

# Culture Clash: New World Meets Old

## Teacher's Guide

**Grade Level:** 6-8

**Curriculum Focus:** World History

**Lesson Duration:** Two class periods

### Program Description

*The Hunt for Society* (5 min.) – Traces the physical and cultural development of early humans – from hunter-gatherers to the first great civilizations. *Mesoamerican Conflict* (4 min.) – See how the Maya, Inca, and Aztec civilizations maintained their power through warfare. *Peru's Past* (5 min.) – Profiles the Inca, who overcame their environment to create great stone cities and an advanced civilization. *Columbus: Secrets From the Grave* (32 min.) – Examines the many myths surrounding the man credited with discovering the New World, separating truth from mere speculation.

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### Onscreen Questions

- Why did early humans migrate to different parts of the world?
  - How did Aztec rulers help bring down their empire?
  - How did the Incas adapt to their mountainous environment?
  - Why might Christopher Columbus try to conceal his identity?
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### Lesson Plan

#### *Student Objectives*

- Demonstrate understanding of basic facts about Christopher Columbus and different theories regarding his background.
- Discuss the different experts and resources involved in trying to solve the mystery of Columbus' background.
- Write their own opinion about Columbus' background, focusing on three pieces of evidence.

#### *Materials*

- *Culture Clash: New World Meets Old* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Computer with Internet access

- Resources on Columbus

## Procedures

1. After watching *Culture Clash*, discuss basic facts about Christopher Columbus. Talk about what is known and what is unknown about his life. (*His country of origin and background are unknown. What is known are facts about his life surrounding the voyage to the New World, as well as facts about his marriage, his brothers, his son.*) Which country funded his voyages to the New World? (*Spain*) According to most history books, what is Columbus' background? (*He was the son of a poor weaver from the Italian town of Genoa.*)
2. Next, talk about some of the theories regarding Christopher Columbus' background. For each theory, discuss why Columbus might have hid this information. For example
  - He was a Catalan mercenary who had fought against the Spanish. If his secret was revealed, the Spanish monarchs may not have financed his voyage.
  - He was Jewish, and changed his identity to escape the Spanish Inquisition.
  - His parents were not married, and he hid his past to escape the stigma of illegitimacy.
  - He was, as he claimed, the son of a Genoese weaver, and hid his modest childhood because he was ashamed.
3. Ask students to name the types of experts that the historian Charles Merrill consulted while trying to solve the mystery of Columbus' background. For each expert, talk about the materials or resources analyzed. For example:
  - DNA expert (bones of Columbus, his son Hernando, and his brother Diego)
  - Forensic anthropologist (bones of Columbus, his son, and his brother)
  - Handwriting expert (Columbus' personal letters and journals)
  - Forensic linguist or linguistics engineer (Columbus' personal letters and journals)
  - Psychological profiler (history and known facts about Columbus' life)
  - Specialist in Portuguese history (facts about Columbus' marriage)
4. Have students name any historic materials that Merrill consulted in his research, such as
  - Columbus' personal writings
  - Columbus' son's biography of his father's life
  - Historical records in Genoa and Catalona
  - Facts about the Colom family of Barcelona
5. Tell students that their assignment is to write an essay offering their own opinion about Columbus' background. They should use at least three statements from experts or pieces of evidence to support their opinion. Encourage them to use additional resources to supplement



what they learned in the video. They may want to begin with the Discovery site called "Explore the Evidence": <http://dsc.discovery.com/convergence/columbus/evidence/explore.html>.

6. Have students share their completed essays with the class.
7. Discuss the essays as a class. Which theory was most popular? What additional evidence would help support or oppose this theory?

### **Assessment**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students demonstrated a strong understanding of the facts, mysteries, and theories about Christopher Columbus' background; wrote a clear, engaging essay supported by at least three experts or pieces of evidence.
- 2 points: Students demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of the facts, mysteries, and theories about Christopher Columbus' background; wrote a competent essay supported by three experts or pieces of evidence.
- 1 point: Students demonstrated a weak understanding of the facts, mysteries, and theories about Christopher Columbus' background; wrote an incomplete or inaccurate essay supported by less than three experts or pieces of evidence.

### **Vocabulary**

#### **DNA**

*Definition:* The molecule that carries genetic information in all living things; the chemical basis of heredity (deoxyribonucleic acid).

*Context:* By comparing Columbus' DNA with his brother Diego's, Lorente can find out if they had different mothers.

#### **forensic**

*Definition:* Relating to or dealing with the application of scientific knowledge to legal problems.

*Context:* Professor Miguel Botella is an expert in forensic anthropology. His expertise enables him to find secrets within bones.

#### **hominid**

*Definition:* One in the scientific family of bipedal, primate mammals including modern humans and early humanlike ancestors.

*Context:* Many scientists believe that the earliest hominids, or members of the human family, lived in Africa.

#### **ice age**

*Definition:* A period in Earth's history when ice sheets covered vast regions of land.

*Context:* Earth's last ice age ended about 12,000 years ago.



**linguist**

*Definition:* One who studies human speech and language.

*Context:* Forensic linguists will try to unlock the code hidden within Columbus' writings to reveal his mother tongue.

**mercenary**

*Definition:* A soldier paid to fight for a country other than his or her own

*Context:* Charles Merrill believes that Columbus was a Catalan mercenary who once fought against Spain.

**Mesoamerica**

*Definition:* The region in present-day Mexico and most of Central America where civilizations flourished before European contact.

*Context:* The Maya lived in the hot, dense rain forests of southern Mesoamerica.

**Spanish Inquisition**

*Definition:* From 1478 to 1834 a Roman Catholic judicial institution intended to root out religious heresy, often through the use of torture and public execution.

*Context:* There is evidence that suggests Columbus was a Jew who secretly changed his identity to escape the Spanish Inquisition.

## *Academic Standards*

**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History: Era 1 – Understands the biological and cultural processes that shaped the earliest human communities
- World History: Era 3 – Understands how early agrarian civilizations arose in Mesoamerica
- World History: Era 6 – Global Expansion and Encounter: Understands how the transoceanic interlinking of all major regions of the world between 1450 and 1600 led to global transformations
- U.S. History: Era 1 – Understands the characteristics of societies in the Americas, Western Europe, and Western Africa that increasingly interacted after 1450.
- Historical Understanding: Understands the historical perspective.



### **The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
  - Time, Continuity, and Change
  - Individual Development and Identity
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### **Support Materials**

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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