

# Theories of migration

BY PAULINE S. JOHNSON

In this lesson, students will read about and evaluate differing theories about the migration of the first people to the Americas.

## Learning outcomes

- Students will examine differing theories about the peopling of the Americas
- Students will learn about advances in science and technology that have added to the study of history
- Students will evaluate their own thoughts about the differing theories

## Teacher planning

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Wall map of the world (If you don't have a map in your classroom, you may want to use the map below. Click the "about the map" link below the image for a larger version.)
- Chart paper or newsprint
- Marker
- Computer with internet access for each group of students OR one computer with an LCD projector
- One copy of the theories chart for each student

### TIME REQUIRED FOR LESSON

40 minutes

Homework time will be needed.

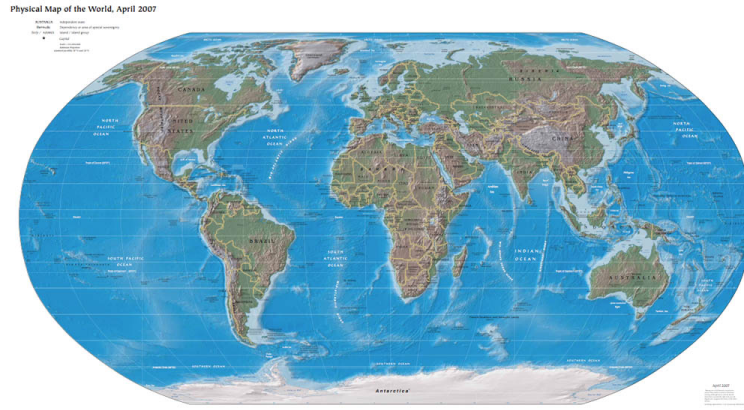


Figure 1. 2007 physical world map from the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas.

## Procedure

1. Project or put up a modern world map.
2. Explain that people did not originate in North and South America.
3. Ask the question, “How did the first people get to the Americas?”
4. Give the students several minutes to think about this question while examining the map. You may also have the students discuss these in cooperative pairs.
5. Take brainstorming ideas from the students and record them on chart paper.
6. You will most likely find that many of the students have heard of the Beringia migration theory, but that they will not have heard of the more recent discoveries that are leading to new theories.
7. Explain that the class will be reading about some of the major theories about the movement of people to America.
8. Put the students into groups of three or four with a laptop and have them access the page “First Peoples<sup>1</sup>” or project the page with an LCD projector. If you do the latter, you will need to advance the page as the students read.
9. Give each student a copy of the theories chart.
10. Explain that the students will be filling in the first two columns of the chart as they read “First Peoples” and “The Mystery of the First Americans<sup>2</sup>.” In the first column (the one with the names of the theories) students should record a short description of the theory. In the second column students should list the technology and science that has enabled scientists to come up with that theory. Let them know that one of the theories (“massive die-out”) is related to the first people, but actually describes another Pleistocene issue.
11. Allow the students 20 to 30 minutes to read “First Peoples” and “The Mystery of the First Americans” and to fill in their chart. Students may need more time, depending on their reading levels. Encourage them to work with the other members of their group.

12. You may choose to go over the first two columns as a class. See the teacher guide for the theories chart.
13. Since the last column encourages critical thinking, the students will need more time than they would probably have in the classroom. Assign the third column for homework. Have students think about each of the theories they have read and discussed. Encourage them to record their views of the theories as well as questions they may have about them.
14. When students bring their homework in the following day, ask them to share some of their thinking.

## Assessment

Assessment for this lesson is cooperative work in groups and discussion. Students should also have a completed theories chart. Use the teacher guide for the chart as a guide for the first two columns, but note that students' answers will have differing specifics. The third column should be filled with student ideas, but these will vary.

## Theories about the arrival of the first Americans

Theory	Scientific evidence	Your thoughts about this theory
Clovis		
Monte Verde		
Kennewick Man		
Massive die-out		
Genetic testing		
Coastal migration		
Comparing humans		

## Teacher guide — Theories about the arrival of the first Americans

Theory	Scientific evidence	Your thoughts about this theory
<p><b>Clovis</b> Clovis points were located in the American Southwest near skeletons of megafauna. The earliest people in America came across the land bridge, Beringia, from Asia during the Pleistocene.</p>	<p>Stratigraphy; scientists knew when the megafauna became extinct so they could date the projectile points; cross-dating; geologic evidence about the glaciers and when an ice-free corridor could have opened.</p>	
<p><b>Monte Verde</b> An archaeological site in Monte Verde, Chile has been dated before the time of the Clovis culture.</p>	<p>Artifacts were found at the site and were dated. Although not directly stated, it could be assumed that the dating was some form of radiocarbon dating. Other sites also seem to indicate that they were settled before the Clovis culture.</p>	
<p><b>Kennewick Man</b> The skull of a man was found in Washington state. After testing it was found that he was related to the Ainu of Japan.</p>	<p>DNA testing to determine ancestry; perhaps the first Americans were from several different areas.</p>	
<p><b>Massive die-out</b> Consists of theories about why the megafauna died out about 11,000 years ago. Did humans hunt them to extinction or did they bring diseases with them?</p>	<p>Scientists are studying climatic changes; examination of the remains of megafauna.</p>	
<p><b>Genetic testing</b> Genetic testing indicates that modern Native Americans are descended from Asians from the Siberia region.</p>	<p>DNA testing</p>	
<p><b>Coastal migration</b> The first Americans may have migrated down the western coast of the Americas in boats and settled in ice-free coastal areas. This could have occurred well before the Clovis culture arrived in the interior of the U.S.</p>	<p>Geologic evidence about the glaciers and when a ice-free corridor could have opened; confirmed discoveries of settlements earlier than the Clovis culture in Monte Verde, Chile; Kennewick Man discovery in coastal Washington; discovery of ancient human remains in California on what was an island in the Pleistocene</p>	
<p><b>Comparing humans</b> Some first Americans came from Europe or Africa or Australia.</p>	<p>Scientists examine the skulls of ancient humans looking for similarities or differences.</p>	

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## 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 1.02:** Identify and describe American Indians who inhabited the regions that became Carolina and assess their impact on the colony.

### National Standards

In addition to meeting objectives of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, this lesson plan addresses the following national standards.

#### **U.S HISTORY STANDARDS**

Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

- D. Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations.
- G. Draw upon data in historical maps.

Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

- A. Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas.
- C. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation, including the importance of the individual, the influence of ideas.
- E. Distinguish between unsupported expressions of opinion and informed hypotheses grounded in historical evidence.
- H. Hold interpretations of history as tentative.
- I. Evaluate major debates among historians.

Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making

- A. Identify issues and problems in the past.

#### **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS**

Standard 9: The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.

Standard 12: The process, patterns, and functions of human settlement.

Standard 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past.

## On the web

### First peoples

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/2.1>

Beringia was a wide land bridge between Alaska and Siberia that was periodically exposed during the last Great Ice Age. According to a widely-held theory, the first people to live in North America were Asians who followed animal herds across Beringia. The Paleoindians living in North Carolina by 9000 BCE were descendents of these first North Americans. Nobody knows how long it took before the first Paleoindians reached North Carolina, but the few artifacts they left create an image of their past.

### The mystery of the first Americans

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/2.2>

In the second half of the twentieth century, archaeologists agreed that those “first Americans” migrated from Asia across Beringia and into North America between fourteen and twenty thousand years ago. Recently, though, new evidence has come to light that has led some archaeologists to doubt that theory and to suggest new possibilities.

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## Notes

1. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/2.1>.
2. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/2.2>.

## About the author

### PAULINE S. JOHNSON

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.

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### Figure 1 (page 2)

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