

# **Explorers in North America**

**Lesson Video: Grades 3-5**

# Overview

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**Teacher:** Rob Cuddi  
**Grade:** 5  
**School:** Winthrop Middle School  
**Location:** Winthrop, Massachusetts

**NCSS Standards-Based Themes: Culture; Time, Continuity, and Change; People, Places, and Environments; Power, Authority, and Governance; Production, Distribution, and Consumption; Global Connections**

**Content Standards: History, Geography, Economics**

## Video Summary

Who were the first Europeans to step foot in the New World? What were they hoping to find? And what impact did their arrival have on the people already living there? Rob Cuddi uses essential questions like these to teach his fifth-grade students about the early explorers in North America.

Mr. Cuddi begins by asking guiding questions about the relationship between the early explorers and the Native Americans. The class then divides into small groups to research and answer the questions and plan their presentations. Mr. Cuddi and his students develop a rubric that will be used in evaluating the presentations. Then each group introduces an explorer and answers the essential questions using skits, poetry, and other literary devices they've been studying in English class. As the lesson concludes, students summarize important facts about each explorer and post their findings on a class data chart.

## Standards

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*Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* defines what students should know and be able to do in social studies at each educational level. This lesson correlates to the following standards for middle school students:

### **I. Culture**

Compare similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns; explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference; explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and/or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs; articulate the implications of cultural diversity, as well as cohesion, within and across groups.

# Standards, cont'd.

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## **II. Time, Continuity, and Change**

Identify and use key concepts such as chronology, causality, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity; identify and use processes important to reconstructing and reinterpreting the past, such as using a variety of sources, providing, validating, and weighing evidence for claims, checking credibility of sources, and searching for causality; develop critical sensitivities such as empathy and skepticism regarding attitudes, values, and behaviors of people in different historical contexts.

## **III. People, Places, and Environments**

Examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes; propose, compare, and evaluate alternative uses of land and resources in communities, regions, nations, and the world.

## **VI. Power, Authority, and Governance**

Describe the purpose of government and how its powers are acquired, used, and justified; analyze and explain ideas and governmental mechanisms to meet needs and wants of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, and establish order and security; explain conditions, actions, and motivations that contribute to conflict and cooperation within and among nations; give examples and explain how governments attempt to achieve their stated ideals at home and abroad.

## **VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption**

Explain and illustrate how values and beliefs influence different economic decisions; use economic concepts to help explain historical and current developments and issues in local, national, or global contexts.

## **IX. Global Connections**

Analyze examples of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies, and nations; describe and analyze the effects of changing technologies on the global community.

## **Content Standards: History, Geography, Economics**

# About the Class

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## Classroom Profile

“We were working from essential questions: one based on economics, one on the environment, and one on American history. Since this unit was about the explorers, naturally that was the focus, but it was also very important to help students understand that the explorers weren’t in isolation.” —Rob Cuddi

Rob Cuddi teaches fifth-grade social studies at Winthrop Middle School in Winthrop, Massachusetts. Located four miles north of Boston, on a peninsula that extends into Boston Bay, Winthrop is one of the oldest towns in the United States and one of the first areas to be settled. Its proximity to the ocean, downtown Boston, and Logan Airport make Winthrop the third most densely populated city in America, with a population of 20,000 living within one square mile.

Winthrop was originally an island, and this contributes to the city’s small-town feel. Winthrop Middle School reflects the surrounding tight-knit community. Most students come from white, middle-class families; many of their parents and grandparents went to the school. There is a small but growing minority population.

Mr. Cuddi began the year with a unit on the Native Americans, comparing the still-undeveloped landscape of the “New World” with the relatively sophisticated societies of the “Old.” Students kept a learning log—a working portfolio—in which they recorded essential questions. The essential questions guided the study of each lesson. They were tied to the standards and focused on economics, government, discrimination, religion, and the origins of personal rights and individual freedoms. The learning logs provided a means of documenting students’ predictions and answers to those essential questions and helped students make connections among units throughout the year.

The lesson shown in “Explorers in North America” fell within a unit on the early explorers. By the time they started this lesson, Mr. Cuddi expected his students to be familiar with the political and economic climate of pre-colonial Europe. He wanted students to be able to distinguish the different forms of government in existence at the time, to recognize the economic incentives that drove explorers to seek new routes to Asia, and to understand the fierce competition that existed between countries. A unifying theme throughout the year was comparative governments and the relationship between a system of government and the economic motivations that guide its actions.

Mr. Cuddi also integrated science with his social studies curriculum by conducting an ongoing study of the impact of humans on the environment in the New World. He integrated language arts with social studies by incorporating the use of learning logs and literary devices, such as haikus and couplets. He worked with his class to develop rubrics for all activities, connecting performance expectations to the essential questions that introduced each lesson.

After the unit on the early explorers, the class went on to study the early settlers, once again using essential questions to focus on issues of government, economics, religion, and the environment, and on the relationship between the explorers and first people to settle the New World.

Year at a Glance
First People
<b>Early Explorers</b>
Early Settlers
The Revolution
American Government

# About the Class, cont'd.

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## Lesson Background

Read this information to better understand the lesson shown in the video.

### **Content: Explorers in North America**

Although **Marco Polo** never stepped foot in North America, he is credited with motivating the European explorers who eventually did. In the 1260s and 1270s, Polo traveled to the Far East with his father and uncle, who were Venetian merchants. When he returned, he wrote extensively about the wealth he found there. His travelogues inspired other Europeans to seek trade routes to Asia. It was believed at the time that Asia could be reached by sailing due west from Europe. What people didn't realize was that a vast continent, with its own wealth of natural resources, lay in the way.

While some explorers were motivated by natural curiosity (and emboldened by technological advances in ship-building and navigation), others were in it for the money. Almost all were financed by rival European governments, who sought to capitalize on the rich resources of Asia. The search for a sea route to Asia stimulated much of the exploration in the fifteenth century. And it resulted in the discovery by Europeans of lands that had already been inhabited for thousands of years by indigenous peoples—the Americas.

In the sixteenth century, the desire to trade furs and other commodities available in North America fueled the search for other water shortcuts to Asia. The Northwest Passage was the name given to the route that connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans via the icy waterways of northern Canada. The Northeast Passage was the route that connected the Atlantic and Pacific via the waters north of Asia. The search for the Northwest and Northeast Passages resulted in the exploration of vast areas of the northern and eastern parts of the North American continent.

In short, the economic dreams that inspired European rulers to seek trade routes to Asia led to many unanticipated results—political, cultural, and economic. Three “worlds”—Europe, Asia, and Africa—would be forever influenced by a fourth—North America—in ways that even the dreamers never imagined. What follows is a brief description (in chronological order) of the major explorers in North America, including what they were looking for and what they found.

**Christopher Columbus:** Sponsored by the king and queen of Spain, this Italian explorer set out in 1492 to find a sea route to Asia by sailing west. Over the course of four voyages, spanning 1492 to 1504, Columbus explored the islands of the Caribbean and the coasts of Central and South America. He never did reach Asia, although he continued to believe until his death that he had. Today he is credited with opening the age of exploration to the Americas.

**John Cabot (Giovanni Caboto):** Italian-born Cabot explored for King Henry VII of England. In 1497 he sailed westward in hopes of finding Asia, but instead landing in present-day Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, Canada, which he believed to be northeastern Asia. He claimed the region on behalf of Henry VII, and returned to England to receive a large sum of money. In 1498, he organized a second voyage and sailed north to Greenland until his crew forced him to turn back south because of the cold weather. He returned to England because of a lack of supplies, and died soon after.

**Ferdinand Magellan:** In 1519 this Portuguese explorer and his fleet of five vessels left Spain in an attempt to reach the East Indies (Southeast Asia) by sailing west. He sailed around the tip of South America (through what is now called the Straits of Magellan) and reached the Pacific Ocean. (He named it “Pacific” because it was so calm.) He landed in the Philippines in 1521, and died there. Only one of his ships completed the voyage back to Spain, carrying a valuable cargo of cloves. Magellan is credited with being the first to circumnavigate the globe, even though he did it over the course of several voyages.

**Jacques Cartier:** While seeking a northwest passage to China in the mid-1500s, this Frenchman became the first European to explore the St. Lawrence River. He reported an abundance of animals in the area for trapping and fur trading, and his explorations led France to claim large portions of what is now Canada.

# About the Class, cont'd.

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**Samuel de Champlain:** By the early 1600s, hope was fading for finding a sea route to Asia. So in 1603, French fur companies hired Samuel de Champlain to settle the region of eastern Canada known as Acadia (today called Nova Scotia). He made several trips to North America, explored the Bay of Fundy, established the settlement we now call Quebec, and established a trading post in Montreal. Champlain became known as “the father of New France;” he was governor of New France from 1633 until his death in 1635.

**Henry Hudson:** In 1607, English navigator Henry Hudson undertook the first of three voyages to find a northeast passage to Asia. An English company sponsored his first two trips, which ended unsuccessfully. His third trip, in 1609, was financed by the Dutch East India Company. After enduring weeks of cold weather and rough water in the Barents Sea, Hudson’s crew mutinied and forced him to turn the ship southwest. They passed Nova Scotia and ended up in New York Bay. Hudson spent the next few months exploring the river that now bears his name. He established settlements at present-day New York City and Albany, New York, and became involved in the fur trade. Hudson undertook a fourth voyage in 1610, this time to find a northwest passage to Asia. While exploring what we call the Hudson Bay, his ship became frozen in ice and his crew once again mutinied. Hudson and several others were set adrift in a small boat and were never seen again.

**Robert Cavalier La Salle:** In 1666, La Salle immigrated to Canada from France and became a trader and an explorer. In 1682, together with Italian explorer Henri de Tonty, he claimed the lands of the Mississippi Valley for France, naming the region “Louisiana,” after the French king, Louis XIV. Soon after, he was named viceroy of North America, but in 1687, while traveling back to Canada, he was killed by a mutinous crew near the Trinity River.

## Teaching Strategy: Essential Questions

Essential questions are an instructional strategy teachers use to engage students and encourage in-depth study. Essential questions are often used to make connections between units of study and can lead to the integration of disciplines. They sometimes are linked to other essential questions, and can also help focus assessment efforts.

Essential questions have the following characteristics:

- They are broad in nature.
- They are central to the content of the unit or subject.
- They have no one correct or obvious answer.
- They invite higher-order thinking, including analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating.
- They provoke student interest and allow students to draw from experience.

The essential questions asked in this lesson include the following:

- What has been the impact of various explorers on American history?
- What role have foreign governments played in American history?
- What role does economics play in American history?
- How have various population shifts impacted the environment throughout American history?

# Watching the Video

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As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

## Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- What challenges have you faced in teaching the sometimes controversial topic of early explorers in America? How have you addressed those challenges?
- How are essential questions useful teaching tools?
- What differences do you notice among your students' learning styles, and which strategies do you find most effective in addressing the different styles?
- Describe a rubric you have designed to establish criteria prior to an assignment. Did you develop the rubric by yourself or with the help of your students? What are the advantages of each method?
- What types of assessment tools do you use, and what are the purpose and the strengths of each?

## Watch the Video

As you watch "Explorers in North America," take notes on Mr. Cuddi's instructional strategies, particularly the way he uses essential questions. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

## Reflecting on the Video

Review your notes, then respond to the following questions:

- What struck you about the classroom climate, background, preparation, strategies, and materials used in this lesson?
- How is this class different from yours? How would you introduce your students to the impact of European explorers on Native Americans?
- How have state and national standards influenced Mr. Cuddi's lesson plans?
- How does Mr. Cuddi engage and maintain students' interest throughout the lesson?
- Describe the various parts of the lesson and how each part helped build students' interest.
- What role do the essential questions play in developing a student's view of history?
- How do Mr. Cuddi's instructional and assessment strategies accommodate different learning styles?

# Watching the Video, cont'd.

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## Looking Closer

Here's an opportunity to take a closer look at interesting aspects of Mr. Cuddi's lesson.



### Using Essential Questions To Support Learning: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately two minutes into the video. Watch for about three minutes.

Mr. Cuddi begins the lesson with an introduction to exploration, and moves into a discussion of essential questions that connect the different units in his social studies curriculum.

- How does Mr. Cuddi use learning logs?
- Why does Mr. Cuddi ask students to respond to the essential questions before the lesson begins?
- How are the essential questions crafted for use in each lesson?
- How does Mr. Cuddi expect students to be able to respond to essential questions as the year progresses?
- What evidence do you see that using essential questions helps students link and understand broad concepts in social studies?



### Using a Rubric Before Students Work on an Assignment: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately 15 minutes into the video. Watch for about nine minutes.

Before they begin their presentations, Mr. Cuddi refers to the rubric that the students helped develop.

- Why does Mr. Cuddi take class time to review the rubric?
- How is this rubric constructed? What parts of the rubric receive the most attention?
- How might the rubric be useful in improving the quality of student work both now and on future projects and presentations?

# Connecting to Your Teaching

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## Reflecting on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

- What are some challenges you've faced in teaching controversial topics in American history? How did you respond?
- How might you use the controversial nature of a topic to engage students in the content?
- How do social studies topics in your curriculum lend themselves to the integration of other subject areas (e.g., using literary devices in presentations)?
- How do you or might you use teaching strategies like guiding questions and learning logs to connect different units in social studies?
- What other guiding questions would you ask students to consider in a unit on the explorers in North America?

## Taking It Back to Your Classroom

- Provide a brief overview of some books about exploration that are appropriate for upper-elementary or middle school readers. Two examples are *Brendan the Navigator: A History Mystery Written About the Discovery of America* and *Where Do You Think You're Going, Christopher Columbus?* by Jean Fritz. Ask students to choose a book about exploration to read and explain to a younger child.
- Students interested in math and science may enjoy learning about the history of navigation from print resources and Web sites. Ask students to share what they learn about the age of exploration by giving a presentation.
- Ask students to write about the encounter between the Native Americans and European explorers from both points of view. Students can then role-play and act out what they write.
- Ask students to select a modern-day explorer that they would like to know more about (for example, a famous astronaut or deep-sea diver, or a pioneer in the fields of art, science, politics, or music). Then have them research the explorer's life and accomplishments and write a brief biography for an "Explorers Today" bulletin board.
- Ask students to speculate about future explorations. Their predictions can form the basis for a creative writing assignment in which students write science fiction stories about future explorers. Students can also read predictive stories from early science fiction writers who wrote about space exploration in our time, and determine how accurate they were.
- Ask students to set up a personal "learning log" in their social studies notebook. Encourage students to take notes on each day's lesson to serve as a record of their class work and to provide continuity from one unit to the next. Have students date each entry and write the title of the lesson. Entries may include reflective writing; responses to prompts, quotes, or pictures; graphic organizers; summaries of what has been learned; drawings; answers to essential questions; or notes from reference materials.
- Ask students to work together to develop assessment criteria for an upcoming assignment. Students can use the criteria to help them prepare for and complete the assignment. Then have students assess themselves or a partner, using the rubric. Be sure to teach students how to give positive feedback that offers constructive help to fellow students.

# Resources

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## Print Resources for Students

Dodge, Stephan C. *Christopher Columbus and the First Voyages to the New World*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991.

Kresky, Stephan. *Who Really Discovered America?* New York: Scholastic Inc., 1987.

## Print Resources for Teachers

Bitterli, Urs. *Cultures in Conflict: Encounters Between European and Non-European Cultures, 1492–1800*. Translated by Ritchie Robertson. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989.

De Vorse, Louis. *Keys to the Encounter: A Library of Congress Resource Guide for the Study of the Age of Discovery*. Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1992.

Lunenfeld, Marvin. *1492 Discovery, Invasion, Encounter: Sources and Interpretations*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1991.

## Web Resources for Students and Teachers

Outline of Early American History: <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/H/1994/chap1.htm>

This site provides an outline of American history based on significant events and epochs. The first chapter, “Early America,” includes the European discovery of the New World.

## Web Resources for Teachers

The Library of Congress: <http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/1492.exhibit/Intro.html>

The Ongoing Voyage of Columbus offers an informative exhibition in six parts.

Frontier Trails: <http://www.frontiertrails.com/america/firsteuropeans.html>

The Frontier Trails site offers a brief, comprehensive history of Europeans in the discovery of early America.

The Columbus Navigation Homepage: <http://www1.minn.net/~keithp/>

This extensive site includes articles, maps, timelines, and special topics devoted to Columbus and the discovery of America.

Yale-New Haven Teachers’ Institute: <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1992/2/>

Developed by teachers, the essays and curriculum units on this site analyze writings and rewritings of the discovery and conquest of America.

The Coalition of Essential Schools: <http://www.essentialschools.org/pubs/horace/05/v05n05.html>

This extensive site emphasizes critical thinking and questioning in curriculum development.