

Lesson Plans

Lesson 5: Food and the Columbian Exchange

Introduction

Spain's discovery of the New World had one of the most far-reaching impacts on world civilization in history. Not only did it facilitate the rise of the Spanish Empire, but more importantly, it also brought about the Columbian Exchange—the significant transfer of crops, animals, and microbes after Columbus connected the Americas to the rest of the world. The effects of the Columbian Exchange dramatically altered the world balance as diseases ravaged the indigenous populations, Old World livestock altered the American ecosystems, and the world's population experienced an extensive boom with the introduction of New World crops. This lesson focuses on the influence of the Columbian Exchange on food across the world.

Main Tasks

- Discuss the impact of the spread of crops between the New and Old Worlds.
- Track a crop from the New World to the Old World and identify its impact on at least three different regions.

Process

1. As a class, ask students what food they identify with Italy (tomato), Ireland (potato), and Belgium (chocolate). Explain that those items, along with corn, peppers, peanuts, vanilla, and pineapples, all had their origins in the New World. Have them imagine a culinary world without those items.
2. Watch the *New World Foods* and *New World Foods in Europe* video clips.
3. Explain that students will be working on a project that traces the impact of the Columbian Exchange on food. Outline the following requirements:
 - a. Research the origins of the assigned crop.
 - b. Find at least three dishes from different regions outside of the New World that use the crop.
 - c. Analyze the overall influence of the dish and how the New World crop was integrated.
 - d. Using Google Maps* or Google Earth, plot the origins and the regional dishes on the map. Embed the research findings and any relevant multimedia.
* Teachers can also set up a shared Google Map that allows everyone in the class to contribute to a single map.
4. Provide time for the students to research recipes for their crops using the provided resources and their own Google searches.

5. Students should then create their Google Maps.
6. Have students share their findings.
7. As relevant, discuss the importance of individual crops on population growth and cultural diffusion.

Crop List:

- Corn
- Potato
- Sweet Potato
- Tomato
- Chilies
- Peanuts
- Chocolate
- Vanilla
- Manioc
- Pineapples
- Strawberries
- Avocados

Resources

Video:

- New World Foods
- New World Foods in Europe

Website Articles:

- Chapter 1: The Missing Branch of the Family Tree
- The Journey of New World Foods

Outside Resources:

- Foods that Changed the World
- The Columbian Exchange
- Tomato History Timeline
- Cambridge World History of Food: Potato
- The Food Timeline: The Chile Pepper
- The Food Timeline: Dishes and Crops