

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

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

OVERVIEW

- Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean, in 1492; this seminal event is purported to be the founding of America, but did Columbus himself see it that way? Why is it called America, after all? How, and why, did Amerigo Vespucci come to crown the lands of the western hemisphere with his name? Did he even know about it?

The Spanish exploration and conquest of the Americas set off the greatest exchange of ideas, cultures, food, animals, diseases, and people, in history. The context behind European arrival in the new world was the ongoing attempt by Europeans to find a route to the spice rich isles of the Indian Ocean. Blocked by the Portuguese, Queen Isabel of Castile and King Fernando of Aragon, having only recently united Spain under Christianity, sent Columbus upon his fateful voyage, and altered the course of world history.

Unit Goals

- The men who sailed west into the unknown with Columbus were human, malleable, and completely unaware of what was coming, as were the people they met on the other side. The subsequent meeting of cultures was brutal. Students will gather just how profound a meeting it was, and be able to contextualize the actions of the men involved.
- Likewise, knowledge will be gained of the Tainos, an Arawak speaking island people, whose culture and existence was effectively blotted out by Spanish disease and brutality, yet preserved through their record keeping.
- As the Spanish gained awareness of the size of the landmasses they'd reached, through expeditions like those of Balboa's, students will achieve awareness of the multitude of unknowns facing the Spaniards in this new world.
- Understanding of the origin of the name America, as it applies to the western hemisphere, will be achieved.

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 and disease; scholarly debates. Significance to world history.

Resources

- Unit summaries on 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, as well as any the instructor may deem appropriate, are to be utilized as teaching aids

Essential Skills

- Know what led the King and Queen of Spain to send Columbus on his voyage.
- Understand Columbus's knowledge, and his subsequent actions among the Taino; know, as well, key facets of this culture and their way of life.
- Ascertain just how ignorant the Spanish were of the size and scope of the new world they had reached; attribute the significance of Balboa's expedition, and others, to their growth in knowledge.
- Comprehend the significance of Amerigo Vespucci, Matthias Ringmann and Martin Waldseemuller, in the creation of America.
- Know what the Columbian Exchange was, ongoing scholarly debates surrounding it, and its significance.
- Students should also begin to put things in context - a very necessary skill in understanding history.

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