

**Course of Study:**

European History, Western Civilization or World History Course

**Unit:**

May be used during a unit on the Age of Discovery and the impact of the Columbian Exchange

**Topic:**

*Christopher Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*

**Vital Theme(s):**

**Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions:** - the basic principles of influential religions, philosophies and ideologies. The interplay among ideas, moral values, and leadership, especially in the evolution of democratic institutions. The tensions between freedom and security, liberty and equality, diversity and commonality in human affairs.

**Comparative history of major developments:** The characteristics of revolutionary, reactionary, and reform periods across time and place. Imperialism, ancient and modern. Comparative instances of slavery and emancipation, feudalism and centralization, human success and failures, of wisdom and folly. Comparative elites and aristocracies; the role of family, wealth, and merit.

“Vital Themes and Narratives,” *Building a United States History Curriculum*. Westlake, OH: National Council for History Education, 2005, pp. 10-11.

**Lesson:**

*Using a primary source to understand the concept of bias in history and motivations for the European conquest of the New World*

**Rationale for lesson and the use of *Vital Themes*:**

The concept of the history lab is similar to that of a lab in science class. The goal is to replicate the work of an historian and have students think as historians. Each lab focuses on one *Habit of the Mind* specifically in an attempt to have students understand the nature of the discipline. This is accomplished by using the particular skill of the historian or relevant way of historical thought while studying a topic in history in greater depth.

For this lab, students will analyze a letter by Christopher Columbus in which he comments on his initial voyage to the Americas. Students will have an opportunity to determine bias as well as gather relevant information concerning European motivations for exploration and future conquest.

**Student Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Read widely and critically in order to recognize the difference between fact and conjecture, between evidence and assertion, and thereby frame useful questions
- Identify Christopher Columbus
- Describe how historians define bias
- Explain three motivations for European exploration and conquest of the Americas drawn from textual primary source evidence

**Benefits for Teachers:**

- Document approach to history – using primary sources for the teaching of history
- Have students become historians by “doing history” and practicing *History’s Habits of Mind*
- Engaging students in active reading

### **History's Habits of the Mind:**

- Read widely and critically in order to recognize the difference between fact and conjecture, between evidence and assertion, and thereby frame useful questions

“History’s Habits of the Mind,” *Building a United States History Curriculum*. Westlake, OH: National Council for History Education, 2005, p. 9.

### **Materials:**

- Document(s) from *Lapham's Quarterly on Travel*
- *First document to be used in part one of activity (focus of lab):*
  - *1493: Lisbon – Christopher Columbus (page 176)*
- *Additional documents:*
- Written Document Analysis Sheet
- Lab Journal instructions
- Rubric designed for grading lab journal

### **Lesson Activities:**

#### ***Prerequisites:***

- Knowledge of ethnocentrism and historian’s definition of bias
  - This is essential as it is the particular skill that will be emphasized in the lab. Students should have an understanding of how historians define the notion of bias and some sense of why that is important as well as how one would recognize it. This could also be used as an excellent closure for the lesson.

#### ***Motivation for Student Learning:***

- Initiate a class discussion based on the following quote(s):
  - From Mark Twain, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.” OR
  - From Benjamin Disraeli, “Travel teaches toleration.” (*Lapham's* page 27)
  - Allow a wide-ranging discussion that centers on the reasons for travel, either generally or specifically for Columbus, and whether or not contact with the new brings about greater understanding or simply reinforces ethnocentrism. Be sure to review the historian’s notion of bias.

#### ***Activity / Application:***

When the above discussion has come to a conclusion, tell students that they will be completing a history lab focusing on the above habit. Discuss with students the meaning of the habit.

Each student should be given a copy of the document and a document analysis sheet. If time permits, have students partner to review their results. Follow with a teacher-led review of responses on analysis sheet. Information drawn from text should lead to conclusions concerning the motivations for European exploration and future conquest.

Conclude lesson with a discussion of the habit. Students should be able to describe how they *used the habit*. The focus of the history lab is for students to become more aware of history as a discipline and mode of thought. The concluding portion is central to the lab.

*Assessment:*

- Keeping in mind *History's Habits of Mind*, the following assessments are designed to allow students to “do history” and be historians in the truest sense – reflective, analytical, and knowledgeable.

1. **Analysis and Comprehension:** Students should complete a history lab journal. A rubric for grading the journal is attached.
2. **Analysis and Comprehension:** Based on their analysis of Columbus’ letter, students, in a strong paragraph replete with textual evidence, should decide whether or not the letter is evidence for agreeing or disagreeing with either Twain’s quote or Disraeli’s.
3. **Further Research:** Students should select another document from *Lapham’s Quarterly* on travel and complete a document analysis. The focus of the assignment can be on identifying and explaining bias (comprehension) and/or comparing Columbus’ implicit response to the Twain or Disraeli quote with the document’s implicit response (analysis). Any of the documents in the section entitled *Destinations* (starting on page 109) are excellent for this assignment. The sources offer a range across time and place.