

Unit 1: Explorations and Encounters

5th Grade Humanities

35 Class Meetings

Revised June 2026

Essential Questions

- What were the causes and consequences of European exploration and settlement in the Americas for Indigenous, African, and European peoples?
- How did the sharing and blending of agricultural and technological knowledge influence the development of early North American settlements?
- How did the experiences, cultures, and values of African, Indigenous, and European people shape their perspectives during the Age of Exploration?

Enduring Understandings with Unit Goals

EU 1: European exploration and settlement in the Americas led to lasting changes for Indigenous, African, and European peoples.

- Explain the causes that led to European exploration and settlement, including trade, land, and religious motivations.
- Examine the consequences of colonization, such as displacement of Indigenous peoples.
- Analyze how natural resources and geography influenced patterns of exploration and human settlement across the Atlantic and Pacific Worlds.

EU 2: The blending of agricultural practices and technological knowledge from African, Indigenous, and European communities influenced the success and sustainability of early North American settlements.

- Describe how agricultural systems like companion planting, rice cultivation, and the open-field system contributed to food production and survival.
- Identify technologies and skills contributed by African, Indigenous, and European groups and how they shaped early economies and communities.
- Explain how environmental knowledge and cultural practices were shared, adapted, or resisted during the settlement of early North America.

EU 3: The diverse cultures, values, and lived experiences of African, Indigenous, and European peoples shaped their worldviews and responses during the Age of Exploration.

- Investigate the cultural norms, beliefs, and motivations of different groups involved in exploration and settlement.
- Compare how leadership and traditions shaped communities and individual experiences.
- Explore primary and secondary sources to analyze how different perspectives and biases shaped historical narratives of the Age of Exploration.

Standards

CT Social Studies Frameworks Standards:

5.His.14. a.: Explain probable causes and effects of the migration of Indigenous peoples and the formation of Native nations in North America (e.g., archeological evidence).

5.Geo.8. a.: Describe the connection between natural resources and human settlement patterns in the Atlantic and Pacific Worlds (e.g., Caribbean, Europe, North America, South America, West Africa).

5.His.14. b.: Describe the causes and effects of European exploration and settlement of the Americas (e.g., conflict, enslavement, land rights, sovereignty, trade).

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- 5.His.5. a.:** Explain how the culture and experiences of African, Indigenous, and European people influenced their perspectives during the Age of Exploration (e.g., cultural norms, political beliefs, trade motives, exploitation).
- 5.Geo.4. a.:** Explain how cultural diffusion of agricultural and technological knowledge held by African, Indigenous, and European communities contributed to North American settlements (e.g., rice cultivation, open field system, companion planting).
- 5.Civ.6. a.:** Describe gender roles within and among Black, Indigenous, and European communities in early United States history.
- 5.Inq.1. a.:** Identify concepts, ideas, and interpretations associated with compelling and supporting questions about early United States history.
- 5.Inq.1. b.:** Explain how supporting questions help answer compelling questions in an inquiry about United States history.
- 5.Inq.1.c:** Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration the different opinions people have about how to answer the questions.
- 5.Inq.2. a.:** Apply disciplinary knowledge and practices to demonstrate an understanding of United States history content.
- 5.Inq.3. a.:** Gather relevant evidence from multiple sources about a person, event, or issue in United States history while using the origin, structure, and context to guide selection.
- 5.Inq.3. b.:** Identify evidence responses to a compelling question while determining among fact and opinion to determine the credibility of multiple sources.
- 5.Inq.3. c.:** Use evidence to develop claims in response to a compelling question by using evidence related to early United States history.
- 5.Inq.4. a.:** Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources about United States history.
- 5.Inq.4. b.:** Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with relevant information and data.
- 5.Inq.4. c.:** Critique arguments and explanations.
- 5.Inq.4. d.:** Present a summary of arguments and explanations about early United States history using print, oral, and digital technologies in classrooms, schools, and out-of-school contexts.
- 5.Inq.4. e.:** Explain the challenges and opportunities, both present and past, in addressing local, regional, and global problems in United States history.
- 5.Inq.4. f.:** Use a range of deliberative and democratic procedures to evaluate and implement strategies to address problems in classrooms and schools.

Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 5 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.4.a: Use context (e.g., cause/effect relationships and comparisons in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.4.b: Use common, grade-appropriate Greek and Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., photograph, photosynthesis).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.4.c: Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation and determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal contrast, addition, and other logical relationships (e.g., however, although, nevertheless, similarly, moreover, in addition).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.1: Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.2: Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.3: Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.4: Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.5: Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.6: Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.7: Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.8: Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.9: Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.10: By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, at the high end of the grades 4-5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1.a: Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1.b: Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1.c: Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1.d: Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.a: Introduce a topic clearly, provide a general observation and focus, and group related information logically; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.b: Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.c: Link ideas within and across categories of information using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., in contrast, especially).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.d: Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.e: Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3.a: Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3.b: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3.c: Use a variety of transitional words, phrases, and clauses to manage the sequence of events.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3.d: Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3.e: Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.5: With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 5 here.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.6: With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of two pages in a single sitting.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.7: Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.8: Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.9.a: Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., how characters interact]").

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.9.b: Apply grade 5 Reading standards to informational texts (e.g., "Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point[s]").

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

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ISAAC Vision of the Graduate Competencies

Competency 1: Write effectively for a variety of purposes.

Competency 2: Speak to diverse audiences in an accountable manner.

Competency 3: Develop the behaviors needed to interact and contribute with others on a team.

Competency 4: Analyze and solve problems independently and collaboratively.

Competency 5: Be responsible, creative, and empathetic members of the community.

Unit Content Overview

1. European Exploration and Settlement

- Explore the motivations behind European exploration, including economic ambition, religious conversion, and political competition.
- Examine how explorers' journeys were driven by a desire for new trade routes and access to valuable natural resources.
- Analyze how these movements impacted Indigenous peoples through land loss, forced migration, conflict, and disease.
- Utilize maps, primary sources, and visual evidence, to investigate the consequences of colonization from multiple perspectives.
- Investigate the formation of Native nations, the transformation of landscapes, and the lasting effects of European claims to land.

2. Success and Sustainability of Early North America

- Explore how early settlements were deeply influenced by the knowledge and practices of the people who lived there or were brought there.
- Investigate examples of cultural diffusion such as rice farming (shared by West African communities), companion planting (Indigenous agricultural systems), and the European open-field system.
- Examine how settlers relied on Indigenous and African knowledge to survive, farm, and develop trade economies, especially in unfamiliar climates and ecosystems.
- Analyze how tools, farming methods, and food production techniques spread and merged across cultural lines, often under conditions of imbalance and exploitation.

3. Shaping Worldviews and Responses During the Age of Exploration

- Explore how different communities experienced and responded to the Age of Exploration based on their cultural norms, spiritual beliefs, political systems, and social structures.
- Compare how African, Indigenous, and European groups viewed land, leadership, labor, and family life—and how those views shaped their interactions with each other.
- Consider how identity, power, and perspective influenced decisions about trade, alliance, resistance, and adaptation through primary sources, oral histories, and case studies.
- Analyze the roles of men, women, and children in different societies and how gender shaped responsibilities and contributions in early colonial life.

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Vocabulary and Key Terms: exploration, settlement, colony, colonization, empire, conquest, enslavement, trade route, indigenous, migration, conflict, land rights, sovereignty, expedition, treaty, navigator, encounter, contact, missionary, natural resources, settlement pattern, region, climate, environment, agriculture, plantation, subsistence farming, open-field system, companion planting, rice cultivation, trade goods, port, territory, Atlantic World, Pacific World, culture, perspective, worldview, cultural diffusion, tradition, technology, innovation, adaptation, norms, values, heritage, belief system, oral history, customs, family structure, labor, political system, leadership, social hierarchy, resistance, community, enclave, identity

Interdisciplinary Connection:

- ELA, Science

Daily Learning Objectives with *TWPS*

Students will be able to...

- Identify the major motivations for European exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries.
 - *Why were European countries eager to explore unknown parts of the world?*
- Explain the economic, religious, and political goals of European explorers.
 - *How did the goals of exploration differ between countries and individuals?*
- Identify the major explorers and their routes across the Atlantic.
 - *How did different explorers change the world map?*
- Analyze how geography and natural resources influenced early European settlements.
 - *Why did early settlers choose locations to build colonies?*
- Describe the probable causes of Indigenous migration before European contact.
 - *What factors influenced where Indigenous nations moved and settled?*
- Examine archaeological evidence to understand the movement and formation of Native nations.
 - *How does archaeological evidence help us understand history before written records?*
- Analyze the immediate impact of European arrival on Indigenous communities.
 - *What happened when Europeans first arrived in Indigenous lands?*
- Describe the long-term effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples.
 - *How did European colonization reshape Indigenous ways of life?*
- Examine the beginnings of the transatlantic slave trade and its impact on African peoples.
 - *How were Africans affected by European colonization of the Americas?*
- Explain the role of natural resources in the Atlantic World's economic system.
 - *Why were natural resources so important to the growth of empires?*
- Analyze how trade and resource extraction shaped colonial settlement patterns.
 - *How did natural resources shape where people lived and worked?*
- Summarize the causes and effects of European settlement on the land, people, and power structures.
 - *What were the most lasting effects of European exploration?*
- Identify examples of agricultural knowledge shared by Indigenous communities.
 - *How did Indigenous farming practices help early settlers survive?*
- Describe the "Three Sisters" planting method and its significance.
 - *Why do you think Indigenous communities used companion planting?*
- Explain how rice cultivation techniques were brought from West Africa.

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- *What does the story of rice tell us about the contributions of African people to agriculture?*
- Explore the European open-field system and its use in colonial agriculture.
 - *How did European agricultural systems differ from Indigenous and African systems?*
- Compare how different groups adapted their farming methods to new environments.
 - *What challenges did settlers face when growing food in unfamiliar places?*
- Analyze how food systems and farming knowledge were exchanged between cultures.
 - *How did agricultural knowledge move from one culture to another?*
- Examine how Indigenous tools and technologies contributed to survival.
 - *What technologies were shared between Indigenous and settler communities?*
- Identify the role of trade in spreading agricultural goods and tools.
 - *What role did trade play in the development of settlements?*
- Describe how blending farming knowledge led to innovation and adaptation.
 - *How did cooperation and conflict shape farming in early America?*
- Summarize how cultural diffusion contributed to regional identities.
 - *How did shared knowledge shape the culture of each region?*
- Define worldview and identify cultural factors that shape it.
 - *What shapes how we see and understand the world?*
- Compare how different groups viewed land ownership and use.
 - *How did beliefs about land cause conflict between cultures?*
- Describe political and spiritual beliefs held by Indigenous communities.
 - *How were Indigenous governments and belief systems different from Europeans'?*
- Analyze the cultural values that shaped European views on exploration and conquest.
 - *How did European values influence their actions during exploration?*
- Describe how African communities understood and responded to European contact.
 - *How did African people respond to the arrival of European traders and settlers?*
- Compare the experiences of Indigenous, African, and European peoples in early colonial America.
 - *How did people experience early colonial life differently based on their identity?*
- Identify how cultural beliefs influenced alliances, trade, and conflict.
 - *How did culture affect cooperation and conflict between groups?*
- Describe gender roles in early Indigenous communities.
 - *What roles did men and women have in Indigenous societies?*
- Describe gender roles in African communities during early colonial contact.
 - *How did gender roles shape African life and leadership?*
- Describe gender roles in early European settler communities.
 - *How did gender expectations shape life in European colonies?*
- Analyze how different perspectives influenced decisions about land, labor, and leadership.
 - *Why is it important to study history from more than one point of view?*
- Reflect on how diverse cultures shaped early American society and continue to influence the U.S. today.
 - *How do the cultural contributions of Indigenous, African, and European peoples still shape our country?*

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Instructional Strategies/Differentiated Instruction

- Whole group instruction and small group discussions
- Paragraph frames and sentence starters
- Teacher modeling
- Graphic organizers
- Accountable talk
- Homework
- Word walls with visuals
- Small group instruction
- Visual exemplars with teacher and student critiques
- Text and video chunking
- Spiraling back to guiding questions
- Multiple CFUs
- Close reading with text-dependent questions

EL Differentiation Strategies

- Word Banks and Word Walls with visuals
- TWPS (Think, write, pair, share)
- Pre-reading strategies
- Culturally responsive teaching
- Explicit teacher modeling
- Key vocabulary
- Graphic organizers
- Strategic Grouping
- Non-verbal assessments

Assessments

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:

- Do Now
- Academic Discourse
- Exit Slips
- Accountable Talk Discussions
- Completed notes
- Completed graphic organizers
- Homework
- Performance Task -- “Hidden Stories of Early America”
 - Teacher’s rubric/scoring guide

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:

- Quiz: Vocabulary terms and definitions (EU1, EU2, and EU3)
- Listen/Interpret FIAB
- Unit Task: “Hidden Stories of Early America” (EU1, EU2 and EU3)

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Unit Task

Unit Task Name: “Hidden Stories of Early America”

Description: Students will write a historical collection of journal entries from the perspective of a fictional or composite character living during the Age of Exploration and early settlement. Their writing must demonstrate deep understanding of the historical causes and consequences of European exploration, cultural exchanges in agriculture and technology, and the perspectives of African, Indigenous, and European peoples. The character can represent an African, Indigenous, or European perspective and must reflect the lived experience of individuals impacted by migration, colonization, and cultural exchange. Students will demonstrate their understanding of historical events, cultural diffusion, and geographic influence by integrating accurate historical content into a creative narrative format. Students will also submit a research note explaining the real facts, maps, and sources that informed their writing, alongside a simple visual component (a hand-drawn map, artifact, or illustration) to deepen contextual understanding.

Evaluation: Teacher’s Scoring Guide

Unit Resources

- Google Classroom
- NewsEla
- Readworks
- Smithsonian Native Knowledge 360° (NK360)
- National Museum of the American Indian Educator Resources
- National Geographic Education
- Smithsonian Learning Lab
- Library of Congress – Teachers Resources
- Digital Inquiry Group (formerly Stanford History Education Group)
- Reading Like a Historian Lessons- TeachingHistory.org
- National Museum of African American History and Culture Learning Lab
- Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
- National Archives DocsTeach
- Library of Congress Maps Collection