

The Spanish Conquest of the Americas

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Seed
Learning



Contents

Europeans and Their Needs	4
Asians and the Land East of Them	5
The People in the New Land	6
Christopher Columbus	8
Amerigo Vespucci	9
More Than Just Spices	10
Explorers and Conquerors	11
Cortés and the Aztecs	12
Pizarro and the Incas	13
What Spain Brought to America	14
What America Gave to Europe	15
Owners and Workers	16
Life After the Conquest	17
Comprehension Questions	18
Glossary	19
World History Timeline	21

Europeans and Their Needs

Five hundred years ago, Europeans dreamed of a better life. They ate well, but they wanted to eat better. They wanted pepper and other spices. Spices came from Asia by land, and they were very expensive.

A famous sailor, Christopher Columbus, thought he could reach Asia faster by sailing west. The queen and the king of Spain accepted his plan. They paid for the ships he needed and his travel. Columbus set off west to Asia.



Christopher Columbus

Columbus explains his project to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand.



Asians and the Land East of Them

Between Europe and Asia and between the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans, there is a large and long land.

When Columbus sailed, no one in Europe or Asia knew about this land or the people who lived there.

The Asians didn't remember that thousands of years ago, some of them had gone to this new land.

Petroglyphs in California



Cave paintings in the Cueva de las Manos, Patagonia, Argentina



The People in the New Land

In this new land, some cultures had remained very simple, but others had developed.

By the time Columbus sailed, the most important cultures were the Aztecs, the Mayas, and the Incas. Their cultures were quite developed because they had calendars and knew how to write.



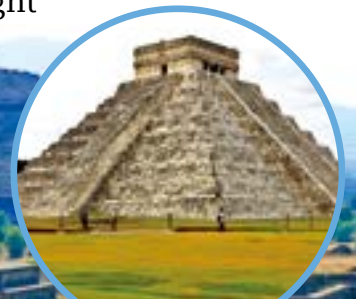
Aztec calendar



The wall of an Ancient Mayan Tomb

These cultures built pyramids and big cities. They believed in different gods. They used silver and gold. They knew how to fight their enemies.

In addition, there were different groups of people with very simple cultures. They often fought each other for land or food.



A Mayan Pyramid at Chichen Itza, Mexico



Machu Picchu, Peru



Aztec Pyramids at Teotihuacan, Mexico

Christopher Columbus

Columbus sailed with his three ships. He traveled for 36 days. When he landed on one small island, he thought he was in India! He called the people “Indians.”

Columbus went back to Spain but later made three more trips. On his last trip, he found the mainland.

When he died, he still didn't know how far Asia was or how big the new land between Europe and Asia was.



Amerigo Vespucci

The New World was called America by Amerigo Vespucci. Vespucci was another explorer who traveled along the coast of South America. He was the first one to understand he was not in Asia but in a new land. He named it after himself and so it became the Americas.



Comprehension Questions

1. The Spaniards began conquering the Americas...
 - (a) 10 centuries ago
 - (b) 5 centuries ago
 - (c) 2 centuries ago
 - (d) 1 century ago
2. What did Columbus want?
 - (a) To discover America
 - (b) To buy chocolate
 - (c) To reach Asia
 - (d) To find gold
3. Who lived in the Americas before the Spaniards?
 - (a) No one
 - (b) Europeans
 - (c) Africans
 - (d) The Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas
4. The first inhabitants of the Americas were called "Indians" because...
 - (a) that is what they called themselves.
 - (b) they looked like Asians.
 - (c) Columbus thought he was in India.
 - (d) they came from India.
5. The New World was named...
 - (a) after Vespucci.
 - (b) after Columbus.
 - (c) after Cortés.
 - (d) after Pizarro.
6. Cortés and Pizarro did NOT want to explore to...
 - (a) conquer the land.
 - (b) find gold.
 - (c) be kings.
 - (d) find riches.
7. Who destroyed the Incas?
 - (a) Columbus
 - (b) Vespucci
 - (c) The Aztecs
 - (d) Pizarro
8. What did Spain bring to the Americas?
 - (a) Potatoes
 - (b) Rice
 - (c) Tobacco
 - (d) Avocados
9. Which is NOT true about the natives under Spanish rule?
 - (a) The natives were not paid to work for the Spaniards.
 - (b) The natives were hungry.
 - (c) The natives went to Africa.
 - (d) The natives were angry.
10. What happened to the native people after the Spanish conquest?
 - (a) They spoke English.
 - (b) They became Catholics.
 - (c) They defeated the British.
 - (d) They became richer.

Glossary

- **Aztec** a member of the American Indian people who lived in Mexico
- **belief** a strong feeling that something is true or real
- **conquer** to take control of a country or defeat people in war
- **conquest** the act of taking control of a country or area
- **conquistador** a conqueror; one of the Spanish soldiers in the conquest of the Americas
- **disease** an illness
- **explorer** someone who travels to places where no one has ever been
- **Hispanic America** the region of the Spanish-speaking nations in the Americas; Spanish America
- **Inca** a member of the South American Indian people who lived in the Andes
- **independence** freedom from outside control or support
- **Mayas** a member of the American Indian people who lived in Guatemala and Mexico
- **rebel** to fight against a person in power
- **republic** a country that is governed by an elected leader (such as a president) rather than by a king or queen
- **resentment** a feeling of anger about an unfair situation
- **smallpox** a disease that causes fever, spots on the skin, and often death
- **Spaniard** a Spanish person
- **spice** a substance used to give a special taste to food