

Unit 2, Lesson 2: America Before Columbus

Lesson Overview

This lesson focuses on what America was like before Columbus arrived as a way of pre-empting suggestions made by colonizers that it was a wilderness populated by “savages” in need of being civilized. The lesson also addresses some modern misconceptions about American Indians.

Delaware Standard(s)

- **History Standard 1a, 4-5 [Chronology]:** Students will study historical events and persons within a given time frame in order to create a chronology and identify related cause-effect factors.
- **History Standard 2a, 4-5 [Analysis]:** Students will draw historical conclusions and construct historical accounts from primary and secondary source materials
- **History Standard 3, 4-5 [Interpretation]:** Students will explain why historical accounts of the same event sometimes differ and relate this explanation to the evidence presented or the point-of-view of the author.

Big Ideas

- chronology, cause-effect, point of view, misconceptions, diversity, development

Essential Questions

- What was America like before Columbus arrived in 1492?
- What are some misconceptions about American Indians today?

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that, as was the case with Africa, there was great diversity within the Americas that included impressive levels of development. Misconceptions about American Indians existed at the time of Columbus and persist to this day.

Resources

- [Lesson 2 Google Slides](#)
- [Resource 1: Warm-Up - Frayer Model](#)
- [Resource 2: America Before Columbus](#)
- [Resource 3: Checks for Understanding](#)
- [Resource 4: Misconception Game Playing Cards](#)
- [Resource 5: Common Misconceptions about Native Americans](#)

Procedures

1. **Introduce the Lesson:** Tell students that, in this lesson they are going to learn about America and its people before Columbus “discovered” it.

2. **Warm-Up - Conceptions of American Indians:** Distribute copies of [Resource 1: Warm-Up - Frayer Model](#). Read the instructions as students follow along. Then have them complete the tasks on the handout. Tell them not to overlook the task at the bottom i.e., **Draw what the homes of American Indians look like today on the back of the paper.**
 - a. Invite a few volunteers to share their work. Collect, save, and analyze the papers to uncover common thoughts and misconceptions that students might have.

3. **Reading:** Tell students that they are now going to read about America and the people who lived on the continents (North and South) before Europeans “discovered” it in 1492. Distribute copies of [Resource 2: America Before Columbus](#). Read aloud as students follow along. Note the “Pause Points” at which you should pause and allow students to share and discuss their responses to the prompts, allowing them time to re-read if necessary..

4. **4- Checks for Understanding:** Distribute copies of [Resource 3: Checks for Understanding](#) and have students complete the checks for understanding. Review correct responses before moving on.

For the Teacher: Check for Understanding Answer Key

1 - Correct chronological order =

- First humans appeared in Africa
- First people set foot in America
- Native Americans built cities with pyramids
- Columbus landed in America

2- B

3- A

4- Students should place checks next to the following:

___ there were more people living in America than in Europe

___ people lived in America thousands of years before Columbus arrived

5- American Indian Points of View = America was an “Ancient World” and American Indians always lived in America

European Points of View = Europe was more advanced than America and Land in America could be taken because it was a wilderness

5. **Game - MAKE THE MIS DIS (Misconception DISappear).** The Misconception Game: Tell students that there continue to be misconceptions about American Indians that persist to this day. Some may have shown up in the Warm-Up for this lesson. In the next activity, they will play a game to see if they can identify some of the common misconceptions about American Indians that exist today and make them disappear. The game is called “**Make the Mis Dis.**”
 - a. See [Resource 4: Misconception Game Playing Cards](#). Cut out the cards so that each pair of students has one “deck.” Give one deck to pairs of students but have one student get the odd # Statement cards and the other partner get the even numbered statement cards. Have the students layout the cards with the “Statement #” face up.
 - b. See [Resource 5: Common Misconceptions about Native Americans](#). Tell students that you are going to present one statement about American Indians at a time – just the

statements, not any images. Partner 1 is assigned the first statement and rest of the odd numbered statements. If the statement presented is a misconception, students are to make the misconception statement “dis”appear by turning the “Statement Card” face down so that the blank side of the card is showing (the statement disappeared). If the students do not think it is a misconception, they are to keep the Statement card face up. Partner 2 can try to talk Partner 1 out of his or her conclusion.

- c. Do not reveal which are misconceptions until you have gone through all of the statements. This way students do not know who is winning or losing until the big reveal at the end.
 - d. Partner 2 goes next and is presented with the Statement 2 and repeats the instructions described for Partner 1 above with the exception that he or she is assigned the even numbered statements.
 - e. Repeat the instructions above with Statements 3-10.
 - f. The student who accurately identifies the most misconceptions or factual statements is declared the winner (or both do if there is a tie).
6. **Video Reinforcement:** a cute and informative 3:04 minute video that addresses common misconceptions about American Indians and presented by American Indian youth is available [here](#).

Debrief

Revisit the essential questions for the lesson and offer students the enduring understanding.

1. What was America like before Columbus arrived in 1492?
2. What are some misconceptions that people have about American Indians today?

Emphasize the Following

- People living in the Americas were there for thousands of years before Europeans “discovered” it and it was their land up until that point.
- The people living in the Americas were very diverse with many living in remarkably well-developed societies with characteristics that made sense for the environments in which they lived.
- Misconceptions about American Indians made it convenient for Europeans to take advantage of them. Some misconceptions persist to this day and can be insulting to American Indians.
- As a result of how American Indians have been treated over the course of American history, they continue to be marginalized and suffer significant health and economic disparities (see [here](#))