

Continue to Celebrate Columbus Day?

Subject: Language Arts, Literature, Geography, History
Grade: 6-12

Brief Description

Students will use inquiry-based learning to gather information about Columbus' impact on the Americas. They will use this information to answer the question of whether or not a fictitious community should continue to recognize Columbus Day.

Objectives

Students will use information literacy skills to evaluate the reliability of source material on Columbus. Students will use problem solving skills to create a solution to an ill constructed problem which has no clear right or wrong answer.

Project on Columbus

Task: Your group has been hired by the local government in your town to consider whether or not the town should continue to recognize the national holiday of Columbus Day. In recent years protests from Native American Groups have increased, and town officials have been under increasing pressure to stop its recognition of Columbus Day. These groups argue that Columbus' legacy is one of conquest, murder, and theft, and is nothing to memorialize. On the other hand many other members of the town argue that Columbus was a man of his times, and that expansion and conquering new lands were things that he accepted as normal without questioning them.

For: That there were indeed injustices visited by Europeans against the Indians is undeniable. It is no less true that to know only this is to know virtually nothing. For now, suffice it to say that Columbus was no saint. However, neither was he a villain. He was a man whose vision and courage contributed immeasurably to the world, "the New World," from which countless numbers of peoples have been reaping endless blessings for centuries. (October 14, 2013 by Jack Kerwick)

Against: We should cease to celebrate Columbus Day, first because it is ludicrous to say a place already inhabited can be "discovered"; second because Columbus failed to add anything new to the pool of European knowledge; and finally because the celebration of Columbus sends a message of hostility to the very peoples who have paid most dearly to establish the great nation of which we are a part. (Copyright 1997 by G Rebecca Dobbs.)

In the course of your research, you will have to determine exactly how much we actually know about Columbus and what he did. You will have to evaluate the actions of the man against the end results of those actions (i.e. present-day American Culture). Finally, you will need to draw conclusions about what is the best course of action for this small town to resolve the conflict between its residents.

Your conclusions should be divided into 3 sections:

1. **Summary of the issues:** This section should summarize the basic arguments for and against the continuance of the Columbus Day holiday. Be sure to support each of your arguments with specific evidence from your research.
2. **Possible options:** In detail describe a minimum of three options to resolve the conflict within the town. As you do this be sure to explain how each option would satisfy and not satisfy the groups on both sides of the argument.
3. **Final recommendation:** In two or three paragraphs, give your final recommendation. You must explain why you choose this particular option. Explain what is good and bad about this particular option, and why this is the best choice of all possible options.

Steps: After you are in your group, you will need to put together an action plan. This action plan should list the following things:

1. Questions you need to answer to complete the task
2. Where you can look to find the answers to these questions (the Internet is not always the best place)
3. Who will gather the information for each question and deadlines for completing research.
4. What outside texts your group will have to read.
5. A detailed description of what your group will do each day of the project. You have 1 week.
6. Who in your group will do the actual writing. This should probably be more than one person, and the entire group should discuss what is going to be written.

These action plans should be submitted to me by the end of the day. Your group will receive a grade for them based on how detailed they are and on the quality of the questions you list.

On Friday, you will hand in your final report (1 per group) along with a division of labor sheet. This sheet should list what each group member did on the project, and should look similar to what you handed in on your plan of action. However if some group member(s) did not meet their responsibilities, this should be reflected here, and I will take that into account when computing their grade.

Research: Each group may send ONE member to the Computer Center or to the library during class time. There is an enormous amount of information about Columbus on the Internet, but again, this is not the only place you should look. Here are some web sites to get you started.

- <http://metalab.unc.edu/expo/1492.exhibit/c-Columbus/columbus.html>
- <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/COLUMBUS/col3.html>
- <http://www.win.tue.nl/cs/fm/engels/discovery/columbus.html>
- <http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/web/pages/holidays/Columbus.html>
- <http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/HIST/tutor/eurvoya/columbus.html>
- <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/taino/docs/columbus.html>
- <http://multiculturalism.aynrand.org/columbus.html>

Suggestion: Create a model (perhaps on a related but separate topic) to give the students an idea of the format you want.

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