

Decision Making in U.S. History

Colonies

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COLONIES

Introduction

OVERVIEW

This volume on American colonial history consists of seven lessons: one on exploration, four on the 1600s, and two on the 1700s. Since the colonial period spans such an unusually long period of time, no effort is made to cover all the major topics in this time period. Rather, lessons were chosen around interesting decision-making problems.

SKILLS GRID FOR THIS VOLUME

X = part of lesson

E = emphasized in the lesson

Skill	Lesson						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Underlying problem(s)		X		X	X		X
Point of view		E		E	X		
Assumptions/emotions		X					
Ask—context	X	X		X	X		X
Ask—sources	X				E		
Ask—analogies		X					
Goals? Realistic?	X	X	E	X	X	E	
Options. Ethical?		X					
Unintended consequences	E	X	X	X		X	E
Play out option	X	X		X		X	

LESSON 1: COLUMBUS'S REQUEST FOR AID, 1492

Teacher Pages

OVERVIEW

Unlike many of the lessons in these books, students will almost universally know the basic outcome of this lesson. They will know that Queen Isabella supported Columbus, who in turn found the Americas. Nonetheless, students will learn a great deal about the reasons for and against supporting Columbus. The lesson may dispel myths that opposition to Columbus came from those who thought the earth was flat (almost all learned men in the 15th century knew the earth was round). Moreover, the lesson focuses on the consequences of Columbus's voyages, especially the beginnings of the Columbian exchange. Few students will be able to predict all these consequences.

VOCABULARY

- Queen Isabella—Queen of Castile who united Spain
- Christopher Columbus—Adventurer who sailed west and discovered the New World for Spain
- Moors—Muslims in Spain who were defeated and expelled in 1492
- Indians—Natives of the islands and continents of the Americas. Since Columbus thought he was in the Indies, he named the natives Indians.
- Columbian Exchange—The exchange of plants and animals that began on Columbus's second voyage in 1493. Some historians think the second voyage is more important than the first because of the exchange, which altered world history.
- Aztecs—Great native empire in the area of Mexico; conquered by Cortes
- Incas—Great native empire in the area of Peru; conquered by Pizarro

DECISION-MAKING SKILLS EMPHASIZED

- Ask about context
- Ask about reliability of sources
- Set realistic goals
- Play out options
- Predict unintended consequences

LESSON PLAN

A. IN-DEPTH LESSON (One 40-minute class)

Procedure:

Distribute Handout 1 and have students read it silently and decide what they will do. Next, divide students into groups and have them discuss their choices. Then bring the class back together and have each group report on its decisions and explain. After the discussion, have students vote on the question of whether to support Columbus. Distribute Handout 2 with the outcomes. Focus on unintended consequences by distributing Handout 3. Groups of students should write as many consequences as they can generate. Distribute Handout 4, which lists some possible consequences.

OPTION: After the vote, have students read the primary source agreement between Columbus and the Crown (Handout 5) and answer the questions.

Reflecting on Decision Making:

Ask students what they learned from these outcomes. What would they have done differently, if anything, now that they know the outcomes? Which decision-making skills were especially important to the decision about Columbus? Which letters of **P-A-G-E** applied especially to this problem? (See the section on “Decision-Making Analysis” below for ideas.) Ask students what they did well or poorly on in terms of the **P-A-G-E** analysis. Discuss their answers.

Placing the Actual Decisions Into Historical Context:

Ask students why exploration was important at this time. Who supported it and why? Why was exploration not as important in 1292 or 1392?

Connecting to Today:

Ask students to list three foods or other items today that are at least partly the result of the Columbian exchange.

Troubleshooting:

Use the maps to make sure students understand where all this action is taking place and how limited people’s views of the world were. Remind students how important religion was in conflicts between countries and in motivating exploration.

B. QUICK MOTIVATOR (10–15 minutes)

Give students Handout 1 for homework. In class the next day, have students pair up to discuss their answers for about two minutes. Bring the class together and ask how many would support Columbus. Distribute Handout 2 (outcomes). Skip Handouts 3 and 4.

TEACHER NOTES FOR EXPANDING DISCUSSION

(For outcomes for students, see Handout 2)

Queen Isabella was also referred to as “Queen Isabel.” She is called the more familiar “Isabella” in this lesson. Although both the Queen and King had to make the decision, it is simpler to have students make the decision for only one of the monarchs.

The map by Toscanelli is not the actual map, but a modern drawing based on descriptions. There is disagreement about whether Columbus had a map with him. It is included in this lesson because it will help students understand what Columbus was arguing.

Spain wasn’t a united country at the time in the sense in which we think of the word country in the modern era. Nevertheless, the familiar word “Spain” is used in the lesson (rather than “Castile”) to avoid confusion.

The queen and king decided against Columbus’s proposal. Columbus left for France, but a messenger caught up to him and said the queen changed her mind and accepted his proposal. One of the queen’s advisers had met her after the meeting and persuaded her that Columbus’s requests were reasonable, and that it was a small risk for a possibly large gain. This element of the story was left out to keep the story simpler and shorter. Also, one historian argues that Ferdinand actually supported Columbus and persuaded the queen. These interpretations would be a distraction to the decision-making focus.

DECISION-MAKING ANALYSIS

P = Problem

- Identify any underlying problem(s)
- **Consider other points of view**
- **What are my assumptions? Emotions?**

A = Ask for information (about)

- * - Historical context (history of this issue; context in the world)
- * - Reliability of sources
- Historical analogies

G = Goals

- * - What are my main goals? Are they realistic?
- Generate options to achieve these goals. Are they ethical?

E = Effects

- * - **Predict unintended consequences.**
- * - **Play out the options. What could go wrong?**

*Denotes topics emphasized in this lesson

- **Ask Questions:** Does this guy know what he's talking about? (Not exactly) Has he made this request to other countries? (Yes: to England, France, and Portugal) If so, why have other countries not supported his request? (They could see that his main argument about Asia being close was wrong, or they were tied up with problems at home, or they felt his demands were too high. The King of Portugal thought Columbus was a boastful man and didn't believe his boasts.) Most of your experts argued that he was wrong, so you should have taken that into consideration. Why haven't merchants put up money to help Columbus on this venture? (Maybe it shows it was too risky.)
- **Ask about reliability of sources:** Columbus is not a very reliable source. He's a skilled mariner, but he has a reason to lie to get you to support his voyage. He makes whatever arguments he thinks will get you to support him. In addition, experts have shown that his calculations of the size of the world are wrong, so that should make you question his reliability in general.
- **Consider goals:** Isabella wanted to increase the power of Spain. If Columbus failed to find a route to the Indies, but did find new lands for Spain, she felt the venture would be worth the risk. So her goals were realistic.
- **Play out the option:** There were many things that could have gone wrong with the exploration, but the main risk was borne by Columbus and his crew, not the queen. The evidence indicates that the queen did consider the cost, implying that she looked for what could go wrong.
- **Consider consequences:** Many unintended consequences are listed in Handout 3. Isabella separated the fanciful claims of the young sailor from the best interest of Spain. The long-term consequences might help Spain even if those consequences weren't what Columbus intended.

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LESSON 1: COLUMBUS'S REQUEST FOR AID, 1492

Vocabulary

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LESSON 1: COLUMBUS'S REQUEST FOR AID, 1492

Student Handout 1: Problem



The year is 1492, and you are Queen Isabella of Spain. You rule Spain along with your husband King Ferdinand. An adventurer named Christopher Columbus has come to you asking for your financial and official support to explore a route to the Indies (China, Japan, and the Spice Islands) by sailing west, into the Western Ocean. You and the king didn't approve his proposal six years ago, but in order to keep him from going to another country with the proposal, you've paid him a good income since that time. Now that you've just finished a war, it is time to hear his proposal again.



Queen Isabella

Some merchants in Venice and other Italian cities are making a great deal of money trading with the Indies. The usual overland trade routes are blocked now that the Muslims have captured Constantinople, so countries have been searching for



different routes to the Indies. Columbus says that sailing west to the Indies will work. He is confident that he can make it without too much difficulty in a relatively short voyage, perhaps six weeks. He has a map with him showing how he will sail to the Indies. He wants financial support for three or four ships, crews, and supplies. It's a small amount of money—about the yearly income of one fairly wealthy person. In addition, he wants to be called "Admiral of the Ocean Sea," get 10% of all wealth from the lands he discovers, and be made royal governor of all lands Spain gets from

his explorations. Columbus argues that not only will sailing west lead to a new route to the Indies, but it will also lead to the discovery of new islands for Spain. He promises to bring Christianity to the areas he explores and to bring financial rewards back to Spain.