

## Unit 3, Lesson 4: Columbian Exchange Simulation

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### Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will engage in a simulation that will help them understand some effects of Columbus' encounter with the "New World." The focus is on what is called the "Columbian Exchange" i.e., the exchange of resources and diseases between the Old World and the New World. In the end, students are asked to draw conclusions about who benefited the most from the exchange, and who was hurt most from the exchange.

*Note: This lesson is adapted from the Focus: Middle School World History Lesson 20 - the Columbian Exchange developed by the Council for Economic Education. Available at <https://msh.councilforeconed.org/lessons.php?lid=68379>*

### Delaware Standard(s)

- **History Standard 2a, 4-5 [Analysis]:** Students will draw historical conclusions and construct historical accounts from primary and secondary source materials.
- **History Standard 3a, 4-5 [Interpretation]:** Students will explain why historical accounts [conclusions] of the same event sometimes differ and relate this explanation to the evidence presented or the point-of-view of the author.

### Big Ideas

- conclusions, evidence

### Essential Questions

- Why might there be different conclusions about the same event?

### Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that reasons for different accounts or conclusions include the use of different evidence to support the conclusions.

### Resources

- [Lesson Google Slides](#)
- [Resource 1: New World Food Cards](#)
- [Resource 2: Old World Food Card](#)
- [Resource 3a: The Columbian Exchange Illustrated](#)
- [Resource 3b: Drawing and Supporting Conclusions](#)
- [Resource 4: Checks for Understanding](#)

### Procedures

1. **Introduce the Lesson:** Columbus' "discovery" of America - involved an encounter between two worlds - the "Old World" and the "New World." One effect of this encounter was the exchange of goods and resources between the two worlds. There were things that existed in the Old World that did not exist in the New World and vice versa. This lesson will help students

understand what is known as the “Columbian Exchange.” In the end, you want students to draw conclusions - who benefited most from the exchange? Who was hurt most by the encounter?

**For the Teacher:** the simulation in this lesson does not offer students insights into all aspects of the Columbian Exchange. While it does a good job of helping students understand the foods, animals and diseases that flowed between the Old and the New Worlds following Columbus’ discovery, it overlooks other negatives. For example, rats did not exist in the New World, but they hitched rides on ships coming from the Old World. And while enslavement existed in the New World prior to Columbus’ arrival, the enslavement of people from Africa did not.

**2. Preparing for a Simulation:**

- a. Assign half of the students to be New World consumers and the other half to be Old World consumers.
- b. Make enough copies of the cards on [Resource 1: New World Food Cards](#) and [Resource 2: Old World Food Cards](#) so that each New World consumer receives two New World food cards and each Old World consumer receives two Old World food cards.
- c. You may choose to give some consumers two of the same card (for example, a New World consumer may be given two “Chocolate Syrup” cards).
- d. Divide students into New World and Old World consumers and distribute the food cards.

**3. Round 1 of the Simulation:**

- a. Give the students five minutes to trade their food cards within their own groups, New World trades with New World; Old World trades with Old World.
- b. Tell students that they may choose not to trade if they prefer the food cards they were given over the cards that other students have.
- c. After trading ends, ask students to report by a show of hands whether they considered themselves better off as a result of their trades. Record the results.

**4. Round 2 of the Simulation:**

- a. Conduct a second round of trading, allowing students to trade with all other students - Old or New World.
- b. After a second five-minute round, announce that some New World consumers have been exposed to diseases for which they have no immunity. To determine which consumers are affected, tell the students to look at any cards that have a period ( . ) next to the letters on the lower right hand corner. The period represents a virus or germ.
- c. Old World consumers have been exposed to this disease previously and have developed immunity. New World consumers have no immunity; they become very ill and perish.
- d. At the end of the round, ask students whether they consider themselves better off as a result of their trades, including the New World consumers who have “perished.”

- e. Record these results and compare them to results from the first round.
5. **Analyze and Evaluate: Mini-Lecture.** share the following with students...
- a. Before 1492, the New World was cut off from the rest of the world. The voyages of Christopher Columbus and other Old World European explorers introduced new animals, plants, ideas, and diseases to the New World and, conversely, to the Old World. Many of these exchanges had positive impacts, but the impacts of some exchanges were negative, even deadly. This transfer of animals, plants, ideas, and diseases is called “The Columbian Exchange.”
6. **Image Analysis:** Distribute copies of [Resource 3a: The Columbian Exchange Illustrated](#) and [Resource 3b: Drawing and Supporting Conclusions](#). Have students work with a partner or in small groups to analyze the illustration of the Columbian Exchange on Resource 3a. Have them discuss with a focus on the following questions:
- a. Who got what - Old World and New World?
  - b. What were some of the resources that benefited each “World?”
  - c. What were some of the resources that brought harm to each “World?”
7. **Discuss Conclusions:** Ask at least one volunteer to share his or her conclusion for question 1 on Resource 3b. Draw attention to the evidence that the student used to support his or her conclusion. Ask other students if they had different evidence to support the same or a different conclusion. The important point to make with students is that both students and historians may use **different evidence** to support similar or different conclusions.

Repeat Procedure 7 with question 2 on Resource 3b

8. **Checks for Understanding:** Distribute copies of [Resource 4: Checks for Understanding](#). Have students complete the Check for Understanding.
- a. *Note to teachers - the hope is that the students will respond to the first check by explaining that the people who drew the two conclusions did so because they based their conclusions on different evidence.*
9. **Teaching and Assessing for Transfer:** At this point in the lesson, you have an incredibly valuable opportunity to advance learning. It is highly probable that some of the contexts in which Delaware standards will be assessed will be different from those that students might engage with in classes. In other words, a student may learn how to explain why there might be different conclusions about Columbus in class but be asked why there might be different conclusions about John Dickinson on the state assessment. Sometimes this is unplanned, at other times it is planned. Students often stumble when assessments are in unfamiliar contexts. This is the problem of transfer. One cause of this problem and student failure is that students don’t understand transfer and we don’t teach it or prepare students for situations in which transfer is required.

Transfer involves the application of learning to new and unfamiliar contexts. For example, a person learns how to drive a car then transfers their understanding when asked to drive a truck.

The two checks for understanding in this lesson intentionally assess students in a familiar and an unfamiliar context. Students will probably be more successful with the first check for understanding than the second one. This is because the second assessment requires what is known as “far transfer” in which the context is something remote from what they did in this lesson.

You will want to talk to students about transfer, noting that successfully answering the second question does not depend entirely on understanding the context in which the standard is being assessed.

While the context for question 2 will likely prompt students to say, “we never learned this,” in reality, they did. They were fooled by the context. The question is not asking students to know who our best President was. Rather, when the question is decontextualized, it is asking the same question that appears in Question 1 i.e., why might there be different conclusions about (anything)?

Teaching for transfer is powerful practice that yields powerful learning - for tests and life. Prepare students for what may happen on state testing days. Help them understand transfer and read questions closely. Is it asking about a specific context or about their understanding of historical thinking?

Use this Check for Understanding as an opportunity to implement the principles of formative assessment. Offer feedback on responses to the two Checks for Understanding, emphasizing the nature and problem of transfer. Don't put your students in a position of being shocked when they open test booklets.

**Video Extension:** PBS offers an online module about the Columbian Exchange [here](#). Pages 4-6 offer brief video clips highlighting resources involved in the exchange (e.g., horses, sheep, cattle, potatoes).