

TITLE: Columbus Day, 2nd Monday in October: Columbus: Hero or Villain?

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will read about different perspectives on Christopher Columbus.
- Students will survey peers on their feelings of Columbus.

Benchmarks

- Interpret conflicting accounts of events in early United States history and analyze the viewpoints of the authors (I.3.LE.2). GLCE.
- Describe the causes, routes, and major movements of people prior to the 17th century (II.3.LE.2, II.3.LE.4). GLCE.

SUBJECT: Language Arts, Social Studies

INTENDED GRADE LEVEL: 5th grade

DESCRIPTION: In this lesson students explore how historical interpretation changes over time by analyzing various viewpoints relating to Christopher Columbus, his explorations, and his encounters. Students explore quotations, a timeline, and literature. They employ several literacy strategies to evaluate textbook lessons on Columbus as well as other resources. Finally, they conduct a survey of people's attitudes towards Columbus and compare their results to a national survey done in 1992.

RESOURCES:

Overhead projector

Quotations, overhead

Timeline, overhead

25 copies of Evaluation Sheet

25 copies of Survey Tally Sheet

25 copies of Lesson Assessment

deRubertis, Barbara. *Columbus Day (Holidays and Heroes Series)*. NY: Kane Press, 1992.

Liestman, Vickie. *Columbus Day*. NY: Carolrhoda books, 1992.

Roop, Peter and Connie. *I, Columbus: My Journal 1492-93*. New York: Morrow/Avon, 1991.

Yolen, Jane. *Encounter*. NY: Voyager Books, 1996.

DETAILED TIMELINE: This lesson can take as little as an 1.5 hours or can be used as an all-day inquiry into Christopher Columbus on Columbus Day. The teacher can decide how much text to read and how long the discussions should go on.

TEACHER PREPARATION: The teacher will need to create overheads and copies of the activity sheets in resources. The teacher will also need to gather picture books for students to read about Columbus.

PREREQUISITE STUDENT SKILLS: Students will need to be able to reason when

given two sides of the same issue.

ACTIVITIES / PROCEDURES:

1. Explain the simulation game described below in Step 2 to a willing student the day before this lesson.
2. After students are in the room and waiting for class to begin, walk round the room admiring the belongings of several students. When you get to the student selected in Step 1, compliment his/her notebook - color, size, usefulness, etc. Then, take the notebook back to your desk or seat and look even more closely at the contents, remarking aloud how useful and/or interesting certain things are. Thank the child for the notebook and state that you intend to keep it since it will be very useful for keeping notes, student papers, calendars, etc. Offer the owner a pen or pencil in return. Hopefully, you will see the look of discomfort on the faces of the other students, and some conversations between neighbors about what just happened.
3. Get ready to carry on with the lesson, gathering your materials, turning on the overhead projector, whatever else you would normally do. This will give students time to question and formulate some thoughts about what they just saw happen. After a few minutes, stop and ask children to describe what they saw happen and discuss how they felt about it with their neighbors. Discuss the event with the whole class. Suggested questions:
 - What did you think when you saw me, the teacher, take the notebook?
 - Why?
 - If you saw something someone else had that you found interesting, how would you go about getting one like it?
 - How could I have handled this differently?
 - Why should it be handled in a different manner?

Explain to students that this is how the explorers to the Western Hemisphere acted toward the Native Americans. The explorers claimed what they saw for their homeland, taking what they wanted from the people of the new lands and offering objects like beads or metal goods in exchange. Explain that "finders, keepers; losers, weepers" was a customary practice during this period.

4. Tell students that it was Christopher Columbus who launched the age of exploration and encounters, which led to the age of colonization or claiming of land in the Americas. Ask students how Columbus is generally viewed in our country. Discuss student responses and guide students to the idea that Columbus is generally thought of as a hero. He is celebrated on one of only two federal holidays named after people, the other being Martin Luther King Day.
5. Show students an overhead transparency of "Quotations, Overhead #1," located in the Supplemental Materials and read the quotations out loud. Ask students to describe the viewpoints illustrated in each of the quotations. Discuss the

viewpoints and guide students to the idea that these quotations show that not everybody views Columbus as a hero.

6. Explain that historical interpretation of the past changes over time. In other words, the way in which we interpret the past changes as we learn more about the past. This has been true regarding the voyages and legacy of Columbus. Show students an overhead transparency of "Timeline, Overhead #2," located in the Supplemental Materials and guide a discussion on the information using these questions.
 - How did viewpoints of Columbus and his voyage tend to change over time?
 - What do you think brought about these changes in viewpoints?
 - Why do you think Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway opposed the UN resolution relating to Columbus?
 - Why do you think several African countries also opposed it?
 - How do you think Columbus will be viewed one hundred years from now?
7. Read students the following books: "Columbus Day" by Vickie Liestman and "Columbus Day" by Barbara deRubertis. Have students compare and contrast the viewpoints relating to Columbus in these two books. You might also want to use "Encounter" by Jane Yolen and have students analyze how Columbus is portrayed. As you read, have students create a two-column chart in their social studies journal. Students should label one column "Opinion" and the other column "Proof." Students should record any evidence of the supporting the opinion or viewpoint from the text.
8. Have students read the section on Columbus in their textbook. Have students evaluate their textbook using the "Evaluation Sheet" located in the Supplemental Materials. As an alternative, select several books and resources including the textbook you use and have small groups of students evaluate the Columbus information in the various resources. Note that this is especially insightful if you can find some examples of older textbooks and resources.
9. Conduct a class discussion about how Columbus is portrayed in the text. Continue to prompt students to look for proof of their conclusion by identifying portions of the text that support the interpretation. Suggested questions include:
 - How is Columbus portrayed in the text?
 - How do you know?
 - How is this similar to how others have viewed Columbus?
 - How is this different than how others have viewed Columbus?
10. Explain to the class that in 1992 a survey was done regarding people's views of Columbus by the ICR Survey Research Group. People were asked whether Columbus was a hero, a villain, both, or neither. Ask students to predict the survey results. Then, share the actual results as follows:
 - 64% hero
 - 15% villain

- 9% both
 - 12% neither/don't know
11. Explain that you will now be working together to conduct a similar survey. As a class decide on two groups to survey regarding viewpoints of Columbus. Try to choose groups that may have differing opinions. For example, one group could be 8th grade students who are currently studying American History and another group might be senior citizens who learned about Columbus initially many years ago. Design a method of surveying the groups. For example, will you send students to visit the groups? Will you pass out the survey to students and collect it after they complete it? Use the "Survey Tally Sheet" located in the Supplemental Materials to gather or record the data.
 12. Have students compare their survey data with that of the 1992 survey. Engage students in a class discussion of the data and any conclusions they could draw from it.
 13. Explain that even though Columbus is sometimes criticized for his methods, it is likely that another person from this time period would have acted in the same manner, made the same discoveries using similar methods with comparable consequences. Remind students that as they learned in the previous lesson the voyages by Columbus resulted in the movement of products, ideas, diseases, and people. These exchanges changed the entire world dramatically.

ASSESSMENT / EVALUATION: The Evaluation Sheet from Step 9 may be used to assess student learning. As a culminating activity have students complete the "Lesson Assessment" located in the Supplemental Materials by describing positive and negative aspects of Columbus and his explorations on a chart and then using the information to write a balanced paragraph about Columbus.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES: Students could interview family members regarding their viewpoints of Columbus and his voyages.

Connections

English Language Arts

Students develop communication and speaking skills when they participate in group discussions. Students practice comprehension strategies as they explore various forms of text. When students identify a viewpoint of an author, they use a variety of literacy skills.

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Quotations

Overhead #1

“Columbus was a grasping fortune hunter whose legacy was the destruction of the native population and land that continues to this day.”

“We honor Columbus for doing something that he never intended to do, and never knew that he had done.”

“I just see Columbus as a lost adventurer, simply as that. We can build him up to be a great man, or on the other side we can see that he is the symbol of white man’s oppression.”

“For some Columbus Day is a day of celebration, while others it is a day of lamentation.”

“We, Europeans, did not deal honorably to the people who said, ‘all right we’ll share the land.’ It wasn’t sharing, it was a takeover. Should we honor a man for doing that?”

“I believe it’s a myth that Columbus was a hero. Columbus and other explorers who entered into the ‘age of discovery’ changed the very peaceful and happy way of life of Native American people. Columbus’ purpose from the beginning was not mere exploration or even trade, but conquest and exploitation.”

Timeline

Overhead #2

1500s	The voyages of Columbus were hardly mentioned in Europe. Other explorers like da Gama, Vespucci, Cortes, and Pizarro received all the attention.
1600s	Europe began its praise of the achievements of Columbus. He was celebrated in plays and poetry, especially in Italy and Spain.
1700s and 1800s	Americans began to hail Columbus as an epic hero. The new nation's capital was named the District of Columbia after him and Columbus had become a national hero.
1882	The U.S. had a yearlong celebration in honor of the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus' voyages.
1982	A draft resolution at the United Nations was introduced to mark 1992 as the 500 th anniversary of Columbus's discovery. The U.S., Canada, and several Latin American countries supported it. Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland opposed it. A number of African countries were highly opposed to it. The resolution was eventually dropped.
1992	The 500 th Anniversary of Columbus' voyage was commemorated, but there were protests as well as numerous events presenting alternative viewpoints of Columbus.

Evaluation Sheet

Resource you evaluated: _____

How was Columbus portrayed in the resource?

What words were used to describe Columbus?

Were there other features besides text included? If so, what kind of features?

In what way did these features contribute to the image of Columbus portrayed in the resource?

How were the encounters of Columbus and Native Americans described?

Were any alternative viewpoints of Columbus presented? If so, describe them?

In general, do you think this was a balanced and fair portrayal of Columbus? Why or why not?

Survey Tally

Was Columbus a...

Hero	
Villain	
Both	
Neither/don't know	

Lesson Assessment

Directions: Think about what you have learned about Christopher Columbus. Think about his explorations, his encounters with Native Americans, and the exchanges that he began. Then, describe both positive and negative aspects of Columbus on the chart below:

Positive	Negative

Directions: Use what you have listed above to help you write a paragraph about Christopher Columbus describing both his positive and negative points. Make sure to support your ideas with evidence from what you have learned in this unit.