

Lesson 8: First Contacts, First Impressions

Unit 3
Grade 4

This image is an artist's representation of an event that took place in 1492.

Look closely at the image, review the questions on your sheet and then discuss and answer the questions with your partner.

1. What event in history do you think this drawing is attempting to illustrate?
2. Do you think that the artist who drew this was there to witness the event? Should we consider this image showing us exactly what happened?
3. What do you notice to be different between the Europeans on the left and the Native American Taino people on the right side of the painting?
4. What do you think the Europeans shown here think about the Native American Taino people? What is their point of view? Is it positive or negative?
5. What do you think the Native American Taino people shown here think about the Europeans? What is their point of view? Is it positive or negative?



Today's lesson is going to help you understand how Europeans thought about Native Americans after meeting them and why they thought that way.



Reading purpose:

1. What Europeans thought about Native Americans
2. How that thinking changed and why?
3. Why Europeans thought this way?

Resource 2: Europeans Views of Native Americans

Word Box

- noble - having or showing fine and admirable qualities
- savage - animal like; fierce, violent, and uncontrolled
- treacherous - likely to betray trust; marked by hidden dangers

What Did Europeans Think About Native Americans?

You may recall that when Columbus first set foot in America in 1492. He thought that he landed in a part of Asia known as the Indies - an area that Marco Polo wrote about. You may also recall that this mistake caused Columbus to name the people he met in America "Indians." They called themselves Taino.

One effect of naming the people Indians was that this led people who read about Columbus' voyages to think that all people in the Americas were the same, that they were all Indians who looked alike, lived alike. Some people still think about Native Americans this way. But there are and were many differences among the people who we now call Native Americans, American Indians, or Indigenous people. They had different names, different customs, different beliefs, different languages, and different ways of living. The map below shows just some of the major Native American groups that lived in the area that became our country - the United States before Columbus arrived. There were different tribes and they often lived in very different ways.



How Did Those Views Change and Why Did They Change?

News of Columbus' "discovery" started a massive movement of people from Europe to America. As time passed, different Europeans came in contact with many different Native American groups. Europeans gradually began to meet very different groups of Native Americans.

Due to the different Native Americans they met, their experiences with them, and what others read about those experiences, Europeans began to think about "Indians" in two different ways. One way involved viewing Native Americans as "noble savages" and

"simple children of nature." In other words, people who had admirable qualities but lived more like animals. While this was the more positive way of thinking about Native Americans, it was still part of a way of thinking that considered Native Americans as "savages" or "simple children." In other words, even this more positive way of thinking about Native Americans involved thinking about them as inferior to Europeans.

The other way of thinking about Native Americans was much more negative. From this point of view, Native Americans were "treacherous savages" and "dirty savages" who lived more like animals and could not be trusted.

Why Did Europeans Think About Native Americans in These Ways?

A major reason is because Europeans judged Native Americans based on how Europeans lived, how Europeans defined "civilized" and "civilization." Their thinking was so heavily influenced by what they did and liked that they did not consider the possibility that "other" people who lived differently were also civilized and equal, not inferior. They just preferred living differently.

The Europeans point of view about being civilized had certain characteristics that included:

- wearing "proper" clothing
- speaking a language that Europeans understood
- having a language that allowed them to write as well as speak
- living in "orderly" ways
- living in permanent houses
- farming to grow and have food
- being Christians (Calloway, p. 81)

When the Europe and arrived, they saw that the people in America had none of the following:

- sailing ships
- guns
- metal tools
- printing presses
- vehicles with wheels
- churches
- steel weapons such as swords or knives

They also saw that many Native Americans lived in wigwams (tents or small huts) and hunted and fished for their food rather than farming and raising animals like pigs. And when they did see Native Americans growing crops such as corn on farms, Native women were working the farms. Men did this work in Europe, not women. So, the Europeans concluded the Native American men were lazy. (Calloway, p. 81)

Let's check your understanding

1- According to the reading, Europeans first thought all "Indians" were alike. Later, some thought some Native Americans were "noble savages" while others thought Native Americans were "treacherous savages." Which of the following **BEST** explains why this change happened?

- A. Europeans met more Native Americans
- B. Europeans stopped reading about Native Americans
- C. Native Americans started treating Europeans better
- D. Native Americans started writing more about their ways of life

2- Answer this question from the Europeans' point of view. Write each of the following in the correct column based on whether Europeans thought each was evidence of people being "Civilized" or "Uncivilized."

- living in permanent housing
- hunting for food
- having guns
- being Christian
- living in the woods
- wearing few clothes

Evidence of Being CIVILIZED	Evidence of Being UNCIVILIZED

3- Check each of the following that are **MOST LIKELY** effects of naming the people in America "Indians".

- ___ people in Europe concluded that Columbus landed in Asia
- ___ people in Europe concluded that "Indians" were better than Europeans
- ___ people in Europe concluded that "Indians" could not be enslaved
- ___ people in Europe concluded that Indians were all the same

Your two reading tasks:

- Task 1: Highlight or underline the sentence that best describes the Native American's (Mi'Kmaq) point of view.
- Task 2: Highlight or underline three details that are used to support that point of view.

Resource 4: A Native American Responds to European Attitudes

The following are the thoughts of a Native American for the Mi'Kmaq tribe who was reacting to how Europeans viewed Native Americans.

I am very surprised to see that the Europeans are not very clever. Why do people who are between 5- and 6-feet tall need houses which are 60 - 80 feet big? The places in which we live are not nearly as big and they give us all of the advantages that the European houses give e.g., the abilities to lay down, sleep, drink, eat, and have fun with ourselves and our friends.

Do you Europeans have as much cleverness as the Indians, who carry our houses and our wigwams with us so we can move easily and live wherever we please. When you Europeans go on a voyage, you cannot carry your homes on your shoulders. We take down and set up our wigwams easily wherever we go and without asking permission of anybody.

You suggest very inappropriately that our country is a little hell when compared to countries in Europe that you compare to paradises where you can get anything you want.

You also say that we are the miserable and most unhappy of people, living without religion, without manners and, in a word, without any rules like the beasts in our woods and our forests, not having bread, wine, and a thousand other comfortable things that you have in Europe.

Well, my brother, if you do not yet know the real feelings which our Indians have toward Europe, it is only fitting that I inform you now.

As miserable as we seem to be in your eyes, we consider ourselves much happier than you. We are very content with the little we have. And you are deceiving yourself if you think you can persuade us that your country is better than ours. For if Europe is the paradise you say it is, does it make sense that you would leave it and come here? And why would you leave your wives, children, relatives, and friends back in Europe? Why would you risk the storms and dangers of the ocean to come to a country that you say is strange, barbarous, and poor?

We believe that you are incomparably poorer than we are. We find all of our riches and conveniences among ourselves without exposing ourselves to the dangers in which you constantly find yourselves on your long voyages...

Which of these two is the wisest and happiest - he who is always working and only gets enough to live on with great trouble, or he who rests in comfort and finds all that he needs in the pleasure of hunting and fishing?

Learn now, my brother, once and for all...: there is no Indian who does not consider himself endlessly more happy and powerful than the Europeans. (Calloway, pp. 130-133)

A Mi'kmaq Native American (1677)
Recorded and interpreted by Chrestien LeClerq
French Missionary

Let's check your understanding

Resource 5: Checks for Understanding Name _____

1- Check each of the following that is a reasonable conclusion that a reader can draw from what the Mi'Kmaq Native American wrote.

- Native Americans appreciated how Europeans thought about them
- Native Americans had a point of view that was different from the Europeans
- Native Americans thought that the ideas of Europeans were wrong
- Native Americans had a better way of life than the Europeans
- Native Americans thought Europeans wanted too much
- Native Americans and Europeans would probably not get along

2- Answer this question from the **NATIVE AMERICAN POINT OF VIEW**. Write each of the following in the correct column based on whether Native Americans thought each was evidence of people being "Civilized" or "Uncivilized."

- hunting for food
- having guns
- having few goods
- wearing few clothes
- having big permanent homes

Evidence of Being CIVILIZED	Evidence of Being UNCIVILIZED

3- **Reflection.** What thoughts do you have after reading about how Europeans and Native Americans thought about each other when they first met one another?
