with opposing viewpoints.
- Divide the students in pairs or groups of three (with a recorder [highlighter in this case] and a reporter) to highlight or underline two or three statements from each document that provide evidence of thinking differently about Columbus.

- Model this process on the board and give these directions: Find and highlight a statement on one document that expresses a point of view. Look for and highlight a statement on the other document that expresses an opposing point of view.
- Have reporters from each group report the work from the group.
- Teacher or volunteer writes results on chart paper.
- With the class speculate as to why the writers of these documents hold the opinions they do.
- Let students know that they will have an audience of community members and classmates and have them write editorials on their own viewpoints regarding the arrival of Columbus. Make copies for other classrooms. Publish in the local newspaper.

Interview with Suzan Harjo

Why aren't you joining in the celebrations of the Columbus quincentenary?

As Native American peoples in this red quarter of Mother Earth, we have no reason to celebrate an invasion that caused the demise of so many of our people and is still causing destruction today. The Europeans stole our land and killed our people.

But because the quincentenary is a cause celebre, it provides an opportunity to put forth Native American perspectives on the next 500 years.

Columbus was just "a man of his times." Why are you so critical of him? Why not look at the positive aspects of his legacy?

For people who are in survival mode, it's very difficult to look at the positive aspects of death and destruction, especially when it is carried through to our present. There is a reason we are the poorest people in America. There is a reason we have the highest teen suicide rate. There is a reason why our people are ill housed and in poor health, and we do not live as long as the majority population.

That reason has to do with the fact that we were in the way of Western civilization and we were in the way of westward expansion. We suffered the "excesses" of civilization such as murder, pillage, rape, destruction of the major waterways, destruction of land, the destruction and pollution of the air.

What are those "positive" aspects of the Columbus legacy? If we're talking about the horse, yeah, that's good. We like the horse. Indians raised the use of the horse to high military art, especially among the Cheyenne people and the tribes of the plains states.

Was that a good result of that invasion? Yes. Is it something we would have traded for the many Indian peoples who are no longer here because of that invasion? No.

We also like the beads that came from Europe, and again we raised their use to a high art. Would we have traded those beads for the massacres of our people, such as the Sand Creek massacre (in which U.S. soldiers massacred hundreds of Native American men, women, and children at Sand Creek, Colorado in 1864)? No.

Why do we focus on Columbus rather than any number of U.S. presidents who were also responsible for the death and destruction of Indian people? Because it's his 500 years; it's his quincentenary.

What should be the goal and perspective of teachers when telling their elementary and high school students about Columbus?

First, that no one knows the truth about Columbus. His story is a very complex history in and of itself. Too often, this history is posed as romantic myth, and the uncomfortable facts about Columbus are eliminated.

Explaining the unpleasant truths about Columbus does not take away from the fact that he was able to lurch over to these shores in three little boats. In fact, it gives the story of Columbus more dimension. It also makes it easier for kids in school to accept not only Columbus but other things.

Teachers need to respect the truth. What happens if I'm sitting in a classroom and teachers are telling me that Thomas Jefferson was one of the greatest men in the world, and I also know that he owned slaves, but they don't tell me that? What am I going to do when I'm told, "don't use of abuse drugs or alcohol"? Will I think there may be another side to that too? What else am I being told that isn't true?

Kids are smart. And they have not experienced enough setbacks to know that they have to be sheep. But that's what they're taught in the public school - how to exercise not personal discipline, but top-down discipline. It's the "do as you're told" approach to the world, rather than trying to help kids understand their place in the world.

We have to inject more truth in the classroom generally. And that only comes from discussion. I guess I'm a fan of the Socratic method.

What are the key struggles that native people face today?

We need, in the first instance, basic human rights such as religious freedom. Or how about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and other things that many people in the United States view as standard fare but are out of reach for Indian people?

There is also the issue of land and treaty rights. We have property that we don't own and we should, and we have property that we own and we don't control and we should.

We have treaties with the United States that are characterized in the U.S. constitution as the supreme law of the land. Yet every one, without exception, of nearly 400 treaties signed between native peoples and the U.S. government has been broken. Every one of them.

A good place to start would be for the United States to live up to every treaty agreement. It's also the way you get at resolving some of the problems of poverty, alcoholism, unemployment, and poor health.

If we don't handle the big things, we can't get to the manifestations of the problem. We have to go to the basic human rights issues, the basic treaty rights issues.

If we don't resolve these issues, then all people in this country are going to be complicit in the continuing effort to wipe out our Indian people. It's as simple as that.

Note: The following article was received with some hurt and angry feelings among many people of Indian and non-Indian communities alike. However, opinions such as these exist and can provide for productive dialogue for students in middle and high school and their teachers.

On Columbus Day, Celebrate Western Civilization, Not Multiculturalism

By Michael S. Berliner

Columbus Day approaches and this year has a special meaning. Christopher Columbus is a carrier of Western Civilization and the very values attacked by terrorists on September 11. To the “politically correct,” Columbus Day is an occasion to be mourned. They have mourned, they have attacked, and they have intimidated schools across the country into replacing Columbus Day celebrations with “ethnic diversity” days.

The politically correct view is that Columbus did not discover America, because people had lived there for thousands of years. Worse yet, it’s claimed, the main legacy of Columbus is death and destruction. Columbus is routinely vilified as a symbol of slavery and genocide, and the celebration of his arrival likened to a celebration of Hitler and the Holocaust. The attacks on Columbus are ominous, because the actual target is Western Civilization.

Did Columbus “discover” America? Yes - in every important respect. This does not mean that no human eye had been cast on America before Columbus arrived. It does mean that Columbus brought America to the attention of the civilized world, i.e., to the growing, scientific civilizations of Western Europe. The result, ultimately, was the United States of America. It was Columbus’ discovery for Western Europe that led to the influx of ideas and people on which this nation was founded – and on which it still rests. The opening of America brought the ideas and achievements of Aristotle, Galileo, Newton, and the thousands of thinkers, writers, and inventors who followed.

Prior to 1492 what is now the United States was sparsely inhabited, unused, and undeveloped. The inhabitants were primarily hunter-gatherers, wandering, wandering across the land, living from hand to mouth and from day to day. There was virtually no change, no growth for thousands of years. With rare exception, life was nasty, brutish, and short: there was no wheel, no written language, no division of labor, little agriculture and scant permanent settlement; but there were endless, bloody wars. Whatever the problems it brought, the vilified Western culture also brought enormous, undreamed-of benefits, without which most of today’s Indians would be infinitely poorer or not even alive.

Columbus should be honored, for in so doing, we honor Western Civilization. But the critics do not want to bestow such honor, because their real goal is to denigrate the values of Western Civilization and to glorify the primitivism, mysticism, and collectivism embodied in the tribal cultures of American Indians. They decry the glorification of the west as “cultural imperialism” and “Euro centrism.” We should, they claim, replace our reverence for Western Civilization with multiculturalism, which regards all cultures (including vicious tyrannies) as morally equal. In fact, they aren’t. Some cultures are better than others: a free society is better than slavery; reason is better than brute force as

a way to deal with other men; productivity is better than stagnation. In fact, Western Civilization stands for man at his best.

It stands for the values that make human life possible: reason, science, self-reliance, individualism, ambition, productive achievement. The values of Western Civilization are values for all men; they cut across gender, ethnicity, and geography. We should honor Western Civilization not for the ethnocentric reason that some of us happen to have European ancestors but because it is the objectively superior culture.

Underlying the political collectivism of the anti-Columbus crowd is a racist view of human nature. They claim that one's identity is primarily ethnic: if one thinks his ancestors were good, he will supposedly feel good about himself; if he thinks his ancestors were bad, he will supposedly feel self-loathing. But it doesn't work; the achievements or failures of one's ancestors are monumentally irrelevant to one's actual worth as a person. Only the lack of a sense of self leads one to look to others to provide what passes for a sense of identity. Neither the deeds nor misdeeds of others are his own; he can take neither credit nor blame for what someone else chose to do. There are no racial achievements or racial failures, only individual achievements and individual failures. One cannot inherit moral worth or moral vice. "Self-esteem through others" is a self-contradiction.

Thus the sham of "preserving one's heritage" as a rational life goal. Thus the cruel hoax of "multicultural education" as an antidote to racism: it will continue to create more racism. Individualism is the only alternative to the racism of political correctness. We must recognize that everyone is a sovereign entity, with the power of choice and independent judgment. That is the ultimate value of Western Civilization, and it should be proudly proclaimed.

Title of Lesson 4: Search for Stereotypes and Racism

- Discuss with the class the concept of stereotypes and racism – toys, media images, and clothing
- Give some examples. See the OPI lesson on stereotypes for good examples.
- Students will choose from a variety of books, commonly found in schools and libraries, with the goal of recognizing stereotypical language and images.
- Read aloud derogatory sections from the book, "Sarah Noble" to give examples of stereotypes and racist comments from books.
- Divide students in five groups to read (predetermined by teacher) pages from the following books:

Indian in the Cupboard

Little House on the Prairie

Tom Sawyer

Education of Little Tree

Brother Eagle, Sister Sky

- As a class project, have students put together a critique of these books to be distributed to all 3rd – 12th grade teachers in the district and published in the local newspaper.

Note: For more lessons and teacher resources on the issue of stereotypes, refer to: How to Tell the Difference: A Guide for Evaluating Children's Books for Anti-Indian Bias available from www.oyate.org, the lesson: *What's In a Name? American Indian Sports Mascots: Beyond the Hype and into the Classroom* and the publication, *Evaluating Textbooks* both available at www.opi.state.mt.us/IndianEd.

The following poem may also be read and discussed by students:

Columbus Day

By Jimmie Durham

In school I was taught the names
Columbus, Cortez, and Pizarro and
A dozen other filthy murderers.
A bloodline all the way to General Miles,
Daniel Boone and General Eisenhower.

No one mentioned the names
Of even a few of the victims.
But don't you remember Chaske, whose spine
Was crushed so quickly by Mr. Pizarro's boot?
What words did he cry into the dust?

What was the familiar name
Of that young girl who danced so gracefully
That everyone in the village sang with her-
Before Cortez' sword hacked off her arms
As she protested the burning of her sweet-
heart?

That young man's name was Many Deeds,
And he had been a leader of a band of fighters
Called the Redstick Hummingbirds, who slowed
The march of Cortez' army with only a few
Spears and stones which now lay still
In the mountains and remember.

Greenrock Woman was the name
Of that old lady who walked right up
And spat in Columbus' face. We
Must remember that, and remember

Laughing Otter the Taino who tried to stop
Columbus and was taken away as a slave.
We never saw him again.

In school I learned of heroic discoveries
Made by liars and crooks. The courage
Of millions of sweet and true people
Was not commemorated.

Let us then declare a holiday
For ourselves, and make a parade that begins
With Columbus' victims and continues
Even to our grandchildren who will be named
In their honor.

Because isn't it true that even the summer
Grass here in this land whispers those names,
And every creek has accepted the responsibility
Of singing those names? And nothing can stop
The wind from howling those names around
The corners of the school.

Why else would the birds sing
So much sweeter here than in other lands?

Suggested Resources (from www.oyate.org)

Grade 4 and up

- Grace, Catherine O'Neill and Marge Bruchac (Abenaki), *1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving*. 2001, color photos

“Produced in collaboration with the Wampanoag Indian Program at Plymouth Plantation, 1621 weighs Wampanoag oral traditions and English colonial written records against the popular myth of ‘brave settlers inviting wild Indians over for turkey dinner.’ Stunning photographs by Sissy Brimberg and Cotton Coulson, accompanied by simple, thoughtful text, are designed to walk the young reader into the dual perspectives of Native peoples and the English Colonists in Patuxet/Plymouth. The text, written for a young audience but not solely for children, also offers insights into the relationships of the Wampanoag people to their traditional homelands, and survival into the present. As well, 1621 addresses the harsh reality of the subsequent colonial history. Along with *Giving Thanks* and *Thanksgiving: A Native Perspective*, 1621 is an excellent tool for unteaching the myth of ‘the first Thanksgiving.’”

- King, Thomas (Cherokee), *A Coyote Columbus Story*. 1992, color illustrations.

“It was coyote who fixed up the world, you know. She was the one who did it. She made rainbows and flowers and clouds and rivers. And she made prune juice and afternoon naps and toe-nail polish and television commercials. Some of these things were pretty good, and some of these things were foolish.’ And some of these things were pretty awful. Like those Columbus people. Because Coyote was thinking about playing ball, you see, instead of concentrating on what she was creating. The illustrations, by Cree artist Kent Monkman, are, well indescribable.”

Grade 7 and up

- Durham, Jimmie (Cherokee), *Columbus Day*. 1983, b/w illustrations

“Jimmie Durham’s rigorous and disciplined poetry is written with passion, about real things, real people. The truths in this book are ‘as eloquent as the sound of a rattlesnake, as direct as the strike of a rattlesnake...as conclusive as the bite of a beautiful red and black coral snake.’”

- Koning, Hans, *Columbus: His Enterprise*. 1991, b/w illustrations.

“In this daring, honest story, Koning explodes the myth of Columbus by presenting the greed, cruelty, and the beginning of European imperialism embodied in the man and his mission.”

Teacher Materials

- Bigelow, Bill, and Bob Peterson, eds., *Rethinking Columbus: Teaching About the 500th Anniversary of Columbus’s Arrival in America*. 1998 b/w photos and illustrations.

“The quincentennial is over, but the issues are far from gone. From introductory articles and essays, to discussions of elementary and secondary school issues, to contemporary struggles, to background, context, and historical documents relating to the quincentennial, this is for teachers who want to get some critical thinking going in the classroom.”

- Seale, Doris (Santee/Cree), Beverly Slapin, and Carolyn Silverman (Cherokee, Blackfeet), eds., *Thanksgiving: A Native Perspective* 1998 edition, b/w illustrations, all grades.

“For Native Peoples, Thanksgiving comes not once a year, but always, for all the gifts of life. All Native nations have celebrations of the harvest that come from very ancient tradition. The U.S. holiday celebrates and perpetuates a myth, which has almost nothing to do with reality, and a bitter reminder of all Native People of 500 years of betrayal returned for friendship. This sourcebook of essays, speeches, poetry, stories and activities will help teachers and students think critically about what has been, and what continues to be, taught as the ‘first’ Thanksgiving.”

Videos

- *Columbus Didn't Discover Us*. 1992 24 minutes, color, grades 5-up.

“In July 1990, some 300 Native people participated in the First Continental Conference of Indigenous Peoples in the highlands of Ecuador. This documentary is testimony to the legacy of Columbus on the lives of indigenous peoples of this hemisphere, as they speak about their struggle for tierra, paz, y libertad--land, peace, and liberty.”

Questionnaire for culture/ethnicity

Our class is learning about cultural diversity and ethnicity and would like to gather information about different cultures and ethnic groups. We understand that the best learning is personal learning so stories from the students' families will be a valuable asset as we learn about each other.

Name _____

Ethnic background _____

Family celebrations or traditions _____

Skill or knowledge of folk art _____

If you know of any family or friends who may be willing to help in this effort, please contact our school.