

Columbus Day Revisited

Model Social Studies Curriculum

BACKGROUND

In our society, the story of Columbus is a myth. As one of the first history lessons for children, the story of Columbus should be accurate and portray a more diverse variety of viewpoints since the view of America's first people is an important perspective.

EXAMPLE UNIT PLAN

Title

Columbus Day Revisited

Standard

Analyze human experience and cultural expression (e.g., language, literature, arts, traditions, beliefs, spirituality, values, behavior) and create a product which illustrates an integrated view of a specific culture. Analyze and evaluate the ways various groups (e.g., social, political, cultural) meet human needs and concerns (e.g., individual needs, common good) and contribute to personal identity. Analyze the conflicts resulting from cultural assimilation and cultural preservation among various ethnic and racial groups in Montana, the United States, and the world. Analyze the interactions of individuals, groups, and institutions in society (e.g., social mobility, class conflict, globalization).

Grade Level

K – 3rd Grade

Day 1 – The Story

(lesson adapted from [The Story](#) in *Thanksgiving: A Native Perspective* available from www.oyate.org)

Read each part and have students reflect on and respond to the questions at each stopping point.

Objective: Students will experience feelings and responses similar to those that may have been felt by the Native people of this land when Christopher Columbus landed.

The Native People and Christopher Columbus

Part 1

Imagine the following:

You are one of the native Taino people. You and your family live in a nice home with a huge yard, lots of trees, a big garden, and the ocean is part of your backyard. You have lots of friends and plenty of good food to eat. You are safe and snug and very happy.

One day when you are home alone, three strange objects come slowly into view. You've never seen anything like it before. They are a strange shape and very large. They land in your backyard! Soon very



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strange-looking people get out; they are dressed in clothes very different from yours and talk to each other in a way you cannot understand.

You are hiding so they cannot see you. You don't want them to see you because you are trying to figure out who they are and what they want. You have heard about people who look like this from your mother and father. They walk about, pick up your toys, and examine them closely. They walk all around your yard and garden. Others are helping themselves to the food in the garden. Then they fill a lot of big baskets with the fruit and vegetables from your garden.

Then they come straight toward your home! Without even stopping, they come in and go through your home, picking up things and looking closely at them, talking and laughing among themselves. They really don't seem to be afraid or even embarrassed about being in your home.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THESE PEOPLE?

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU WILL DO? WHY?

WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN TO YOU?

Part 2

The Story Goes On . . .

The strange people leave your home. You think they have seen you, but you are not sure.

It does not matter, though, because you're so glad to see them go. Maybe they will just get into their big ship and go back to wherever they came from. Even if they have taken things that belong to you, you will be happy to see them leave.

But as you watch, they do not seem to be leaving. In fact, they seem to like it in your big backyard. They begin to bring things out of the ship. They set up a saw and cut down one of the biggest trees! They are going to build a house with it, probably in that favorite spot of yours back there by the ocean, because that is where they are clearing away the bushes and digging out the grass. They cut down another tree and another and another! They are building two, three, a half dozen houses. They have furniture and pans and dishes and rugs and curtains—things that you don't even recognize. They also have big weapons that flash with a big bang. You think that they could probably kill you with one big bang.

You stare at all the activity going on. Suddenly you start to cry. These strange people who have come from somewhere far off and who are so very rude are not going away—ever. They are going to stay. They are going to live in your own backyard and use your garden and your toys and fish in the ocean and cut down your trees and act as if it belonged to them!

Then a very strange thing happens. A group of the strangers has been talking together and pointing toward the very place where you are hiding. Do you think they could have spotted you? Yes! They are coming right toward you, talking and smiling. You do not know what to do. Should you run? Call for help? Stay perfectly still? One, who is closer to you than the rest, takes your hand and pulls you out to stand in front of them. They are smiling and pointing at your favorite place by the ocean where they are building their houses. They want you to come with them!

As you do, the one holding your hand says: “We like you. We like this place. We are going to live here from now on.”

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

DOES ANYONE KNOW WHO YOU AND THE STRANGER WHO TOOK OVER YOUR BACK YARD REALLY ARE?

Day 2 – The Untold Story

Objective: Students will be exposed to an unfamiliar view of meeting between Columbus and the Native people. Students will discuss this different point of view.

Read the following excerpt from Rethinking Columbus. A felt board may be used to tell the story.

The Untold Story

Once upon a time a group of people lived on an island, Bohio (now called Hispaniola) in the Caribbean. These people, whom I consider my people, were proud of their island.

They built beautiful farms and villages from dirt and rock. They respected the plants and animals. Many people lived on Bohio. They called themselves Tainos.

One day, some of my people saw three boats far off in the ocean. They gathered around and watched as the boats came closer and closer. When the boats reached land, strange-looking people got off.

These people were not like us. Their skin was pink, their hair the color of sand, and their eyes the color of the open sea. They wore strange items that covered their bodies, even though it was very hot.

The leader was a man called “Christopher Columbus.” He immediately put a cross and flag down and acted as if the land were now his. This was odd. We did not believe anyone could own the land. Besides we were already living there.

Through motions and gestures, it became clear Columbus wanted gold. He wanted us to find it for him.

We tried to explain there was little gold on our land, just a few small pieces gathered from the water. “We have no gold. There is no gold here,” a man said in the Taino language.

Columbus appeared very angry and walked away. My people were afraid of his anger. They wondered what he planned to do next.

After several months, Columbus returned to our island for a second visit. He brought hundreds of people on 17 boats. Before he left this time, he captured many of my people; over 500 were forced onto his boats. We later heard they had been taken to Spain to be sold as slaves. Many died on this voyage to Spain. Their bodies were thrown into the ocean.

During this second visit, Columbus again told my people to bring him gold. “If you do not,” he warned, “we shall slay your people.”

Our people had to bring him gold, even though it was very difficult to find. Columbus made us wear buttons to show we had brought him gold. If we didn’t have our buttons, my people’s hands were cut off and they bled to death.

My people formed an army. But we did not have the guns, swords and vicious dogs used by Columbus and his crew. We were defeated.

My people ran for their lives into the mountains. Those who were caught were hung or burned to death. Many others killed themselves. Two years had passed and over half of the Taino people of Bohio were dead.

My people's peaceful and proud land was taken over and destroyed. These newcomers cut down all the forests. They let their pigs and cows eat all the grass. Thousands of my people's lives were destroyed for these people's pleasure.

Before long, the conquerors killed almost all the Tainos. Other native peoples in the Americas were also attacked, some with weapons, some with terrible new diseases. But not all were destroyed. My people have survived.

We have little to show our children as proof of what happened to the Tainos. But we have our stories, told from generation to generation. The stories tell of the cruel genocide of my people, hundreds of years ago: "Once upon a time, in an untold story ..."

Activity 1

The story is divided into parts. Divide students up and give them a part to illustrate. When illustrations are complete, students will practice retelling the story using their illustrations. Students can go to other classrooms and retell this story.

Activity 2

Split class in half and have students write in journal one of the following:

- 1) If you were Christopher Columbus, how would you feel about meeting these strange, uncommon, new people?
- 2) If you were a child of the Taino, how would you feel about meeting these strange, uncommon, new people?

When finished, students will find a partner with a different topic and share.

Follow Up Activities – Making Books and Critiquing Books

Read *Columbus Day* by Vickie Liestman and *Encounter* by Jane Yolen.

Objective: Students will apply what they have learned about the different perspectives of the Columbus landing using one or more of the culminating activities.

Level K-1st Grade

ABC Book—Create a class ABC book using words from stories read and told during the week. Discuss words and give each student a word to illustrate for the book. Students will present their pages. They may want to share the book with other classrooms.

Level 2nd-3rd Grade

1. Students will write journal entries from two points of view:

- a. I am Columbus; and
- b. I am a native child. Students may want to illustrate.

Students will be exposed to many books about Columbus Day. After teacher models a book critique, the students will, with a partner, critique a book using the following questions: Did we learn about what the Native people were thinking and about the Native people's lives? Does the book describe how Columbus treated the Native people?

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 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.