



Day 10 and 11 of Age of Exploration Unit
75 - 125 Minutes

Spanish Explorers

(Adaptable for Grades 3–9)

SPANISH EXPLORATION IN THE NEW WORLD – LESSON PLAN (74 - 104 MINUTES)

Adaptable for Grades 3–9

TITLE:

Spanish Exploration in the New World: Columbus, the Conquistadors, and Expansion

OBJECTIVE:

Students will examine why Spain sponsored exploration, understand the effects of Columbus's voyages, analyze the actions of Spanish conquistadors, and evaluate how Spanish exploration reshaped the Americas. Students will use maps, articles, primary descriptions, and differentiated activities to deepen historical understanding.

GRADE LEVEL:

Grades 3–9 (Differentiation embedded throughout)

MATERIALS:

- Spanish Exploration article (LearnAboutAmerica.com)
- Optional PowerPoint presentation
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Access to online comprehension activities (Christopher Columbus, Ponce de León, Coronado, de Soto, Magellan)
- Student notebooks or writing sheets
- Optional: world map or digital map tools
- Creative writing prompt list (provided)

INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

Teacher says: "Today we are learning how Spanish exploration changed the world. Spain became powerful under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella and sent explorers across the oceans."

Display (optional): images of King Ferdinand, Queen Isabella. See image at:

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/unit-and-curriculum/spanish-exploration-in-the-new-world>

Activate prior knowledge:

Ask students, "Why would a country want to explore faraway lands?"

Expected responses may include wealth, trade, land, power, curiosity, and spreading religion.

Define key vocabulary to prepare students: navigator, empire, Indigenous, Columbian Exchange.

ARTICLE READING (15 - 25 minutes)

Choose one option:

- Teacher reads aloud
- Students read independently
- Grades 3–5 read simplified selections or teacher-selected paragraphs
- Grades 6–9 read full article plus extended paragraphs about Ponce de León, Coronado, de Soto, and Magellan

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/unit-and-curriculum/spanish-exploration-in-the-new-world>

Optional: You may choose to read a second article about a specific explorer. I always liked to introduce students to Ferdinand Magellan, Ponce de Leon, or Francisco Coronado

Detailed Biographies: [Columbus](#) | [de Leon](#) | [Magellan](#) | [de Soto](#) | [Coronado](#) | [Balboa](#) | [Cortes](#) | [Pizarro](#)

Quick Check:

"Why did Spain want to find a new route to Asia?"

Expected responses: wealth, spices, silk, gold, competition with Portugal, power.

THE MAGIC (35 min.)

Part 1 - Want to REALLY engage students? Don't forget about the magic of the Age of Exploration. Start off with the fun activity called the Greatest Mythical Place. Have students brainstorm mythical places they know of from books, movies, or even video games.

Based on the Iroquoian explanation of the Kingdom of Saguenay to Jacques Cartier, and Coronado's description of the Seven Cities of Cibola, students must describe and draw the greatest mythical place they have ever experienced in a book, movie, or video game! Very fun and engaging.

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

Allow students to share their work and then explain that in the Age of Exploration, people still believed in mythical places such as the Fountain of Youth, golden cities, and other interesting myths.

Read/project to students the following article on Coronado's search for the Seven Cities of Cibola.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/legends-myths-and-nations/the-seven-cities-of-cibola>

Follow up with these discussion questions:

- What made explorers like Coronado believe the Seven Cities of Cibola existed?
- How did Native American villages like the Zuni pueblos influence the legend?
- Why do you think stories of gold and treasure were so powerful during this time?
- What impact did Coronado's expedition have, even though it failed to find treasure?

Part 2 - Next, tell students that for most of history it was thought that Juan Ponce de Leon, the conquistador that claimed Florida for Spain, searched in vain for the Fountain of Youth.

Ask students - "Does anyone know what the Fountain of Youth was supposed to do when people drank its water?"

Explain - Recently, it's come to light that Juan Ponce de Leon may have never looked for the Fountain Youth, but instead, the entire premise was a story made up by one of his enemies to make him look bad. Although explorers and people of the time believed in the existence of mythical places, the idea of a real Fountain of Youth was far-fetched even then. Today, we might call what happened to de Leon, libel.

Explain to students the difference between slander and libel: Slander is verbal and libel is written. In this case, students can write about an instance of libel or slander (libel might be a difficult topic for students to think of an example of). This subject can branch into a discussion of bullying or being falsely accused. You might find that students love having the opportunity to explain situations in which their siblings falsely accuse them.

Print out this writing prompt for students:

For much of history, school children learning about the Age of Exploration were taught that Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon spent much of his fortune searching for the mythical Fountain of Youth. Modern historians, however, largely claim such an assertion is pure fiction. In fact, it is now thought that de Leon's name was attached to the Fountain of Youth maliciously by a man named Gonzalo Fernandez de Oveido y Valdes, who had serious political differences with de Leon and found him to be dimwitted, egocentric, and gullible. Oveido y Valdes wrote a book about the Spanish settling of America. In the book, he claimed that de Leon was foolishly deceived by Indians and spent five years searching for the Fountain of Youth. It was designed to ruin de Leon's reputation, as even in the 1500s, the thought of a fountain with waters that could make a person young forever, was thought to be ridiculous. Nevertheless, de Leon's legacy has been defined as much by his discovery of Florida as it has by his fruitless search for the fountain.

Can you relate to de Leon's experience? Has anyone ever said something about you that wasn't true? Did other people believe it? If not, or you prefer not to write about such experiences, think about an instance in literature or movies in which a character tried to ruin the reputation of another character by spreading false information (slander).

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-writing-activities/libel-the-false-narrative-on-ponce-de-leon>

Allow students to share their responses.

POWER POINT PRESENTATION ON SPANISH EXPLORERS (25 minutes)

Expand on the information presented in the article. This presentation delves into the specific goals, "discoveries" and claims of each of the Spanish explorers.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/explorer/plans/spanish.pptx>

Grades 3–5 focus: focus on Columbus, Ponce de Leon, and Francisco Coronado.

Grades 6–9 focus: detail each of the Spanish explorers

SPANISH EXPLORER FACT SORT (15 minutes)

This drag-and-drop activity challenges students to sort debate points into the treasure chests of important Spanish explorers based on each explorer's contributions to the Age of Exploration. After organizing the evidence, students receive an instantly generated, printable score report that helps them evaluate their understanding and support a written argument about which explorer was most important.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/unit-and-curriculum/spanish-explorers-fact-sort/>

OPTIONAL: SPANISH EXPLORER LITERACY ACTIVITIES (20-25 minutes)

We have a huge library of Spanish explorer reading comprehension activities that can be found at:

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

Recommended:

- [The Columbian Exchange Printable or Online](#) - Lexile 800 and 1000
- [The Fall of Technoctitan Printable or Online](#) - Lexile 850 or 1000
- [The Conquistadors Printable or Online](#) - Lexile 720 and 920
- Ferdinand Magellan [Printable](#) | [Online](#) - Lexile 900
- [The First Circumnavigation Super Cloze Series](#) (grades 5+)
- [The Search for the Seven Cities of Cibola Super Cloze Series](#) (grades 5 +)
- Francisco Coronado [Printable](#) | [Online](#) Lexile 1150
- Scurvy [Printable](#) | [Online](#) - Lexile 900

Please visit

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities> to see our full offerings. There are over 100 options.

OPTIONAL: SHORT ANSWER AUTO-GRADE ONLINE (15 minutes)

- [Describe the accomplishments and claims of Spanish explorers in the Age of Exploration](#)

