

LESSON PLAN - Columbus, the Truth behind the Myth

EALRS: History 1. *The student* examines and understands major ideas, eras, themes, developments, turning points, chronology, and cause-and-effect relationships in US, World, and Washington State history.

GRADE LEVEL: Secondary

BASIC CONCEPTS: Clearing up many of the misconceptions, myths, and misunderstandings behind the mainstream view of Christopher Columbus.

ORGANIZING GENERALIZATION: The voyages of Columbus changed the lives of American Indians forever. We must begin to present a perspective about him that is more acceptable to the sensitivity of Indian history. Instead of perpetuating the many inaccuracies found in textbooks, or the commonly used terms, ideas and concepts that refer to a biased viewpoint, we must look at the devastation to Native cultures his “arrival” on this continent foreshadowed.

CULTURE AREA: Western Hemisphere

TIME PERIOD: 1492-present

BACKGROUND: “When Columbus and his men came ashore in the Bahama Islands and were met by the Arawak people he was to later write in his journal: “They . . .brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks’ bells. They willingly traded everything they owned . . .They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features . . .They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane . . .They would make fine servants . . .With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.” p. 1

This chilling and foreboding statement achieves even an even darker tone when considering the fate of the Arawak people. “In two years, through murder, mutilation or suicide, half of the 250,000 Indians on Haiti were dead. By the year 151, there were perhaps 50,000 Indians left. By 1550, there were 500. A report of the year 1650 shows none of the original Arawaks or their descendants left on the island.” p. 4-5

“The treatment of heroes (Columbus) and their victims (the Arawaks) - the quiet acceptance of conquest and murder in the name of progress - is only one aspect of a certain approach to history, in which the past is told from the point of view of governments, conquerors, diplomats, leaders.” p.9

Quotes taken from: *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn.

OBJECTIVES:

Knowledge

Students will: (History 1.1) understand historical time, chronology, and causation and (History 1.2) analyze the historical developments of events, people, places, and patterns of life in US, World, and Washington State history.

Skills

Students will: Evaluate the misconceptions and flaws in their previous learning about this subject, analyze the reasons for their misconceptions, and develop a deeper understanding about the Native American viewpoint of Columbus.

Values

Students will: group events and individuals by broadly defined historical eras and use time lines to explain patterns of historical continuity and change in the historical succession of related events and analyze the historical development of civilization drawn from different continents with regard to turning points, ideas, people, places, and patterns of life in US, World, and Washington State history.

ACTIVITIES: Read Ch.1 of *A People's History of the United States* and will read the included paper, *Truths of Columbus*, and will write a paper about their own perspective on this issue, focusing on what they have learned that was different from their previous conceptions. Students should compare this information to the representation in their textbooks they have been using for History to decide if their textbooks perpetuate any of the misconceptions raised after reading this lesson's resources.

EXTENSIONS: Have students search for older history textbooks and research how the supposed "facts" of Columbus have changed over a relatively short amount of time, and write an in-depth paper on their findings. Students could do a creative writing assignment that puts them back in history to the time of Columbus' arrival on the Bahama island from the viewpoint of a person their own age. They could write a persuasive paper focusing on the renaming of Columbus Day to Native American Memorial Day. Skits could be performed that focus on the truths, clearing up the many misconceptions. Poetry, music, or songs could be performed with the focus on the issues raised in this lesson.

EVALUATION: Having students analyze the topic in this lesson will raise many other questions and perhaps allowing students to continue in this vein of "self-discovery" will raise their awareness of their own cultural encapsulation, misconceptions about other topics of historical significance, and help them to higher level thinking skills.

MATERIALS/ RESOURCES: Chapter One in *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn

Available from OSPI:Office of Indian Education - *An American Indian Perspective on Columbus* by Esther Stutzman - *Truths of Columbus* adapted from this pamphlet and included in this packet.