

**RESOURCE LIBRARY**  
ACTIVITY : 50 MINS

## Explorers of the Americas

Students discuss factors that motivate exploration and some consequences of early exploration of the Americas. Then they each research one early explorer of the Americas and present their findings.

### GRADES

6 - 8

### SUBJECTS

*Geography, Human Geography, Physical Geography, Social Studies, World History*

### CONTENTS

1 PDF, 1 Link

## OVERVIEW

Students discuss factors that motivate exploration and some consequences of early exploration of the Americas. Then they each research one early explorer of the Americas and present their findings.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/explorers-of-americas/>

## Program



## DIRECTIONS

**1. Have students brainstorm the motivations that prompted early explorers to go to the Americas.**

Ask students to brainstorm different motivating factors that may have prompted early explorers to go to the Americas. Write their ideas on the board. Prompt students to include factors such as curiosity, the desire for valuable trade routes, a mission to convert people to a certain religion, hunger for land or for precious goods such as gold and spices, and the thirst for scientific knowledge.

**2. Have a whole-class discussion about the consequences of some of these early explorations.**

Draw a T-Chart on the board and add the labels "Pros" and "Cons." Discuss the pros and cons of these explorations in terms of the greatly expanded knowledge about the Americas versus the negative effects on the cultures and landscapes that were discovered. Discuss issues such as the effects of cultural differences and misunderstandings, the introduction of new animals, plants, tools, weapons, and disease to indigenous cultures, and the discovery of precious resources. Add students' ideas to the T-Chart.

**3. Distribute the handout and have students research an explorer.**

Provide each student with a copy of the handout Explorers of the Americas. Have students select an explorer, and then use the Internet or library resources to research him or her and take notes.

**4. Have students write journal entries from the explorer's point of view.**

Have students write one or more journal entries about their explorer's experiences and motivations. Questions have been provided on the handout to guide students' writing. Ask students to include a map showing the explorer's routes.

**5. Have students map their explorers' routes on the Americas Mega Map and then present their findings.**

Have each student plot their explorer's route on one of the Americas Mega Map from the Americas MapMaker Kit. Ask students to use yarn or markers and attach index cards with photos or interesting information about their explorer or any findings along the way. Have each student tell the class about the explorer they selected.

## Extending the Learning

Have students select a place in the Americas that they would like to explore themselves. Students should consider the following questions: *Why do I want to go to this place? How will I get there? How long will it take? What will I need to bring? What plants, people, and physical features will I see along the way? What difficulties might I encounter? What will I see and do once I get there? What will I collect to bring home, such as photos or souvenirs?* Using maps and other resources, have students plan a trip from their home to that place. Then have students plot their journey on a map or create an illustrated journal of their trip to share with other members of their class or their community.

## OBJECTIVES

# Subjects & Disciplines

### Geography

- [Human Geography](#)
- [Physical Geography](#)

### Social Studies

- World History

# Learning Objectives

Students will:

- describe motivating factors that lead to exploration
- describe the positive and negative consequences of early exploration of the Americas
- write about an early explorer of the Americas and present their findings

# Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

# Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Discussions
- Research
- Writing

# Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Themes
  - Global Awareness
- Critical Thinking Skills
  - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
  - Acquiring Geographic Information
  - Organizing Geographic Information

## National Standards, Principles, and Practices

### NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 3:

People, Places, and Environments

### NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- Standard 1:

How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

- Standard 6:

How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions

### Preparation

### What You'll Need

### MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Encyclopedias (online access or hard copies)
- Index cards

- Markers
- Transparent tape
- Yarn

## REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per learner

## PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom
- Computer lab

## GROUPING

- Large-group instruction

## OTHER NOTES

Before starting this activity, assemble the Americas Mega Map.

## BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

### Background Information

Early explorers were motivated to explore the Americas by a variety of factors, including curiosity, the desire for valuable trade routes, a mission to convert people to a certain religion, hunger for land or resources, and the thirst for scientific knowledge.

### Prior Knowledge

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### Recommended Prior Activities

- None

### Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
indigenous culture	<i>noun</i>	languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods of people who are native to a specific geographic area.

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## For Further Exploration

### Articles & Profiles

- [Library of Congress: Exploration and Explorers](#)



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