

COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE



Overview

When Christopher Columbus returned to the Americas in 1492 (his second voyage) he brought with him many seeds, plants and livestock. This cargo started a "grand exchange" and revolution between the New World and the Old World that would alter the world forever because he had brought with him seed, plants and livestock that were not originally occurring in the New World. This exchange would be called the "Columbian Exchange" by historian Alfred Crosby. The major exchange between the two worlds centered on the exchange of plants, animals, diseases and technology. Although the exchange began with Christopher Columbus it continued and developed throughout the major years of the Age of Exploration. Ultimately the Columbian Exchange impacted the social and cultural makeup of both sides of the Atlantic and dramatically impacted the people on both sides.

The Columbian Exchange is often considered to be one of the most important events of the modern world. Understanding the Columbian Exchange helps you to understand the impact of the cultural contact of the New and Old World's.

Task

Students will use the included readings in order to complete the related activities.

Use this provided readings, and page 668 in your Journey Across Time Text to complete this map. When you are finished, cut it out and glue into your comp book.

Social Studies

Name: _____

COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

Directions: On the map below, show the movement of plants, animals and diseases during the Columbian Exchange by writing the different items on the arrows. Use the information you gained from the reading activity to complete the map.



COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE DISEASES

One of the major aspects of the Columbian Exchange was the spread of diseases around the world between the Old World and the New World. When Christopher Columbus made his voyage to the New World in 1492 unbeknownst to him he and his crew brought a series of diseases that would be devastating to the indigenous peoples of the New World. In particular, the European explorers transmitted smallpox to the indigenous peoples, which the ingenious peoples did not have immunity to and thus resulted in a large number of deaths among the indigenous peoples in the Americas.



The above image shows the effects of smallpox as the rash and blisters of the disease spread over the body of the infected person.

Historians disagree on the how many indigenous people of the Americas died as a result of European diseases with estimates ranging from as low as 50% to as high as 90%. Regardless, the spread of Europeans diseases had a dramatic effect on the societies and cultures of indigenous peoples. While smallpox was the most deadly of European diseases, it was not the only disease that spread to the New World. Other common Old World diseases included: measles, malaria, yellow fever, influenza and chicken pox.

COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE DISEASES

The nature of the Columbian Exchange was that the “exchange” occurred both ways between the New and Old Worlds. Therefore, some diseases also spread from the New World to the Old World. For example, syphilis originated in the New World and returned to Europe when European explorers contracted the disease and then returned to Europe. Also, New World diseases also made their way to Europe when indigenous peoples were brought back to Europe on the return voyages.

Syphilis had a severe effect on Europeans. It was transmitted by sexual contact. It was common for sailors to contract the disease. Historian Alfred Crosby stated, “If we may assume that the nature of sailors in the 16th century was not radically different than in the 20th century, then we can imagine no group more perfectly suited for guaranteeing that syphilis would have worldwide distribution”.

With that said, New World diseases did not devastate Europe, Asia or Africa the way Old World diseases devastated the indigenous peoples of the New World. The indigenous population of the New World was impacted for several reasons. Firstly, the indigenous peoples had no prior exposure to the Old World diseases and therefore their immune systems were not fully prepared to fight the new diseases. Secondly, most of the European diseases were transmitted by air and touch making them spread quickly and easily among the people.

COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE PLANTS

The plants involved in the Columbian Exchange dramatically changed both the economy and culture of the New and Old Worlds. European explorers returned home with New World plants, such as: beans, squash, chili peppers, sunflowers, peanuts, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, avocado and pineapple. However, the two most important New World plants were the potato and maize (corn). They would eventually have profound effects on the Old World and modern peoples.

Maize (corn) is an important New World crop involved in the Columbian Exchange. It was always important to the societies of Central America because it could be dried and stored for long periods of time. It was easily transported to Europe because of its adaptable nature and would eventually be grown in many different regions around the world. The introduction of maize into the Old World, along with other New World foods, led to a population growth as the new foods helped support larger societies.



COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE PLANTS

Potatoes are native to South America but were transported to the Old World where they would become a key component of the diet of many Europeans for years to come. The potato was important because they could resist cold temperatures and grow in relatively thin soil. Specifically, the potato would be vital to Ireland in particular and by the 19th century, Ireland was so dependent on the potato as a source of food that the “Irish Potato Famine” in the 1840’s and 1850’s caused mass starvation and emigration from Ireland. Approximately two-fifths of the population was solely reliant on the potato as a source of food, and when a potato disease destroyed the crops it had dramatic effects for Ireland and Irish people. Ireland’s population dropped approximately 20% to 25% between the years of the famine.



The above image is a statue in Dublin, Ireland that memorializes the history of the Irish Famine.

COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE PLANTS

Many Old World plants were brought to the New World and would have a dramatic impact on the Americas. Most importantly, Old World crops like wheat and barley became staple growing crops on the American prairies. A more specific example of an Old World crop was the sugarcane. The sugarcane was a very significant crop historically. Christopher Columbus introduced the crop to the Caribbean on his second voyage to the Americas. The new crop flourished in the New World with sugarcane plantations being developed in Cuba, Puerto Rico and Jamaica. Sugar today is used in many foods and has since become one of the largest cash crops in history.

Coffee had been grown in Africa and the Middle East before it was transported to the Americas. Once in the New World, coffee became an important new crop in Central and South America. It has continued to be an important crop of the region due to its ability to grow easily in the climate of Central and South America. Today coffee is a popular drink around the world.



COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE ANIMALS

Animals were another key component of the Columbian Exchange. The animals were transported by European sailors aboard early ships and would quickly impact the societies and environment of the Americas. The differences between the animals in the New and Old Worlds were dramatic with the indigenous peoples of the Americas only having a few animals for use. For example, indigenous peoples on the New World had only domesticated the dog, and llamas. Prior to the Columbian Exchange, the Americas had no major beasts of burden (work animals) and therefore all manual labor had to be completed by human hands. On Columbus' second voyage in 1493 he brought a variety of Old World livestock, including: horses, pigs, sheep, dogs, cattle, chickens, and goats. When explorers brought new animals across the Atlantic, it introduced a whole new means of transportation, a new labor form, and new sources of food.



COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE ANIMALS

Pigs were extremely successful in the New World after being introduced by early European explorers and became very important to the



(Above) European explorer Hernando de Soto.

Americas. For



example, the pigs reproduced very fast and were able to serve as meat for early explorers and other societies. Specifically, Hernando de Soto brought thirteen pigs with him to Florida and within three years the pigs had reached a population of over 700.

Horses were extremely plentiful in Europe, especially in Spain and Portugal. The first horses arrived in the Americas with Columbus aboard his second voyage in 1493. The early European explorers brought horses across the Atlantic despite the difficulties of the voyage because horses served such an important function in the life of Europeans. The explorers used the horse successfully in battle against the indigenous peoples of the Americas and were tremendously helpful because the indigenous cultures had never experienced an animal as large as a horse in battle before. Horses today are common in the Americas and exist both as a work animal for humans as well as a wild animal.

COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE ANIMALS



Paul Kane's *Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo* circa 1851-1856 painting depicts two Plains First Nations on horseback hunting a buffalo. The introduction of horses by Spanish settlers changed the way Plains Indians hunted, allowing them to overtake buffalo by speed. This would not have been possible without the overall process of the Columbian Exchange.