

Unit 3, Lesson: Did Columbus Really Discover America? You Decide

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will evaluate arguments for and against the claim that Columbus should be credited with discovering America, then take a stand defending one position or the other.

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 of the same event sometimes differ and relate this explanation to the evidence presented or the point-of-view of the author.

Big Ideas

- Point of view

Essential Questions

- Why might there be different accounts of the same event?

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that there might be different accounts of the same event because authors have different points of view and present different evidence.

Resources

- [Lesson Google slides](#)
- [Resource 1: Scenarios](#)
- [Resource 2: Did Columbus Discover America - Arguments For and Against](#)

Procedures

1. **Warm up:** Can you recall any times when there were two different versions of the same event?
 - a. Invite volunteers to share their recollections.
 - b. If students are not familiar with the story of the 3 little pigs, you may want to offer a brief synopsis.

Summary - Story of the Three Little Pigs (source [here](#))

A mother pig sends her THREE LITTLE PIGS out into the world to seek their fortunes, and each builds a house. The first little pig builds a house of straw, but a wolf blows down that house and eats the pig. The second little pig builds a house of sticks, but the same wolf blows it down and eats the pig. The third pig builds a strong house of bricks, so when the wolf comes to the door, he can't blow the house down. The wolf devises several schemes to trick the third pig into leaving his house so the wolf can eat him, but the pig outsmarts the wolf every time. Finally, the wolf tries to sneak

down the pig's chimney, but the pig places a pot of water to boil over the fire, and when the wolf falls in, the pig cooks the wolf and eats him for supper.

Emphasize that the Wolf is considered the bad character in the story for starting the conflict by blowing down the houses and eating the pigs.

- c. Present the True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by Jon Siesta (access [here](#)). Explain or reintroduce the term “point of view.” Ask students
- i. What was the point of view of the 3 little pigs? [[wolf was bad antagonist...to blame for destroying lives and property](#)]
 - ii. What was the wolf’s point of view? [[he is misunderstood, just trying to survive as a wolf - part of a wolf’s nature](#)]
 - iii. According to the texts, were accounts of the events wrong? [[no in some ways](#)]
 - iv. Is it possible for there to be different versions of a story without anyone having lied? [[yes](#)]
2. **Concept Analysis:** Post or project the following term and definition on the board. “Discover - to find something for the first time.”
- a. Tell students that you are now going to present them with some scenarios involving a person named Charlie. Their task is to work with a partner or in a small group to decide whether Charlies should be credited with discovery.
 - i. Option 1 - Small Group: Distribute copies of [Resource 1: Scenarios](#) and have the students work through the scenarios on their own.
 - ii. Option 2 - Whole Group: Present each of the following scenarios to students. After each, ask - Should Charlie be given credit for a discovery?
 - Charlie finds a planet but does not tell anyone about it because he does not realize that it is anything new.
 - Charlie finds a planet, but no one learns that Charlie found it.
 - Charlie finds a planet, no one hears about it. Then someone else finds that planet and tells everyone about it.
 - Charlie finds a planet with intelligent aliens on it. No other person knew about that planet.
 - Charlie finds a planet that no other person knew about, but no one is aware that Charlie found it.
 - Charlie finds a planet that no other person knew about, and everyone learns about Charlie’s find.
3. **Introduce the Debate** with this question and responses: Did Columbus Discover America? Then present students with the following:

Person A Claims Yes	Person B Claims No
Columbus <u>DID</u> discover America.	Columbus <u>did NOT</u> discover America

4. **Mini-Lecture: Share the following with students -**

- a. Tradition has it that Columbus *discovered* America in 1492. Recently, however, some people argue that he did not discover America. Their main arguments are that...
 - i. there were already millions of Native Americans living in what is now called “America” for thousands of years.
 - ii. there is evidence that a European explorer named Leif Erikson landed in what is now called America 500 years before Columbus.

The following information came from the Smithsonian Institute in 2021.

“Artifacts found at Newfoundland’s famed L’Anse aux Meadows site shows that Vikings lived, and felled trees, on North American soil exactly 1,000 years ago—during the year 1021 C.E...Norse seafarers accomplished the earliest known crossing of the Atlantic from Europe to the Americas.

Moving across the frigid waters of the North Atlantic in their legendary longships, a few thousand Vikings colonized Greenland for almost 500 years, building churches and communities, keeping records, and maintaining ties with Europe before mysteriously vanishing for reasons that are still not known. They left behind evidence e.g., —bones, artifacts, cloth, and other remnants.... “

Source: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/new-dating-method-shows-vikings-occupied-newfoundland-in-1021-ce-180978903/>

5. **Explain their task:** You will read some of the arguments for and against the claim that Columbus discovered America. After you have read the arguments, you will be asked to draw a conclusion - did Columbus discover America - yes or no? Be sure to support your conclusion with information found in the texts that you read.
6. **Small Group Reading/Discussion:** Assign students to small groups and distribute copies of [Resource 2: Did Columbus Discover America - Arguments For and Against](#). Ask them to read arguments for both sides then, when instructed, discuss the arguments, and draw their conclusions.
7. **Sticky Poll:** distribute small sticky notes. Ask students to write “yes” or “no” on the sticky side of the sticky notes as a response to the question - should Columbus be credited with discovering America?
 - a. Have them write their names on the non-sticky side of the note.
 - b. Have two signs posted on opposite sides of the front of the room (or chalkboard) - one on which is written “YES POINT OF VIEW - Columbus Discovered America” and the other on which is writing “NO POINT OF VIEW - Columbus Did Not Discover America.” Have students walk up and put their sticky notes under the statement that they supported on their sticky notes.
8. **Take a Stand in Defense of Conclusions:**
 - a. Invite 2 students for each side to stand under the statement that they support. Their goal - convince the students on the other side to switch sides.

- b. Give each side up to 90 seconds to present their arguments without the other side interrupting. Students can take steps towards the other side without having to switch completely.
 - c. Ask students to move if any arguments from the other side persuaded them to.
 - d. Then, invite others in class to present arguments to try to get those who took a stand to move.
9. **Deepen Understanding:** Revisit the term “point of view.” Ask students to discuss - how would each of the following people respond to the question: “Did Columbus discover America? Explain.”
- a. A Native American
 - b. A Viking such as Leif Eriksson
 - c. A European such as Christopher Columbus

Highlight that, even today, how people answer the question often depends on their points of view.

10. **Determining Point of View from Musical Videos:** Play the musical video about Columbus [here](#). Tell students that you want them to draw conclusions about the songwriter’s point of view after listening to the song. Ask them...
- a. Which is the song writer’s point of view?
 - i. Columbus discovered America, or
 - ii. Columbus did not discover America
 - b. Which words in the lyrics (text) do you find support for your conclusion?

Check for Understanding

Distribute paper or index cards to students. Tell them to pretend that they are textbook authors, and their assignment is to write a paragraph for a U.S. History textbook. The chapter is about Columbus and their paragraph will be the last paragraph for the chapter. The header that the publisher has provided is:

Did Columbus Discover America?

The students’ paragraphs must answer the question with information that they learned during this lesson to support their textbook accounts.

Allow some time for students to share competing accounts and the information (evidence) that they used to support them.

Debrief

Point out that this lesson is designed to help students understand that there might be different accounts of the same event because people will use different evidence to support their conclusions and their points of view might be different.