

## [Context and Consequences of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas]

SUBJECT	TEACHER	GRADE	DATE
[American History]	[?]	[High School]	[November 12, 2020]

### OVERVIEW

The arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean, in 1492, opened the door for further exploration - and eventual conquest - of the Caribbean, and South and Central America, by the Spanish, in the hundred years following his arrival. But did these men realize that they'd happened upon two vast continents, with great and powerful empires, and trade networks established across its length and breadth?

Not at all. The context behind Columbus's voyage was the hope of the Catholic Monarchs of Spain – Isabel of Castile and Fernando of Aragon (the power couple that had recently united Spain under Christianity) - to outflank their Portuguese rivals in the continuing attempt by Europeans to find a route to the spice isles of Asia. Columbus's first voyage ended up on the outskirts of the western hemisphere, a thing unknown to most Europeans.

Violence ensued, as does with all conquests, but these wars - and the founding of the Spanish Empire - ignited the greatest transfer of ideas, culture, human populations, food, animals, technology, and disease in history, in the form of the Columbian Exchange: an event with which the modern world would not be what it is. Likewise, a new name was given to these lands by European intellectuals that has since stuck. In creating 'America,' a culture clash of cataclysmic proportion was unleashed, one in which entire peoples were shattered from existence, and an empire - like unto which the world had not yet seen - rose from their demise.

### Unit Goal

- By unit's end, students will have an understanding of the men who explored, named, and conquered the Americas for Spain.
- They are to understand their actions in the context of the sixteenth century; noting the ignorance of the Spanish (and Afro Eurasians as a whole), in terms of the geography, cultures, and breath of the lands they had entered.
- Likewise, students will come to know of the Taino, the first major culture encountered by the Spanish, their way of life and organization; how that information was recorded and passed down, and what fate befell them, when their world was suddenly turned upside down.
- Finally, students will appreciate the significance of men like Columbus, whose actions (while brutal in modern eyes), unleashed the greatest transfer of ideas, plants, animals, foods, technologies, and people, in human history.

### Schedule:

- Monday: Context – **Isabel and Fernando**. Two monarchs and the country they forged. Their rise to power, differences in the two kingdoms they ruled. War with Portugal; consequences for Spain; conclusion of the Reconquista; policies towards Spanish Jews. Impudence behind patronage of Columbus.
- Tuesday: **Columbus and the Taino**. Context of Columbus's voyage. His voyage; insights on native Tainos. Who were they? Language and culture; how Spanish missionaries recorded their cultural traits for posterity. Columbus's behavior against them; possible reasons for it; Spanish government's response; imprisonment. Significance.

- Wednesday: **Amerigo Vespucci and How America got its Name**: Did Columbus discover America, or was it Amerigo Vespucci? Vespucci's life before his voyages. His role in the early voyages; the letters he writes of his journeys; how his name was bequeathed to a Continent, by two German intellectuals. What did these early explorers know of the lands they encountered?
- Thursday: **Vasco Nunez de Balboa** - Accomplishments – what did Balboa achieve to give him lasting fame? Why was this significant for the Spanish? Why was he killed by his own? Highlight rivalries among Spaniards early in the Conquest. How secure was authority? How established was government?
- Friday: **The Columbian Exchange** – Origin of the term; what was brought to the Americas; what was taken back to the old world? Population numbers, disease; scholarly debates. Significance to world history.

### Resources

- Unit summaries on [www.huntthepast.com](http://www.huntthepast.com), for use in this lesson plan: Isabel and Fernando; The Genoese who Changed History: Christopher Columbus, Tainos, Amerigo Vespucci, How America got its Name, Vasco Nunez de Balboa, Columbian Exchange
- Books, particularly primary sources, such as letters and histories written by the participants. What did the participants have to say of their own doings in the Americas?
- Videos, books, images, activities, and maps provided by [www.huntthepast.com](http://www.huntthepast.com), as well as any the instructor may deem appropriate, are to be utilized as teaching aids

### Essential Skills

- Students will gain an appreciation for the countless unknowns faced by the early Spanish explorers and conquerors.
- Students will come to understand the context for Columbus's voyages, and the names, culture, and fate of the people he first encountered.
- They will know the complicated story behind Amerigo Vespucci's naval career; the significance of his letters, and the names of the men who gave America its name.
- Finally, students will appreciate the significance of the Columbian Exchange, its fundamental importance to world history, and the ongoing scholarly debates surrounding various aspects of it.
- Students should also begin to put things in context - a very necessary skill in understanding history.