

Reading guide: Spain and America

BY PAULINE S. JOHNSON

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.

Worksheet — Spain and America: From Reconquest to Conquest

As you read the article “Spain and America: From Reconquest to Conquest¹” write a phrase for each of the following dates that will help you understand the chronology of the Spanish involvement. You will notice that these dates do not necessarily appear in this order in the article.

4th century BCE

700s

1300

1479

1488

1491

1492

1492

1497

1519

1530

1542

1550

1600s

The following vocabulary terms may be new to you. Some you will have heard of before, but may not recognize their significance in the events before and after Spanish exploration. As you write a phrase for each of these, think about why each word or phrase is important in understanding this chapter.

Iberian Peninsula

Aragon

Portugal

Castile

Berber

Moors

Granada

Reconquista

Ferdinand II of Aragon

Isabella of Castile

al-Andalus

Crusades

Prince Henry “the Navigator”

Bartholomeu Dias

Cape of Good Hope

Vasco da Gama

Genoa

East Indies

Columbian Exchange

Hispañola

Hernan Cortes

Conquistadores

Aztec

Moctezuma

Tenochtitlan

Quetzalcoatl

Inca

Francisco Pizarro

Atahualpa

Huitzilopochtli

Bartoleme de Las Casas

“THE RECONQUISTA AND THE ORIGINS OF SPAIN”

1. What were the three kingdoms that were located on the Iberian peninsula?
2. What three religious groups were involved in what is called the *Reconquista*?
3. What was the result of the *Reconquista*?
4. How did the *Reconquista* affect the Spanish views about themselves and those they conquered?

“INTO THE ‘NEW WORLD’”

1. How did the Europeans and East Asians know about each other?
2. Why were the goods from East Asia so expensive?

3. Why did Spain agree to finance Columbus when so many other European countries had turned him down?
4. Why did the plants and animals in the Western hemisphere evolve so differently from those in the Eastern hemisphere?

“CONQUEST BY SWORD AND GERMS”

1. Why is the term “Indians” an example of the confusion of Columbus?
2. What does Columbus’ journal entry tell you about him?
3. How did disease have an impact on what would become the institution of African slavery in the New World?
4. Extra thinking: In 1519, Hernan Cortez brought horses to the New World. In what ways, positive and negative, did that event change the lives of Indians?
5. How did the Aztec fear that Cortez might be a god affect the Spanish conquest?

“BLOOD AND GOLD”

As you read the next section, “Blood and Gold,” you will learn about some even more disturbing aspects of the conquest.

1. What practice in Tenochtitlan did Cortes and his men find disturbing?
2. Why did the Aztecs practice this?
3. How did the Spanish force the Aztecs to convert to Christianity?

The next part of this section comes from a primary source or eyewitness account. Please consider and answer the following basic questions as you read.

1. Who wrote it?
2. How did de Las Casas get his information?
3. Was he in a position to have witnessed the events?
4. How do you know?
5. When was it written?
6. Where was it written?
7. Why do you think de Las Casas wrote this?

Now, answer the following specific questions about the account:

1. Who are the sheep that de Las Casas writes about?
2. Why do you think de Las Casas referred to them as sheep?
3. What is the contrast that is made with the Spaniards?
4. How many Indians does de Las Casas estimate have been killed in both the mainland and the islands?
5. What reasons does he give for the killing?
6. De Las Casas describes many atrocities that were perpetrated by the Spanish. Why do you think he was so graphic in his descriptions of the events?

7. Did the writing of de Las Casas have any effect on what was happening?

Worksheet: Teacher's guide

As you read the article “Spain and America: From Reconquest to Conquest²” write a phrase for each of the following dates that will help you understand the chronology of the Spanish involvement. You will notice that these dates do not necessarily appear in this order in the article.

4th century BCE

Alexander the Great's empire connected Greece and India

700s

Moors, Berber Muslims from North Africa, had conquered most of the Iberian Peninsula

1300

Muslims controlled only Granada, a very small area in the south of Spain

1479

King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile married

1488

Bartolomeu Dias sailed all the way around the southern tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, proving that there was an ocean route around the continent

1491

The year before the Old World became aware (or perhaps re-aware) of the New World

1492

Reconquest of Spain was finished, Moors and Jews had been expelled from Spain

1492

The first voyage of Columbus who sailed for Spain and landed in the New World instead of Asia

1497

Vasco da Gama followed Dias' route, then sailed north and east to India — opening up the riches of Asia to Portugal

1519

Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico from Cuba

1530

Francisco Pizarro landed in Peru

1542

Bartoleme de Las Casas wrote about the treatment of the Indians by the Spanish

1550

Spain controlled a good deal of North and South America and was a major force in Europe

1600s

Spain was the most powerful country in Europe

The following vocabulary terms may be new to you. Some you will have heard of before, but may not recognize their significance in the events before and after Spanish exploration. As you write a phrase for each of these, think about why each word or phrase is important in understanding this chapter.

Iberian Peninsula

A peninsula in Europe that holds the countries of Spain and Portugal, two of the most powerful countries in the Age of Exploration

Aragon

A small kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula that bordered France and the Mediterranean in the 1400s

Portugal

A kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula bordering the Atlantic Ocean

Castile

A large rural kingdom in the middle of the Iberian Peninsula in the 1400s

Berbers

Muslims, called Moors, from Northern Africa who had invaded the Iberian Peninsula in the 700s

Moors

Berber Muslims

Granada

A small region in Spain that was the only area controlled by the Moors by 1300

Reconquista

Spanish term that denotes the Christian kingdoms retaking the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors during the time between 700 and 1492

Ferdinand II of Aragon

Became the King of Spain when he married Isabella of Castile, uniting their kingdoms

Isabella of Castile

Became the Queen of Spain when she married Ferdinand II of Aragon, uniting their kingdoms

al-Andalus

Arabic word for Muslim-controlled Iberia

Crusades

Religious wars that brought Europeans into contact with goods from the East

Prince Henry “the Navigator”

The Portuguese leader who encouraged exploration in the 1400s

Bartholomeu Dias

Sailed around the southern tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, in 1488

Cape of Good Hope

The southern tip of Africa

Vasco da Gama

Sailed around the southern tip of Africa to India in 1497

Genoa

Independent city-state in northern Italy, birthplace of Columbus

East Indies

The islands of southeast Asia, including Indonesia

Columbian Exchange

The exchange of crops, people, animals, ideas, and diseases between the Old World and the New World after the Columbus voyage

Hispaniola

Present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic

Hernan Cortes

Conqueror of the Aztecs in Mexico in 1519

Conquistadores

Spanish term for the Spanish conquerors

Aztec

Powerful indigenous culture of Mexico and Central America that was conquered by Cortez in 1519

Moctezuma

Leader of the Aztecs

Tenochtitlan

Capital city of the Aztecs

Quetzalcoatl

A fair-skinned Aztec god who was prophesied would return from the east. The Aztecs may have believed that Cortes was this god

Inca

Indigenous people of South America, particularly in the area of Peru, who were conquered by Pizarro in 1530

Francisco Pizarro

Spaniard who, with his small army, conquered the Inca in 1530

Atahualpa

Incan leader who was captured by Pizarro

Huitzilopochtli

Aztec god to whom human sacrifices were dedicated

Bartoleme de Las Casas

Spanish priest who wrote of the Spanish cruelty to the native people of Mexico and the Caribbean in the early 1500s

“THE RECONQUISTA AND THE ORIGINS OF SPAIN”

1. What were the three kingdoms that were located on the Iberian peninsula?
Castile, Portugal, Aragon
2. What three religious groups were involved in what is called the *Reconquista*?
Muslims, Christians, Jews
3. What was the result of the *Reconquista*?
The Muslims and Jews were forced to convert to Christianity or leave the Iberian Peninsula
4. How did the *Reconquista* affect the Spanish views about themselves and those they conquered?

Answers will vary. Some students may quote the historian’s words about Castilian men. Answers could include several of these ideas:

- *Believed they were superior to non-Christians*
- *Believed they had the right to enslave their enemies*
- *Considered themselves to be more militaristic and romantic (honor)*
- *Would endure hardships, yet still be willing and able to fight*
- *Embraced the idea of “heroism”*
- *Wanted land and wealth*

“INTO THE ‘NEW WORLD’”

1. How did the Europeans and East Asians know about each other?
From the time of Alexander the Great, there had been contact. This expanded again at the time of the Crusades.
2. Why were the goods from East Asia so expensive?
The great distances and difficulties in moving goods between East Asia and Europe
3. Why did Spain agree to finance Columbus when so many other European countries had turned him down?
According to the reading, the monarchs of Spain were eager for wealth and the chance to spread the Christian religion.
4. Why did the plants and animals in the Western hemisphere evolve so differently from those in the Eastern hemisphere?
The continents of the two hemispheres had been separated for hundreds of thousands of years.

“CONQUEST BY SWORD AND GERMS”

1. Why is the term “Indians” an example of the confusion of Columbus?
Columbus thought he had arrived in the East Indies so he called the inhabitants of the islands “Indians.”
2. What does Columbus’ journal entry tell you about him?
Answers will vary. Students may note that he concluded that he would be able to control the native cultures, that he was a Christian who wanted to spread his religion, and that he thought slavery was acceptable. Some students may indicate that he seemed to feel somewhat superior in his attitudes.
3. How did disease have an impact on what would become the institution of African slavery in the New World?
Because disease had destroyed the Indian cultures, the Spanish began to import slaves from Africa to work.
4. Extra thinking: In 1519, Hernan Cortez brought horses to the New World. In what ways, positive and negative, did that event change the lives of Indians?
Answers will vary. This question asks for background knowledge from students. Some positives include: Plains Indians adopted the horse to hunt buffalo; and horses made the Indians more mobile. Some negatives include: the Spanish were able to conquer the Aztecs with the help of the horse; and they were very frightening to early cultures.
5. How did the Aztec fear that Cortez might be a god affect the Spanish conquest?
It caused the Aztecs to wait too long to defend themselves.

“BLOOD AND GOLD”

As you read the next section, “Blood and Gold,” you will learn about some even more disturbing aspects of the conquest.

1. What practice in Tenochtitlan did Cortes and his men find disturbing?
Human sacrifices
2. Why did the Aztecs practice this?
They believed that the gods demanded human blood to make sure the sun rose, to ensure a good harvest, or to grant fertility — in crops and humans.

3. How did the Spanish force the Aztecs to convert to Christianity?
Priests destroyed books, idols, and temples of the Aztecs. They were required to convert or be killed.

The next part of this section comes from a primary source, or eyewitness account. Please consider and answer the following basic questions as you read.

1. Who wrote it?
Bartoleme de Las Casas
2. How did de Las Casas get his information?
He saw it.
3. Was he in a position to have witnessed the events?
Yes.
4. How do you know?
He was in the New World and saw these events.
5. When was it written?
This particular source is from 1542.
6. Where was it written?
While it doesn't say directly, it can be assumed that it was written in the New World.
7. Why do you think de Las Casas wrote this?
Most students will indicate that de Las Casas was horrified by the Spanish cruelty to the Indians.

Now, answer the following specific questions about the account:

1. Who are the sheep that de Las Casas writes about?
The Indians
2. Why do you think de Las Casas referred to them as sheep?
Most students will write that sheep are gentle. Some may indicate they could be easily led and are not particularly bright.
3. What is the contrast that is made with the Spaniards?
The Spanish are described as horrible beasts like tigers, wolves, or lions.
4. How many Indians does de Las Casas estimate have been killed in both the mainland and the islands?
He estimates nearly 18 million. (He says 12 million in Mexico and 3 million in Hispaniola, but later states that he fears it is more like 15 million in Mexico.)
5. What reasons does he give for the killing?
He says that it is greed for gold. He also says that the Indians are easy to dominate.
6. De Las Casas describes many atrocities that were perpetrated by the Spanish. Why do you think he was so graphic in his descriptions of the events?
Answers will vary. Most students will conclude that he wanted to shock his readers. Others may write that he wanted to record the horrifying events.
7. Did the writing of de Las Casas have any effect on what was happening?
Yes and no. King Charles V agreed to limit the use and ownership of slaves, but it was not upheld as the Spanish colonists rebelled against the decree. He never did get fair treatment for the Indians.

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

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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Visit us on the web at www.learnnc.org to learn more about topics related to this article, including American Indians, Aragon, Aztecs, Bartolome de Las Casas, Caribbean, Castile, Central America, Christopher Columbus, Columbian Exchange, Europe, Hernando Cortes, Iberian Peninsula, Incas, Mexico, Moctezuma, New World, Portugal, Reconquista, South America, Spain, Tenochtitlan, exploration, geography, and history.

Notes

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