



Day 8: Age of Exploration Unit
120 Minutes

Columbus

(Adaptable for Grades 3–9)

Lesson Plan: Christopher Columbus: Impact and Legacy (Grades 3–9)

Target Grades: 3–9

Because that spans a large developmental range, the plan is differentiated — with simpler tasks for younger (grades 3–5) and more complex, critical-thinking tasks for older (grades 6–9).

Core Materials

- The PowerPoint presentation on Columbus
- Differentiated article on Columbus at:
<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/battles/christopher-columbus-that-contains-both-interactive-Columbus-maps>
- Printouts and online links from the above page

Power Point Presentation (30 min.)

Goals: Students learn who Columbus was, what he found, his importance in the Age of Exploration, and his legacy.

Grades 3–5:

1. Use the presentation slides “Early Life,” “Europe in the 1400s,” and “Why Columbus Believed He Could Reach Asia by Sailing West.” Read them together (teacher-led).
2. Class discussion: What was Columbus looking for? How did he get it wrong?
3. Use slides: “First Voyage (1492)”, “Encounters with Indigenous Peoples”, “The Columbian Exchange”. Explain in age-appropriate language.
4. Class discussion: What changed when the “Old World” and “New World” connected? (Simple list: animals, plants, new foods, but also new problems.)

5. Present the rest of the slides; elaborate as necessary.

- **Grades 6–9:**

1. Present the same slides, but in more detail. Encourage students to take notes.
2. Use the slides, but also add some discussion on later voyages, colonization, and the darker consequences: disease, conquest, suffering of **Indigenous peoples, forced labor**. Discuss the “Columbian Exchange” — list items / ideas / biological exchanges, then discuss: *Which had positive effects? Which had negative effects?*
3. After the presentation, brainstorm reasons why exploring was important to European nations. Ask: *Would you have volunteered to be part of Columbus’s crew? Why or why not?*

Interactive Map - Connecting History and Geography (15 min.)

Have students open the Christopher Columbus page on [LearnAboutAmerica.com](https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/battles/christopher-columbus)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/battles/christopher-columbus>

Scroll down to the Interactive 1492 Journey map. Students should click on the various points that the boat sails on to learn about each location that was meaningful to this journey. Allow students to try to complete the interactive scavenger hunt, or, to simply jot down notes about each location.

LEGACY (45 minutes)

Goals: Students reflect on how history is remembered, celebrate or question holidays, and form an opinion about commemorations like Columbus Day.

Activities by grade band:

- All Grades (adapted to level): Introduce the idea that today, some people think we should continue celebrating Columbus Day, some think we should replace it or stop it — because of the negative consequences. Explain that history can be complicated.
- **Grades 3–5 Discussion**
 1. Read out a simplified explanation: “Some people say Columbus was a brave explorer. Others say his arrival hurt many native peoples.” What do you think?
- **Grades 6–9:**
 1. Hold a class discussion: What is a holiday for — remember people, celebrate values, or something else? Should we celebrate explorers whose voyages caused harm?

2. Writing assignment (essay / structured paragraph): Columbus Day, or Not so Much?

Prompt Starter:

Christopher Columbus has long been celebrated in America with Columbus Day, the second Monday of every October. Recently, many have advocated for eliminating Columbus Day because although Columbus made a history-changing discovery, he was known to have been extremely cruel to the natives he encountered in the West Indies, and was responsible for the enslavement and murder of tens of thousands. Do you think Columbus Day should be celebrated? If not, choose an important person who should replace Columbus and receive a national holiday. Either way, explain your reasoning in detail and give specific examples of why you made your choice.

Encourage evidence: from what they learned about Columbus's achievements *and* his harmful impacts.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/battles/christopher-columbus>

Optional: Connecting History with U.S. Geography - (15 minutes) Visit the second interactive map on our Columbus page and have students explore how Columbus is honored with cities, parks, and monuments, in America. Have students try the interactive scavenger hunt.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/battles/christopher-columbus>

Columbus Fun Activities

Optional: (20 minutes) Play a fun game called U.S. Holidays Calendar Challenge: In Calendar Challenge, students drag holiday tokens onto an interactive year calendar, trying to match both the correct month and date. They start with 100 "days" and lose days based on how far off their guess is, with optional clues that reveal the month but double any penalty if they still miss. After surviving 20 holidays and leveling up to trickier National ___ Day challenges, students can print a detailed score report showing their guesses, penalties, and days remaining.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-people/famous-americans-games-and-fun-activities>

Optional: Play a fun game called Glamour Legends:

This silly and ridiculous game allows students to transform George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Christopher Columbus, or Harriet Tubman into a modern fashion icon.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-people/famous-americans-games-and-fun-activities>

Literacy/Fun Connection: Christopher Columbus Paralaugh!

Columbus online Mad-Lib like exercise with parts of speech

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-games-and-fun-stuff/christopher-columbus-paralaugh>

Columbus Review Activity: Correct-me Passage

This fun activity requires students to identify and correct the factual errors in a short paragraph about Christopher Columbus. Click the factual error and then select the correct fact. The program gives immediate feedback.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-games-and-fun-stuff/christopher-columbus-online-correct-me-passage>



Literacy Activities (20 minutes per)

LearnAboutAmerica.com provides numerous interactive and printable literacy and writing activities related to Christopher Columbus. These are described below. Use your discretion to choose the best options for your classes.

Reading Comprehension:

The Columbian Exchange [Differentiated Online or Printable](#) Reading Comprehension Passage and 7 Multiple Choice Questions - (Lexile 800 of 1000; Word Count: 415 or 528.)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/the-columbian-exchange-printable-or-online-reading-comprehension>

Christopher Columbus [Printable](#) Reading Comprehension - Passage and 10 Multiple Choice Questions (Lexile apx. 900; 363 Words)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/christopher-columbus-printable-reading-comprehension>

Christopher Columbus [Online](#) Reading Comprehension - Passage and 7 Multiple Choice Questions (Lexile apx. 900; 363 Words)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/christopher-columbus-online-reading-comprehension>

Christopher Columbus [Printable](#) Fact or Fiction - Read the passage and determine if each statement is fact or fiction. (Lexile 900; 363 Words)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/christopher-columbus-printable-fact-or-fiction>

Christopher Columbus [Online](#) Fact or Fiction - Read the passage and determine if each statement is fact or fiction. (Lexile 900; 363 Words)

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Christopher Columbus Topic Sentence and Supporting Details - Forming good topic sentences is crucial to writing successful reports. Below is the topic sentence of a body paragraph within a biography on Christopher Columbus. There are four detail sentences that should come after the topic sentence. First, choose the four from the series of sentences below and then, form the paragraph.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/christopher-columbus-printable-topic-sentence-and-details-construction>

Additional, Optional Writing Opportunities (30 minutes)

Is Columbus Overrated in History?

Most of you have probably heard of the term “overrated.” It means that someone (or something) gets more credit or accolades than they deserve. Anyone can think anything is overrated. For example, if I go to dinner at a five-star restaurant that has lots of positive reviews, and the food I am served is cold and tasteless, I’d consider the restaurant “overrated.” Movies, books, musicians, and athletes, are common topics in conversations about things that are overrated.

Some people believe that Christopher Columbus is overrated in history. They might argue that Columbus didn’t even know he had stumbled upon the New World and believed, until his death, that he had found the elusive shortcut to the Indies. They might also say that he wasn’t even the first to find the New World, and, that he was cruel and brutal to the local natives he encountered. In the space provided below, what is something you think is overrated and why? Explain in detail.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-writing-activities/overrated>

Christopher Columbus Virtual History Teacher - Elaboration Practice

This fun activity requires students to role play as a history teacher grading a student's history test that reflects a poor effort. "Teachers" must grade the test and then elaborate on student answers to make them complete answers.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-writing-activities/virtual-history-teacher-christopher-columbus>