

## **Lesson One: Mythbusters**

**Goal:** This lesson is the teacher's opportunity to assess what students may or may not already know about the Spanish conquest of what is now central Mexico. The pretest will serve as a warm-up to pique student interest, provide an organizational context for studying the conquest, and will be incorporated into the final assessment.

**Objectives:** Students will:

- analyze the phrasing of questions.
- debate the merits and accuracy of statements made about the conquest.
- learn pertinent vocabulary words.
- discover that much of what they know about Columbus is inaccurate.

**Duration:** One class period.

**Guiding Questions:**

- What do we already know about the conquest?
- Is what we know about Columbus accurate?

**Assessment:** Teacher will informally assess prior knowledge based on initial responses to the questions and critical thinking skills of students in the room based upon the quality of the discussion. The only formal assessment for the day is the final answer that students give for the three statements regarding Columbus.

**Links to State Curriculum Standards:**

- NM History Strand I-D PS 2: Analyze and evaluate information by developing and applying criteria for selecting appropriate information and use it to answer critical questions.
- NM Language Arts Strand I-A PS 2: Respond to informational materials that are read by making connections to related topics/information.
- NM Language Arts Strand II-A PS 4: Interact in group discussions.

**Materials for Class:**

Student: Copy of Pretest  
Copy of CLOZE notes

Teacher: Copy of pretest for recording responses to questions  
Lecture Notes on Columbus

**Resources Used:**

Restall, Matthew. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

*Columbus in History*. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/COLUMBUS/col13.html>, accessed 7/16/09

**Activities and Teaching Strategies (including opening and closing):**

1. As students enter the class or complete a warm-up, Ozomatli's song "Who Discovered America?" is playing in the background. The teacher begins class with some questions about myths. You might ask who watches Mythbusters and get students to explain how a myth might get "busted" and why myths might exist. Then proceed to explain that there are historical as well as scientific myths. Take for example, the question of who discovered America that Ozomatli asks in the song that was playing. Ask the kids to tell in chorus what the typical response to the question is. They will most likely say, "Columbus." Some students will want to argue about that answer (even though they are able to give the parroted response) and that is a good thing. Next ask if anyone knows why "Columbus" is a poor answer to the question. They may say, "you can't discover it if someone else is already there," or "the Vikings got here first", or "people came across the land bridge." Whatever the responses let the discussion flow. There are obvious problems both with the phrasing of the question and the possible answers so discuss both with the students. This leads you to discuss the theme for the unit which is busting myths related to the Spanish Conquest of the New World.

2. Pass out the pretest. Read and explain the directions and let students know that this pretest will serve as a guide for the entire unit and will be part of the final assessment too. The teacher may either have students read the test to themselves or read it aloud to them but on this initial round there should be no discussion of the statements and students should put a number 1 next to the statement they think is most accurate. Record students' initial responses on an extra copy of the pretest. (Example)

**Columbus**

- 6 A. Columbus was arrested in the *New World* for failing to fulfill his contract to Spain.  
15 B. Columbus understood world geography better than other explorers of his time.  
12 C. Columbus knew that he had discovered a *New World*.

3. The remainder of the day is reserved for discussion of the first pretest statements on Columbus. Return to the student responses to the Columbus statements. Let students know that they are going to be able to change their answers after the class discusses the questions. Begin by asking if anyone now might understand why *New World* is in italics. Open the floor to class participation by asking who would like to defend the choice that they made. (This may take some coaxing or, depending on who is in the class, may not.) Once discussion has exhausted itself, have students respond by putting a "2" next to the statement they now think is most accurate. Record the new responses and (if "shift happened") ask kids why they changed their answers. It might look like this.

**Columbus**

- 14 ~~6~~ A. Columbus was arrested in the *New World* for failing to fulfill his contract to Spain.  
13 ~~15~~ B. Columbus understood world geography better than other explorers of his time.  
6 ~~12~~ C. Columbus knew that he had discovered a *New World*.

5. The teacher will now give a brief lecture about Columbus (based largely upon information found in Restall's *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*). Students will be taking CLOZE notes on the lecture. (See handout.)

6. At the close of the lecture and note-taking, have students mark the Columbus statements a third time and the teacher will collect the data. With any luck, it will now look like this:

**Columbus**

- 33 14 6 A. Columbus was arrested in the *New World* for failing to fulfill his contract to Spain.  
0 13 15 B. Columbus understood world geography better than other explorers of his time.  
0 6 12 C. Columbus knew that he had discovered a *New World*.

**Extension:**

Teachers could extend the lesson or assign homework by:

- Asking students to survey five people with the question "Who discovered America?"
- Write a response that supports this prompt, "Columbus was in the right place at the right time."

**ELL/SPED Accomodations**

The CLOZE note strategy should support needs of both populations. These students can be given a copy of the lecture notes with which they can follow along and take their notes.

### Pretest on the Spanish Contact and Conquest of the Americas

Three related statements regarding one topic are clustered below: some of the statements are common myths **about the Spanish Conquest of the Americas** others are historically accurate. Pay close attention to the phrasing of the statements and try to determine which of the three statements exhibits the greatest historical accuracy. Mark that statement as your choice. Note: words that are important vocabulary words or that may have different meanings to different people have been written in italics: we will discuss these throughout the unit.

#### 1: Columbus

- A. Columbus was arrested in the *New World* for failing to fulfill his contract to Spain.
- B. Columbus understood world geography better than other explorers of his time.
- C. Columbus knew that he had discovered a *New World*.

#### 2: Army

- A. The Spanish *conquistadors* made up a well-regulated army (with uniforms etc.)
- B. The Spanish *conquistadors* were well-paid soldiers.
- C. The Spanish *conquistadors* were independent, armed entrepreneurs (businessmen).

#### 3: Systems

- A. The Spanish usually gave groups the opportunity to surrender peacefully.
- B. The Spanish were led by a few exceptional and inspired men like Cortés and Pizarro.
- C. The Spanish system allowed only white wealthy men to become conquistadors.

#### 4: Rewards

- A. Spanish conquistadors were well paid for their efforts whether successful or not.
- B. Successful Spanish conquistadors were rewarded with land.
- C. Successful Spanish conquistadors paid one-fifth of what they found to the king of Spain.

#### 5: Historiography

- A. *Primary sources* by indigenous groups that tell the story of this period do not exist.
- B. *Primary sources* by Spaniards of this period were often written to justify earning rewards.
- C. *Secondary sources* regarding this period have always carefully analyzed all prior sources.

#### 6: Communication

- A. The Spanish communicated clearly through body language with those they met.
- B. The Spanish were unable through interpreters or body language to express their desires.
- C. The Spanish were usually able through interpreters and actions to express their desires.

#### 7: Cultural Differences

- A. The Spanish encountered many cannibalistic tribes.
- B. The Spanish encountered and depended on tribes who were sedentary farmers.
- C. The Spanish encountered no tribes with writing systems.

#### 8: Weapons

- A. The most useful weapon the Spanish brought with them was the horse.
- B. The most useful weapon the Spanish brought with them was the steel sword.
- C. The most useful weapon the Spanish brought with them was the gun.

#### 9: Indians

- A. *Indians* in the *New World* believed that at least some of the Spanish were probably gods.
- B. *Indians* in the *New World* united against the Spanish but it was too late.
- C. *Indians* in the *New World* often fought with the Spanish to defeat their old enemies.

#### 10: Death

- A. Most of the *indigenous* people who died after contact died while enslaved to Spaniards.
- B. Most of the *indigenous* people who died after contact died due to disease.
- C. Most of the *indigenous* people who died after contact died fighting the Spanish.

### **Columbus: In the Right Place at the Right Time (Lecture)**

In the late 1200's, European sailors left the Mediterranean and started venturing into the Atlantic Ocean. The country to take the lead in this age of exploration was Portugal and, when necessary, the Portuguese were happy to recruit Italian navigators to man their ships. Beginning in 1470, Christopher Columbus was one of these recruits. He married a Portuguese woman and often petitioned the King and Queen of Portugal to support his explorations. But Columbus always felt a little like the outsider he was and by the 1480's and 1490's was growing anxious about his future. He had neither the connections nor the original ideas that many other navigators had.

Columbus happened to live at just the time when Spain and Portugal were in a fierce competition to be the first European country to sail to Asia. Asia could provide a wide variety of trade goods which Europeans were eager to have. When the Portuguese monarchy put their money on sailing around Africa to reach Asia, Columbus took his ideas to Spain. By this time, all educated Europeans understood that the earth was round but there was no consensus on how big the earth was. Columbus believed it was smaller than most other people. He was wrong about that but he was right that by sailing west you could reach land. (It just wasn't Asia.)

The king and queen of Spain risked sponsoring Columbus' journey despite arguments from other scientists that he had miscalculated the size of the Atlantic Ocean. He was contracted to sail to Asia. In the meantime, the Portuguese sailor Vasco de Gama had successfully sailed to Asia by traveling around Africa. Spain (and Columbus) had lost the race to Asia. Until his death, however, Columbus argued that the islands he had "found" were off the coast of Asia: it is unclear if he really believed this or if he was trying to prove that he had fulfilled his contract in order to earn the royal rewards he had been promised.

The king and queen of Spain clearly understood these were new lands and, in fact, had Columbus arrested and returned to Spain in chains. He had lost the race to Asia, his calculations had been proved wrong, and he had never stepped foot on the continents that would become known as the Americas! His career and reputation were ruined. The fact that Columbus' voyage west led to one of the most momentous historical events of all time was an accident caused by the competition between Spain and Portugal. Many other European navigators were exploring the world by now and someone was bound to stumble across this vast landmass.

Coinciding, however, with the 300th anniversary of Columbus' voyage, was the birth of a small country looking for national heroes and a history independent from Great Britain. In 1792, the United States was newly born and poets and authors alike started referencing Columbus. King's College in New York City renamed itself Columbia in 1792 and the newly built capital of Washington was subtitled the District of Columbia. Columbus seemed to symbolize (represent) independence, innovation, and progress.

The wildly popular Washington Irving book of 1828 the *Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* sealed the deal for Columbus' mythological place in United States history. It is Irving's book that portrays Columbus arguing that the world is round when, in fact, scholars already knew that. By the 1830's Columbus was firmly established as an American Founding Father but that is what happens when history books are written by talented short story authors. Washington Irving's most famous fictional character is a man in the Catskill mountains who sleeps for twenty years and wakes up to face a greatly changed world. Rip Van Winkle is his name. Irving, it seems, was more committed to a good story than historical accuracy.

**Columbus: In the Right Place at the Right Time: CLOZE Notes**

The country to take the lead in the age of exploration was (1)\_\_\_\_\_. Portugal recruited (2)\_\_\_\_\_ and other Italian navigators to man their ships. Columbus' problem was that he had neither the connections nor the original (3)\_\_\_\_\_ that many other navigators had.

Spain and Portugal were in a competition to be the first European country to sail to (4)\_\_\_\_\_. Portugal decided to try to sail around (5)\_\_\_\_\_. By this time, all educated Europeans understood that the earth was (6)\_\_\_\_\_. Columbus believed the world was (7)\_\_\_\_\_ than most other people.

The king and queen of (8)\_\_\_\_\_ sponsored Columbus' journey despite the risks. Columbus was (9)\_\_\_\_\_ to sail to Asia. It is unclear if Columbus really believed he had landed on (10)\_\_\_\_\_ off of Asia or if he was trying to earn the royal (11)\_\_\_\_\_ he had been promised.

The king and queen of Spain had Columbus arrested and returned to Spain in (12)\_\_\_\_\_. He had lost the (13)\_\_\_\_\_ to Asia, his calculations had been proved wrong, and he had never stepped foot on the continents that would become known as the (14)\_\_\_\_\_! The fact that Columbus' voyage west led to one of the most momentous historical events of all time was an accident caused by the (15)\_\_\_\_\_ between Spain and Portugal.

In 1792, the (16)\_\_\_\_\_ was newly born and looking for national heroes. Columbus seemed to symbolize (represent) independence, (17)\_\_\_\_\_, and (18)\_\_\_\_\_. Washington Irving's book of 1828 portrays Columbus arguing that the world is round when, in fact, (19)\_\_\_\_\_ already knew that but it built the myth of Columbus. Ironically, Washington Irving's most famous fictional character is (20)\_\_\_\_\_.