

Exploration & Colonization Unit Overview: U.S. History, 7th Grade

Driving Concept 1: Indigenous Nations and Early European Colonization: Political, Social, and Economic Structures of the Americas in the 15th and 16th Century

Through this driving concept, students will analyze the scientific and cultural innovations of diverse, Indigenous societies across the Americas, with particular attention to the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. Using historical evidence, students will interrogate the origins of the idea that the Americas were a lightly populated wilderness prior to European contact by studying the complex and highly organized societies of Indigenous communities and nations of the Eastern Coast of North America along with the chiefdoms of the Southeast. Students will review primary and secondary sources — including both Indigenous and European accounts — to analyze the geographical, political and social impact of early interactions, with themes of both conquest and resilience.

Driving Concept 2: Colonization and Revolution (1500–1783)

Through this driving concept, students will develop and refine their inquiry skills as they evaluate historical evidence to support arguments about colonization and the American Revolution. Students will analyze multiple perspectives and interpretations, drawing conclusions about the causes and effects of historical events in the colonial and revolutionary era. To develop an understanding of the different ways individuals may have experienced daily life, students will study laws and interactions that impacted Europeans colonists, people of African descent and Indigenous Nations. Students will analyze the changing relationship between the colonial governments and Britain, analyzing the reasons that individuals and groups within the diverse American population supported or opposed independence from the British.

Students will also contextualize concepts such as liberty, freedom and democracy, comparing their use in justifications for independence and the extent to which they were applied to different Americans on the basis of religion, socio-economic status or class, race and gender.

Essential Question

How did the arrival of Europeans affect Indigenous American populations and how did Indigenous populations exhibit agency within the resulting intercultural interactions?

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About This Unit

Unit 2: Exploration and Colonization examines the profound changes brought to the Americas by European, specifically Spanish, exploration and colonization. Students will investigate the economic, political, and cultural motives that drove European powers to colonize the New World, such as the search for wealth, the spread of Christianity, and the expansion of global trade networks. Through primary and secondary sources, students will analyze the Columbian Exchange and its effects, including the devastating impact of disease on Indigenous populations and the reshaping of economies and societies. They will also explore the Spanish encomienda system, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and the ways Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans resisted and demonstrated agency. By engaging with multiple perspectives, students will develop a nuanced understanding of the interactions between Europeans, Indigenous peoples, and Africans, and how these encounters reshaped the Americas. The unit concludes with students crafting evidence-based arguments in a Socratic seminar to answer key questions about the consequences of colonization and the resilience of those who resisted.

Use the Best Practices Repository for information on implementing every strategy and lesson activity!

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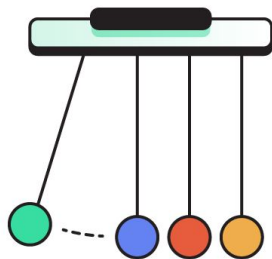
Priority Standards	
7.11	Compare Indigenous and European perspectives of early contact, with attention to the limitations of using European sources to understand the history and culture of Indigenous Nations.
7.13	Analyze the economic and cultural impact of what is often referred to as the “Columbian Exchange,” or the widespread transfer of diseases, commodities, technology, people, animals and ideas as a result of European colonization and interaction with the Americas and other parts of the world.
7.15	Analyze how the concepts of whiteness and blackness changed across time and place (e.g., the “one-drop rule,” Benjamin Franklin’s “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind,” race in Cuba)
7.16	Compare the economic, religious and political motives that led to the establishment of early, distinct European colonies in the Americas.
7.17	Identify and analyze global trade routes and their impact on the formation of European colonies throughout the Americas — including North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean — as well as the impact on African and European society.
7.20	Analyze the experience, perspectives and identities of Africans who were enslaved: 1) prior to enslavement; 2) during capture and transport in the Middle Passage; and 3) through bondage, including resistance to enslavement and the codification of race as a tool of oppression.

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Additional Standards	
7.3	Locate and identify Indigenous Nations, tribes and/or communities from the 1400s through the present day on maps.
7.7	Compare the complex systems of governments of at least three Indigenous societies, including chiefdoms and structures that had democratic characteristics between 1400 and 1600.
7.9	Evaluate the agricultural developments and accomplishments of at least three Indigenous societies in the Americas between 1400 and 1600.
7.10	Analyze the impact of the arrival of European colonists in the Americas using primary and secondary sources, including population data.
7.12	Evaluate the impact of the arrival of Europeans from the perspective of Indigenous peoples, including the effects of warfare and diplomacy, the immense loss of life and land, the impact on Indigenous sovereignty, and the role of conquest and disease using primary and secondary sources.
7.14	Assess the ways Indigenous Nations have been portrayed in American history and popular culture and the limitations of such portrayals in understanding the diverse communities that comprise the "Native American" identity.
7.18	Analyze the reasons for and impact of Spanish colonization and settlement in the Southern and Western United States during the colonial period, including resistance to Spanish colonization by Indigenous Nations

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Unit Preview		
<i>Subtopic(s)</i>	<i>Compelling Question</i>	<i>Standard(s)</i>
Contextualization for and Causes of European Exploration	To what extent did various economic, religious, and political factors influence European exploration and colonization of North America?	7.3, 7.7, 7.9, 7.16, 7.17, 7.18
Columbian Exchange	What challenges arise in assessing the overall impact of European arrival and the Columbian Exchange on Indigenous societies?	7.9, 7.10, 7.11, 7.12, 7.13, 7.16, 7.18
Spanish Colonization	What role did military power, personal relationships, and religion play in the Spanish colonization of the Americas?	7.9, 7.10, 7.11, 7.12, 7.13, 7.14, 7.16, 7.18
Exploitation & Resistance	How did Spanish exploitation of Indigenous peoples and Africans reshape societies and how did communities assert agency in their resistance?	7.9, 7.10, 7.13, 7.15, 7.16, 7.17, 7.18, 7.20



Causation: Unit Focus Skill

Thinking historically means considering why certain things happened and what effects occurred because of an event, development, or process. It also means recognizing that there are multiple causes of and multiple effects from any event, development, or process.

Contextualization for and Causes of European Exploration: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 1 (120 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 2 (120 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 3 (60 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	How did major political, social, and technological developments in Europe stimulate an "Age of Exploration?"	In what ways did trade networks lay the groundwork for increased interconnectedness?	How do both fiction and nonfiction sources deepen the understanding of Spanish motives for exploration?
STANDARD(S)	7.9, 7.16	7.3, 7.7, 7.17	7.9, 7.16, 7.18
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Contextualization	Historical Significance Evaluating Evidence	Contextualization Historical Empathy
DO FIRST	Frayer: Age of Exploration A-Z Guide	Frayer: Diffusion Give One, Get One	Frayer: Historical Empathy Evaluate the Claim
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Unit 2 Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Supporting Questions	Introduction to Historical Significance Review: American Trade Networks	<i>The Last Queen</i> Reading Historical Empathy Graphic Organizer
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE	Introduction to Contextualization Contextualization of Exploration	Global Trade Network Investigation	Motives for Exploration Silent Discussion
ACTIVITY 3- EXHIBIT	Inside/Outside Circle	Structured Class Discussion	N/A
CONCLUSION	Contextualization Graphic Organizer	Exit Ticket: Quickwrite	Unit 2 Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Compelling Question

The Columbian Exchange: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 4 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 5 (90 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 6 (60 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	Why is understanding the perspectives of Europeans and Indigenous Americans about early contact difficult?	In what ways did the arrival of Europeans in the Americas impact life for Indigenous societies?	Did the Columbian Exchange bring more benefits or harm to the Americas, and how can the overall impact be assessed?
STANDARD(S)	7.9, 7.10, 7.11, 7.16	7.10, 7.12, 7.13, 7.18	7.10, 7.12, 7.13
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Perspective	Causation Historical Significance	Historical Significance Evaluating Arguments
DO FIRST	Frayer: "New World" Image Alive	Frayer: Columbian Exchange Anticipatory Guide	Frayer: Columbus Day Notice, Wonder, Think
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Unit 2 Inquiry Journal Topic 2: Supporting Questions	What is Causation? Columbian Exchange Video	History v. Columbus Video
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE	What is Perspective?	Source Analysis Gallery Walk	Preparation for Podcast Interview
ACTIVITY 3- EXHIBIT	Missing Perspectives	Four Corners (Optional) Review Anticipatory Guide (Optional)	Podcast Interviews
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket: "Historygram"	Causation Graphic Organizer	Unit 2 Inquiry Journal Topic 2: Compelling Question



Spanish Colonization: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 7 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 8 (120 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 9 (90 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	What factors enabled Spain's success in establishing colonies in the Americas?	How do different types of sources shape the understanding of La Malinche as a figure of betrayal, survival, or heroism?	How did the Spanish Mission System affect the lives of Indigenous peoples and settlers?
STANDARD(S)	7.10, 7.12, 7.13, 7.18	7.11, 7.12, 7.14	7.9, 7.10, 7.11, 7.12, 7.16, 7.18
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Causation Evaluating Evidence	Historical Empathy Evaluating Evidence	Historical Significance Causation
DO FIRST	Frayer: Colonization Prediction	Frayer: Judge Notice, Wonder, Think	Frayer: Mission System Image Alive
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Unit 2 Inquiry Journal Topic 3: Supporting Questions	Introduction to La Malinche + Historical Empathy Graphic Organizer	Spanish Missions Webquest
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE	DOK Question Generation Factors behind Spanish Successful Colonization Reading	La Malinche Case Study Four Corners Small Group Discussion	Formative Assessment European Exploration - CAU
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT	Inside/Outside Circle	You Be the Judge Class Discussion	N/A
CONCLUSION	Causation Graphic Organizer	Exit Ticket: Final Verdict	Unit 2 Inquiry Journal Topic 3: Compelling Question



Exploitation and Resistance: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 10 (90 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 11 (90 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	In what ways did the Spanish encomienda system alter social and economic structures in the Americas?	How did conflicting Spanish perspectives on Indigenous peoples shape debates about their treatment in the Americas?
STANDARD(S)	7.9, 7.10, 7.16, 7.18	7.9, 7.13
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Causation Contextualization	Evaluating Arguments Perspective
DO FIRST	Frayer: Encomienda System Quickwrite	Frayer: Justify Notice, Wonder, Think
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Unit 2 Inquiry Journal Topic 4: Supporting Questions	Review Video: Early Spanish Colonization
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE	Silent Discussion: Round 1	Small Group Primary Source Analysis
ACTIVITY 3- EXHIBIT	The Encomienda System Reading Silent Discussion: Round 2	Design a Museum Exhibit Panel
CONCLUSION	Formative Assessment: Instructions from Queen Isabella	Exit Ticket: Peer Evaluation

Exploitation and Resistance: Topic Overview Continued

	<u>LESSON 12 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 13 (90 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	How do various sources tell about the lives of people and places that participated in the Transatlantic Slave Trade?	How did Indigenous people show agency in resisting Spanish control and protecting their culture?
STANDARD(S)	7.13, 7.15, 7.17, 7.20	7.9, 7.10, 7.16, 7.18
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Evaluating Evidence Historical Significance	Contextualization Historical Significance
DO FIRST	Frayer: Middle Passage Notice, Wonder, Think	Frayer: Human Agency A-Z Guide
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Introduction to the Transatlantic Slave Trade	What is the Context? - Pueblo Revolt Contextualization Graphic Organizer
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE	Smithsonian Learning Lab: Transatlantic Slave Trade	Resistance Webquest
ACTIVITY 3- EXHIBIT	N/A	N/A
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket: Write and Draw	Unit 2 Inquiry Journal Topic 4: Compelling Question

Assessment: Topic Overview

	LESSON 14 (60 MINS)	<u>LESSON 15 (150 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	Place-Based Lesson Extension <i>See page 11 for lesson options and view Best Practice Repository for additional information about implementation</i>	How did the arrival of Europeans affect Indigenous American populations and how did Indigenous populations exhibit agency within the resulting intercultural interactions?
STANDARD(S)		All Unit Standards
FOCUS SKILL(S)		Causation Evaluating Evidence Evaluating Arguments
DO FIRST		Introduce Unit Assessment: Socratic Seminar
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH		Preparation for Socratic Seminar
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE		Socratic Seminar
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT		Self-Assessment
CONCLUSION		Unit 2 Inquiry Journal Essential Question

Place Based Lesson Extension

	LESSON 14 (60 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	
STANDARD(S)	
FOCUS SKILL(S)	
DO FIRST	
OPTION 1 - PODCAST	
OPTION 2 - SYNCHRONOUS PRESENTATION	
OPTION 3 - FIELD TRIP	
CONCLUSION	

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Suggested Readings and Helpful Resources:

For information on:

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Unit Commentary:

Unit 2 builds upon the foundational skills developed in Unit 1, particularly the critical skill of Evaluating Evidence. In this unit, students will expand their understanding of historical complexity by exploring how European exploration and colonization reshaped societies in the Americas. The focus shifts causation as students study the interactions among Europeans, Indigenous peoples, and Africans, examining the consequences of these encounters through economic, social, and political lenses.

Topic 1 introduces students to the motivations behind European exploration, including the search for wealth, the spread of Christianity, and the expansion of global trade networks. Students will engage with primary and secondary sources to analyze how these motives influenced the actions of European powers and set the stage for colonization.

Topic 2 delves into the economic and societal impacts of the Columbian Exchange. By analyzing multiple perspectives and sources, students will continue their critical examination of how history has been crafted and what it means when perspectives are missing.

Topic 3 emphasizes the factors that allowed for the Spanish to establish an American empire. By spending time evaluating the role of La Malinche and the impact of the Spanish Mission System, students will consider the complexity of this development.

Topic 4 exposes the ways that the Spanish exerted dominance and how Indigenous peoples asserted agency in resisting colonization and preserving cultural identities. Students will explore examples of uprisings, cultural adaptation, and resilience.

Through repeated opportunities in all the unit topics for discussion and analysis, students will become prepared and comfortable with academically productive talk in the classroom as the unit culminates in a Socratic Seminar that challenges them to synthesize evidence, articulate arguments, and engage with their peers in thoughtful debate.

By the end of this unit, students will have gained a deeper understanding of the transformative impacts of European exploration and colonization on the Americas. Through source analysis, discussion, and creative application, they will continue to refine their ability to critically engage with historical narratives and appreciate the agency and resilience of the individuals and communities who shaped this period.

