

Educator's guide: Spain and America

BY PAULINE S. JOHNSON

The article “Spain and America: From Reconquest to Conquest¹” introduces a lot of information and a number of issues that may be new to students. The following suggestions will help you use the article in a way that best fits the needs of your class.

Suggestions for reading “Spain and America: From Reconquest to Conquest”

1. The reading guide² for the article will enable students to make sense of the dates, people, places, and terms mentioned, and will encourage them to think critically about the actions of the Spanish conquistadors and the people they encountered in the “New World.” The reading guide can be used a number of ways:
 - You may want to assign one or more of the sections of the reading guide for students to complete as they read “Spain and America.”
 - You may want students to write down answers to the questions as they read, or you may use the questions as a basis for class discussion as students read sections or the whole article.
 - The reading guide can be done individually or in small groups. The use of groups would be an excellent way to address the needs of ESL and mixed-ability student groups.
2. The article provides numerous opportunities for writing assignments. You may choose to assign one of these after having the students read and identify dates and terms on the reading guide:
 - A summary of the Reconquest using three of the dates and at least five of the terms.
 - A letter from a conquistador to his family in Spain telling of his experiences in the New World.
 - A reply to Bartolome de Las Casas about his report from his superior in the Church.
 - A journal entry by a Muslim or Jew who has been forced to leave the Iberian Peninsula.

- A dialogue between King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella as they decide whether or not to finance Columbus’ voyage to the East Indies.
 - An essay about the reasons the Europeans wanted the commodities from the Far East.
 - An obituary for Bartolome de Las Casas.
 - A “wanted poster” for Hernan Cortez or Francisco Pizarro.
3. You might want to conduct a discussion about how the Spanish in the New World could have possibly engaged in the behavior described by de Las Casas. As part of that discussion, the sacrificial practices of the Aztecs can also be addressed. Students should recognize multiple perspectives in this discussion. They should also be steered to recognize that we cannot view the past with the values of today — that it’s important to view the historical perspective. The atrocities that were carried out and were described by de Las Casas horrified the members of the court in Spain, but no one from the period denied that the Indians could be forced to convert to Christianity or could be enslaved.
 4. Have the students write their opinion of the work and writing that Bartolome de las Casas did in the 1540s. What do they think of him as a person? Should he be admired? What would they say today if they could talk to him? This could be done during class or as a homework assignment. After they have completed the assignment, tell the students that de las Casas proposed bringing Africans to the New World to take over some of the work from the Indian slaves. Allow discussion about that information. The students will most likely be surprised and even disturbed by this knowledge. After some discussion, explain that once de las Casas saw how they were treated he opposed the harsh condition for African slaves in the same way he had protested the treatment of the Native Americans. Lead the students to understand that there are many sides to people and we have to get all the facts. He is still someone to admire, but was a man of his time. They need to understand the historical perspective — we shouldn’t judge the past by using present-day values and morals. Slavery was an accepted condition of some peoples in his time, although de Las Casas didn’t believe in inhumane treatment for any people. You could finish this activity by having the students write a character study of Bartolome de las Casas.

North Carolina Curriculum Alignment

SOCIAL STUDIES (2003)

Grade 8

- **Goal 1:** The learner will analyze important geographic, political, economic, and social aspects of life in the region prior to the Revolutionary Period.
 - **Objective 1.03:** Compare and contrast the relative importance of differing economic, geographic, religious, and political motives for European exploration.
 - **Objective 1.04:** Evaluate the impact of the Columbian Exchange on the cultures of American Indians, Europeans, and Africans.
 - **Objective 1.05:** Describe the factors that led to the founding and settlement of the American colonies including religious persecution, economic opportunity, adventure, and forced migration.

On the web

Reading guide: Spain and America

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds-lessons/3.2>

These terms and questions will guide students as they read "Spain and America: From Reconquest to Conquest." Filling in the chronological list of dates will enable students to understand the order in which events unfolded in Spain and in America, and answering the questions will encourage students to think critically about the readings in the chapter.

Spain and America: From Reconquest to Conquest

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/3.1>

In 1491, no European knew that North and South America existed. By 1550, Spain -- a small kingdom that had not even existed a century earlier -- controlled the better part of two continents and had become the most powerful nation in Europe. In half a century of brave exploration and brutal conquest, both Europe and America were changed forever.

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Notes

1. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/3.1>.
2. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds-lessons/3.2>.

About the author

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I am currently the Director of a Teaching American History Grant for Buncombe County Schools, Asheville City Schools, and Madison County Schools. I have taught history and English in the seventh and eighth grades for over twenty-six years at Reynolds Middle School in Asheville, North Carolina. I am currently doing adjunct work for Mars Hill College and Western Carolina University. I have a Masters Degree from Western Carolina University and am Nationally Board Certified in Early Adolescence/Social Studies-History. I am certified to teach K-12 and I also have Academically-Intellectually Gifted certification.