



History Simulations and Problem Solving 1

BACKGROUND

UNIT 1

Major Voyages Christopher Columbus made four voyages westward. During these voyages, Columbus and his fellow Spaniards came into contact with the Taino, a Native American nation. The contact and interactions between the Europeans and the Native Americans came to be known as the Columbian Exchange. In this exchange, the Europeans introduced the Native Americans to wheat, rice, lettuce, coffee, citrus fruit, bananas, and olives. They also brought over horses, cows, pigs, goats, sheep, and honeybees. The Native Americans, in turn, introduced the Europeans to corn, potatoes, tomatoes, hot peppers, squash, peanuts, cassava (a starchy root from which tapioca is made), and chocolate. The new products, particularly potatoes and corn, greatly improved the European diet. As a result, the population of Europe increased at a steady rate after Columbus's voyages.

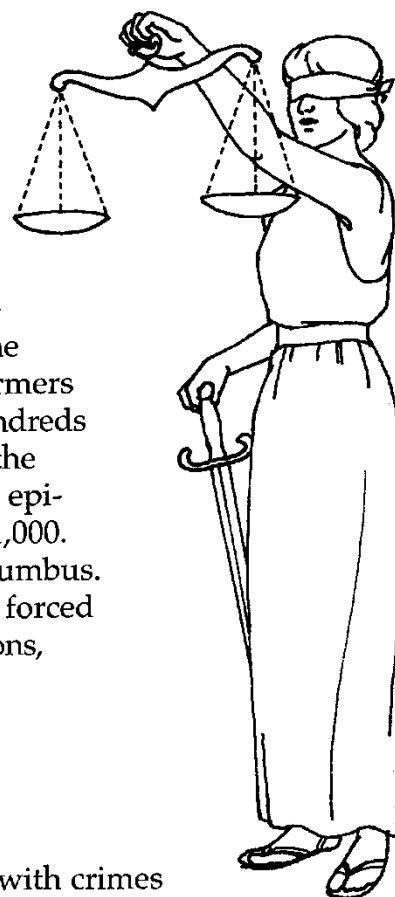
Columbian Exchange The Columbian Exchange also included a two-way transfer of disease. While both the Europeans and the Native Americans contracted one another's diseases, the Native Americans ultimately suffered the worse fate, falling prey to European diseases to which they had no resistance.

When the Spanish arrived in the Caribbean in 1492, the Taino population was approximately 1,130,000 people. The years of slavery took a terrible toll. The peaceful Taino farmers could not survive the brutal treatment by the Spanish. Hundreds of thousands died of starvation and exhaustion. By 1518 the Taino population had been reduced to 11,000. A smallpox epidemic that year brought the population down to a mere 1,000.

The Taino also suffered directly under Christopher Columbus. In his pursuit of gold to satisfy the Spanish monarchs, he forced the Taino into slavery to work the mines. To justify his actions, Columbus argued that slavery would allow him to bring Christianity to the Taino, which he believed would better their lives.

SITUATION

Christopher Columbus has been arrested and charged with crimes against the Taino people. The charges: enslavement of and bringing disease and death to the Taino. The class will engage in a mock trial to determine whether Columbus is innocent or guilty as charged.





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UNIT 1

FOR THE PROSECUTION

In forming your case against Christopher Columbus, keep in mind what Taino lives were like before Columbus's arrival and how his actions and those of the settlers he brought with him changed their lives.

DIRECTIONS: Following are some questions to keep in mind as you research your topic. Use the information you find to form the basis of the prosecution. Record your responses. After finishing your research, come up with a key statement on which to base Columbus's guilt.

- What diseases did Columbus and his fellow settlers give to the Taino people?

What happened as a result of these diseases? _____

- How did Columbus's desire for gold and other kinds of wealth contribute to the exploitation of the Taino? _____

- What happened to the Taino people that Columbus shipped to Spain? _____

- What kind of work were the Taino forced to perform? Why were they not suited to this kind of work? How did their unsuitability cause them harm? _____

- What punishment did those who failed to collect their assigned quota of gold have to suffer? Were the quotas reasonable or unreasonable? _____

- How did Columbus attempt to appease the increasingly discontented settlers in Hispaniola? _____



History Simulations and Problem Solving I

UNIT 1

FOR THE DEFENSE

While we can look back on Christopher Columbus's actions and find much fault in his treatment of the Taino, keep in mind that he was a man of his time and that his actions were not meant to deliberately bring about harm.

DIRECTIONS: Following are some questions to keep in mind as you research your information for the defense. Record your responses. After finishing your research, come up with a key statement on which to base Columbus's innocence.

- Could Columbus have done anything to halt the exchange of disease between the Taino and the Europeans? _____

- How did Columbus's religious beliefs influence his actions? _____

- What was Columbus's purpose in sending the Taino to Spain? _____

- What evidence shows that Columbus was a poor administrator? How did his lack of leadership affect the Taino? _____

- What role did those under Columbus's command play in the treatment of the Taino? _____

- What pressures did King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella put on Columbus? How might those pressures have influenced Columbus's treatment of the Taino? _____
