

# Biases in Primary and Secondary Sources: Christopher Columbus Lesson

Author and School Information	
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Lesson Overview	
Curriculum Framing Question (Essential Question, Unit Question)	How does the way history is presented impact personal feelings and biases?
Lesson Summary	The students will reflect on their prior knowledge about Christopher Columbus. They will then watch a video describing in detail some of the events and campaigns Columbus carried out that they may not be aware of. The students will then work with select primary source quotes and look for bias in what they are and how they are presented. The students will finally participate in a "magnetic debate" in which they try to convince the teacher and a small group of students that Columbus was "good" or "bad" in order to show that everyone has their own bias.
Subject Area(s)	Social Studies
Grade Level	7/8
Student Objectives and Learning Outcomes	Students will gain new knowledge and understanding on what "bias" is and how it comes to be. Using the events in the life of Christopher Columbus, they will be able to analyze and define the different shapes and symptoms of bias, and come to an understanding on how it is currently shaping their thoughts, culture, and world.
Standards and Benchmarks	<p><b>II Time, Continuity and Change</b></p> <p><b>Social studies teachers should possess the knowledge, capabilities, and dispositions to organize and provide instruction at the appropriate school level for the study of Time, Continuity, and Change.</b></p> <p><b>Learner Expectations</b> The study of time, continuity, and change allows learners to understand their historical roots and to locate themselves in time. Learning how to read and reconstruct the past allows</p>

them to develop a historical perspective and to answer questions such as: Who am I? What happened in the past? How has the world changed and how might it change in the future? Why does our personal sense of relatedness to the past change? How can the perspective we have about our own life experiences be viewed as part of the larger human story across time? How do our personal stories reflect varying points of view and inform contemporary ideas and actions? Learners also draw on their knowledge of history to make informed choices and decisions in the present.

#### **Teacher Expectations**

Teachers of social studies at all school levels should provide developmentally appropriate experiences as they guide learners in the study of time, continuity, and change. They should:

- assist learners to understand that historical knowledge and the concept of time are socially influenced constructions that lead historians to be selective in the questions they seek to answer and the evidence they use;
- help learners apply key concepts such as time, chronology, causality, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity;
- enable learners to identify and describe significant historical periods and patterns of change within and across cultures, such as the development of ancient cultures and civilizations, the rise of nation-states, and social, economic, and political revolutions;
- guide learners as they systematically employ processes of critical historical inquiry to reconstruct and interpret the past, such as using a variety of sources and checking their credibility, validating and weighing evidence for claims, and searching for causality;
- provide learners with opportunities to investigate, interpret, and analyze multiple historical and contemporary viewpoints within and across cultures related to important events, recurring dilemmas, and persistent issues, while employing empathy, skepticism, and critical judgment; enable learners to apply ideas, theories, and modes of historical inquiry to analyze historical and contemporary

developments, and to inform and evaluate actions concerning public policy issues.

Procedure

Students will be broken up into groups of 3 or 4 and asked to discuss and write down everything they know about Christopher Columbus. They will then share this prior knowledge with the class. We will take a class poll to see who thinks Columbus is "good" or "bad" and split the class into two sections. The students will then watch a video and answer guided questions. Students will then read select primary source quotes from or about Columbus and answer attached critical thinking questions. The Quotes will have a purposeful negative slant to them for two reasons: 1) to expose the students to a side of Columbus they probably have not ever seen and 2) to help the students learn to pick out biases and agendas in primary sources and how they are presented. Students may then create propaganda posters in favor or against Columbus.

Approximate Time Needed  
(Minutes, Days, Hours, etc)

3 regular 45 minute class periods

**Accommodations for Differentiated Instruction**

Resource Student

Review the students' IEP and adjust lesson accordingly, group work, etc.

Gifted Student

Students may lead or facilitate the magnetic debate, create their own Columbus propaganda posters, etc.

**Assessment**

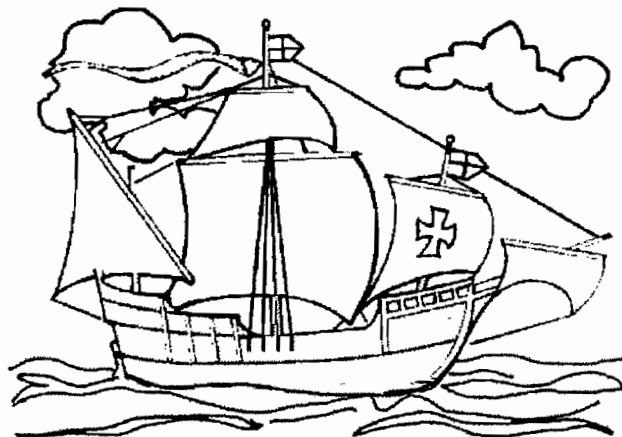
Student Assessment

Guided Notes from Video  
Columbus Quotes Worksheet  
Participation in "Magnetic Debate"

### Biography of Christopher Columbus Questions

Use complete sentences to answer the following questions as you watch the biography of Christopher Columbus. If you need more room, you may use your own paper and staple it to this sheet.

1. What country was Columbus born in?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How old was Columbus when he left home to sail the seas?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What country had the best and largest number of ships in the 1480's?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Who made it to the Americas before Columbus?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Who were the king and queen of Spain who helped fund Columbus's voyages?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What were the names of the 3 ships that Columbus commanded?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How many men went on the first voyage across the Atlantic with Columbus?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What were some of the superstitious fears of sailing the Atlantic?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What day did Columbus's men first spot land?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What country was Columbus looking for when he ran into the Americas?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Which ship sank when Columbus hit a reef on the coast of Espanola?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What happened to the colony that Columbus left in Espanola?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Did Columbus's life end in glory and fame like he wished? How did it end?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. In what year was Columbus's last voyage?  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Who was America named after?  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Columbus Video Questions Key

1. What country was Columbus born in? (Italy)
2. How old was Columbus when he left home to sail the seas? (14)
3. What country had the best and largest number of ships in the 1480's? (Portugal)
4. Who made it to the Americas before Columbus? (Vikings)
5. Who were the king and queen of Spain who helped fund Columbus's voyages?
6. What were the names of the 3 ships that Columbus commanded?
7. How many men went on the first voyage across the Atlantic with Columbus? (90)
8. What were some of the superstitious fears of sailing the Atlantic? (sea monsters and Dog-men)
9. What day did Columbus's men first spot land? (Oct. 11, 1492)
10. What country was Columbus looking for when he ran into the Americas? (China)
11. Which ship sank when Columbus hit a reef on the coast of Espanola? (Santa Maria)
12. What happened to the colony that Columbus left in Espanola? (massacre of Spaniards)
13. Did Columbus's life end in glory and fame like he wished? How did it end?
14. In what year was Columbus's last voyage? (1502)
15. Who was America named after?
  
16. How would you feel as an Indian coming to Spain from your home?
17. Do you think that Columbus was right to enslave the Indians in Espanola? Why did he do it? What was he making them look for? (Gold)

**Columbus Quotes: Working with Primary Sources**

Read the following quotes from or about Christopher Columbus and answer the questions.

- a. "I was attentive and worked hard to know if there was any gold" Columbus Diary, 10/13/1492
- b. "I do not wish to delay but to discover and go to many islands to find gold" Columbus Diary, 10/15/1492
- c. "Our Lord in His goodness guide me that I may find this gold" Columbus Diary, 12/23/1492
- d. "He who has gold makes and accomplishes whatever he wishes in the world and finally uses it to send souls to paradise."
- e. "But in truth, should I meet with gold or spices in great quantity, I shall remain till I collect as much as possible, and for this purpose I am proceeding solely in quest of them."
- f. "Riches don't make a man rich, they only make him busier."

1. What seems to be the theme of the selected quotes above?

2. What appears to be the most important thing to Columbus? Why do you think that is?

3. What might account for the change in tone in the last quote (f)?

- g. "I am a most noteworthy sinner, but I have cried out to the Lord for grace and mercy, and they have covered me completely. I have found the sweetest consolation since I made it my whole purpose to enjoy His marvelous Presence."

4. Do you think Columbus was religious? What makes you think so?

5. What does Columbus claim is his "whole purpose"?

6. Does this quote conflict with quotes a-f? Why or why not?

- h. "By prevailing over all obstacles and distractions, one may unfailingly arrive at his chosen goal or destination."
- i. "These people are very unskilled in arms ... with 50 men they could all be subjected and made to do all that one wished."
- j. "As a result of the sufferings and hard labor they endured, the Indians choose and have chosen suicide....Many when pregnant, have taken something to abort and have aborted. Others after delivery have killed their children with their own hands, so as not to leave them in such oppressive slavery."  
Pedro de Cordoba, letter to King Ferdinand, 1517

**7. What "obstacles and distractions" is Columbus talking about in quote "h"?**

**8. Who are "these people" in quote "i"?**

**9. What does it mean to make someone do all that you wish them to do? What does that make them?**

**10. What does Pedro de Cordoba say about what was happening to the Natives as a result of Columbus's arrival?**

**11. Can even primary sources have a bias? Can how they are selected or presented have a bias or an agenda?**

**12. Does this selection of Columbus quotes have a bias? How do you feel about Columbus after reading these quotes?**