

United States History: Exploration to the Present Day

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Unit 1: Beginnings through the French and Indian War

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Week 1: Day 1: Introduction

I hope you'll enjoy this study of United States history. Whether you're reading about history, doing an activity, researching on your own, or reading one of the fun historical fiction books along the way, remember that God had a plan for the United States—and He still has a plan for our future. That plan included people—some famous and some you've never heard of. That plan includes you and me as well. Learn from these people of the past. Find their strengths and weaknesses. See where they relied on the Lord and where they relied on themselves instead. Learn from their failures as well as their successes.

As we travel through this course, I will ask you to write some papers, take notes, and answer questions. Keep a binder with some paper in it to take notes from things you read and write answers to questions.

As you read the materials in this course, please be aware that our goal is to take an honest look at history, and sometimes that includes looking at ugly things people said to and about each other. You may encounter terms and phrases that are derogatory to one group of people or another. This does not in any way reflect the point of view of the course author or SchoolhouseTeachers.com but is included solely because it is a part of the history being studied.

Where shall we begin? Leif Erikson? He came, but he landed in Canada and didn't stay. Columbus? He discovered the "new world," but he didn't get to the land where the United States is today. Settlers in St. Augustine? They were just there to protect Spain's South American holdings, and Florida didn't become a state until 1845. The Roanoke Colony? That was short-lived, and we don't even know what happened to them. Or maybe Jamestown? Let's start with the Native Americans—the ones who were here first.

What groups of Native Americans were in the New World when Europeans arrived? Take a look at the map below that shows some of the main tribes of Native Americans in the area that would later become the United States.

Choose two different tribes to research. Write a five-paragraph research paper answering these questions:

- How were these tribes similar?
- How were these tribes different?
- How did these tribes relate to Europeans?

You will have one week to work on this paper. Pace yourself!

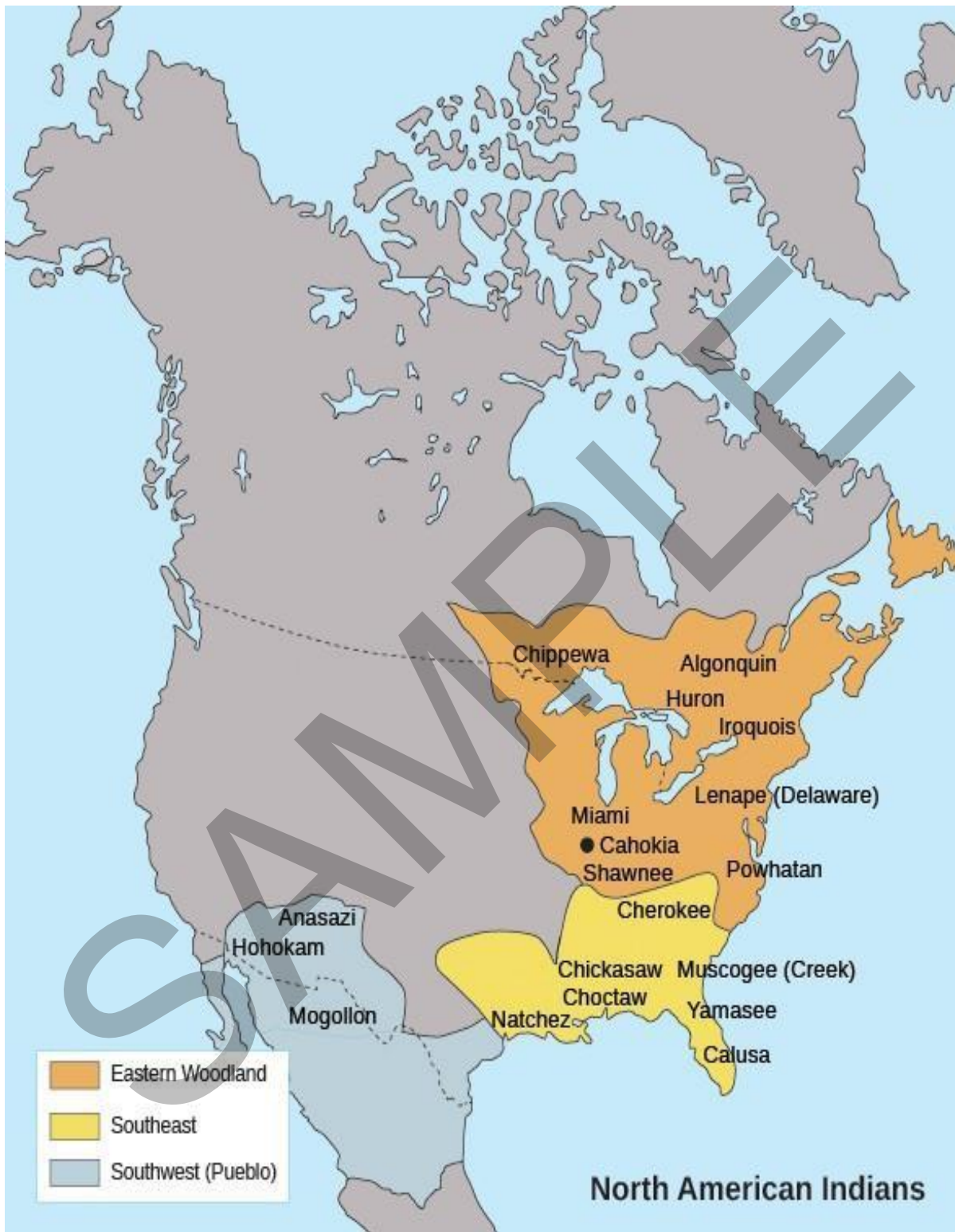


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Week 1: Day 2: Columbus and other Explorers

- Work on your Native American research paper.
- Read and take notes about [Christopher Columbus](#). Think about how things changed in Europe because of this discovery. What was the motivation of Columbus and others who came to the New World in this era?
- Read the following about colonization and exploration and take notes.

SPANISH EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST¹

The Spanish established the first European settlements in the Americas, beginning in the Caribbean and, by 1600, extending throughout Central and South America. Thousands of Spaniards flocked to the Americas seeking wealth and status. The most famous of these Spanish adventurers are Christopher Columbus (who, though Italian himself, explored on behalf of the Spanish monarchs), Hernán Cortés, and Francisco Pizarro.

The history of Spanish exploration begins with the history of Spain itself. During the fifteenth century, Spain hoped to gain advantage over its rival, Portugal. The marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1469 unified Catholic Spain and began the process of building a nation that could compete for worldwide power. Since the 700s, much of Spain had been under Islamic rule, and King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I, arch-defenders of the Catholic Church against Islam, were determined to defeat the Muslims in Granada, the last Islamic stronghold in Spain. In 1492, they completed the Reconquista: the centuries-long Christian conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. The Reconquista marked another step forward in the process of making Spain an imperial power, and Ferdinand and Isabella were now ready to look further afield.

Their goals were to expand Catholicism and to gain a commercial advantage over Portugal. To those ends, Ferdinand and Isabella sponsored extensive Atlantic exploration. Spain's most famous explorer, Christopher Columbus, was actually from Genoa, Italy. He believed that, using calculations based on other mariners' journeys, he could chart a westward route to India, which could be used to expand European trade and spread Christianity. Starting in 1485, he approached Genoese, Venetian, Portuguese, English, and Spanish monarchs, asking for ships and funding to explore this westward route. All those he petitioned—including Ferdinand and Isabella at first—rebuffed him; their nautical experts all concurred that Columbus's estimates of the width of the Atlantic Ocean were far too low. However, after three years of entreaties, and more importantly, the completion of the Reconquista, Ferdinand and Isabella agreed to finance Columbus's expedition in 1492, supplying him with three ships: the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*.

The Spanish monarchs knew that Portuguese mariners had reached the southern tip of Africa and sailed the Indian Ocean. They understood that the Portuguese would soon reach Asia, and in this competitive race to reach the Far East, the Spanish rulers decided to act.

¹ Excerpted from *U.S. History* by Corbett et al., 2016, pp. 36–40. Modified for daily use under [CC BY 4.0](#). Download for free at <http://cnx.org/content/col11740/latest/>.

Columbus held erroneous views that shaped his thinking about what he would encounter as he sailed west. He believed the earth to be much smaller than its actual size and, since he did not know of the existence of the Americas, he fully expected to land in Asia. On October 12, 1492, however, he made landfall on an island in the Bahamas. He then sailed to an island he named **Hispaniola** (present-day Dominican Republic and Haiti). Believing he had landed in the East Indies, Columbus called the native Taínos he found there “Indios,” giving rise to the term “Indian” for any native people of the New World. Upon Columbus’s return to Spain, the Spanish crown bestowed on him the title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea and named him governor and viceroy of the lands he had discovered. As a devoted Catholic, Columbus had agreed with Ferdinand and Isabella prior to sailing west that part of the expected wealth from his voyage would be used to continue the fight against Islam.

Columbus’s 1493 letter—or *probanza de mérito* (proof of merit)—describing his “discovery” of a New World did much to inspire excitement in Europe. *Probanzas de méritos* were reports and letters written by Spaniards in the New World to the Spanish crown, designed to win royal patronage. Today, they highlight the difficult task of historical work; while the letters are primary sources, historians need to understand the context and the culture in which the conquistadors, as the Spanish adventurers came to be called, wrote them and distinguish their bias and subjective nature. While they are filled with distortions and fabrications, *probanzas de méritos* are still useful in illustrating the expectation of wealth among the explorers as well as their view that native peoples would not pose a serious obstacle to colonization.

In 1493, Columbus sent two copies of a *probanza de mérito* to the Spanish king and queen and their minister of finance, Luis de Santángel. Santángel had supported Columbus’s voyage, helping him to obtain funding from Ferdinand and Isabella. Copies of the letter were soon circulating all over Europe, spreading news of the wondrous new land that Columbus had “discovered.” Columbus would make three more voyages over the next decade, establishing Spain’s first settlement in the New World on the island of Hispaniola. Many other Europeans followed in Columbus’s footsteps, drawn by dreams of winning wealth by sailing west. Another Italian, Amerigo Vespucci, sailing for the Portuguese crown, explored the South American coastline between 1499 and 1502. Unlike Columbus, he realized the Americas were not part of Asia but lands unknown to Europeans. Vespucci’s widely published accounts of his voyages fueled speculation and intense interest in the New World among Europeans. Among those who read Vespucci’s reports was the German mapmaker Martin Waldseemüller. Using the explorer’s first name as a label for the new landmass, Waldseemüller attached “America” to his map of the New World in 1507, and the name stuck.

The 1492 Columbus landfall accelerated the rivalry between Spain and Portugal, and the two powers vied for domination through the acquisition of new lands. In the 1480s, Pope Sixtus IV had granted Portugal the right to all land south of the Cape Verde islands, leading the Portuguese king to claim that the lands discovered by Columbus belonged to Portugal, not Spain. Seeking to ensure that Columbus’s finds would remain Spanish, Spain’s monarchs turned to the Spanish-born Pope Alexander VI, who issued two papal decrees in 1493 that gave legitimacy to Spain’s Atlantic claims at the expense of Portugal. Hoping to salvage Portugal’s Atlantic holdings, King João II began negotiations with Spain. The resulting Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 drew a north-to-south line through South America; Spain gained territory west of the line, while Portugal

retained the lands east of the line, including the east coast of Brazil.

Columbus's discovery opened a floodgate of Spanish exploration. Inspired by tales of rivers of gold and timid, malleable natives, later Spanish explorers were relentless in their quest for land and gold. Hernán Cortés hoped to gain hereditary privilege for his family, tribute payments and labor from natives, and an annual pension for his service to the crown. Cortés arrived on Hispaniola in 1504 and took part in the conquest of that island. In anticipation of winning his own honor and riches, Cortés later explored the Yucatán Peninsula. In 1519, he entered Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztec (Mexica) Empire. He and his men were astonished by the incredibly sophisticated causeways, gardens, and temples in the city, but they were horrified by the practice of human sacrifice that was part of the Aztec religion. Above all else, the Aztec wealth in gold fascinated the Spanish adventurers.

Hoping to gain power over the city, Cortés took Moctezuma, the Aztec ruler, hostage. The Spanish then murdered hundreds of high-ranking Mexica during a festival to celebrate Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. This angered the people of Tenochtitlán, who rose up against the interlopers in their city. Cortés and his people fled for their lives, running down one of Tenochtitlán's causeways to safety on the shore. Smarting from their defeat at the hands of the Aztec, Cortés slowly created alliances with native peoples who resented Aztec rule. It took nearly a year for the Spanish and the tens of thousands of native allies who joined them to defeat the Mexica in Tenochtitlán, which they did by laying siege to the city. Only by playing upon the disunity among the diverse groups in the Aztec Empire were the Spanish able to capture the grand city of Tenochtitlán. In August 1521, having successfully fomented civil war as well as fended off rival Spanish explorers, Cortés claimed Tenochtitlán for Spain and renamed it Mexico City.

The traditional European narrative of exploration presents the victory of the Spanish over the Aztec as an example of the superiority of the Europeans over the savage Indians. However, the reality is far more complex. When Cortés explored central Mexico, he encountered a region simmering with native conflict. Far from being unified and content under Aztec rule, many peoples in Mexico resented it and were ready to rebel. One group in particular, the Tlaxcalan, threw their lot in with the Spanish, providing as many as 200,000 fighters in the siege of Tenochtitlán. The Spanish also brought smallpox into the valley of Mexico. The disease took a heavy toll on the people in Tenochtitlán, playing a much greater role in the city's demise than did Spanish force of arms.

Cortés was also aided by a Nahuatl woman called Malintzin (also known as La Malinche or Doña Marina, her Spanish name), whom the natives of Tabasco gave him as tribute. Malintzin translated for Cortés in his dealings with Moctezuma and, whether willingly or under pressure, entered into a physical relationship with him. Their son, Martín, may have been the first mestizo (person of mixed indigenous American and European descent). Malintzin remains a controversial figure in the history of the Atlantic World; some people view her as a traitor because she helped Cortés conquer the Aztecs, while others see her as a victim of European expansion. In either case, she demonstrates one way in which native peoples responded to the arrival of the Spanish.

Without her, Cortés would not have been able to communicate, and without the language bridge, he surely would have been less successful in destabilizing the Aztec Empire. By this and other means, native people helped shape the conquest of the Americas.

Spain's acquisitiveness seemingly knew no bounds as groups of its explorers searched for the next trove of instant riches. One such explorer, Francisco Pizarro, made his way to the Spanish Caribbean in 1509, drawn by the promise of wealth and titles. He participated in successful expeditions in Panama before following rumors of Inca wealth to the south. Although his first efforts against the Inca Empire in the 1520s failed, Pizarro captured the Inca emperor Atahualpa in 1532 and executed him one year later. In 1533, Pizarro founded Lima, Peru. Like Cortés, Pizarro had to combat not only the natives of the new worlds he was conquering, but also competitors from his own country; a Spanish rival assassinated him in 1541.

Spain's drive to enlarge its empire led other hopeful conquistadors to push farther into the Americas, hoping to replicate the success of Cortés and Pizarro. Hernando de Soto had participated in Pizarro's conquest of the Inca, and from 1539 to 1542, he led expeditions to what is today the southeastern United States, looking for gold. He and his followers explored what is now Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Texas. Everywhere they traveled, they brought European diseases, which claimed thousands of native lives as well as the lives of the explorers. In 1542, de Soto himself died during the expedition. The surviving Spaniards, numbering a little over three hundred, returned to Mexico City without finding the much-anticipated mountains of gold and silver.

Francisco Vásquez de Coronado was born into a noble family and went to Mexico, then called New Spain, in 1535. He presided as governor over the province of Nueva Galicia, where he heard rumors of wealth to the north: a golden city called Quivira. Between 1540 and 1542, Coronado led a large expedition of Spaniards and native allies to the lands north of Mexico City, and for the next several years, they explored the area that is now the southwestern United States. During the winter of 1540-41, the explorers waged war against the Tiwa in present-day New Mexico. Rather than leading to the discovery of gold and silver, however, the expedition simply left Coronado bankrupt.

THE SPANISH GOLDEN AGE²

The exploits of European explorers had a profound impact both in the Americas and back in Europe. An exchange of ideas, fueled and financed in part by New World commodities, began to connect European nations and, in turn, to touch the parts of the world Europeans conquered. In Spain, gold and silver from the Americas helped to fuel a golden age, the Siglo de Oro, when Spanish art and literature flourished. Riches poured in from the colonies, and new ideas poured in from other countries and new lands. The Hapsburg dynasty, which ruled a collection of territories including Austria, the Netherlands, Naples, Sicily, and Spain, encouraged and financed the work of painters, sculptors, musicians, architects, and writers, resulting in a blooming of

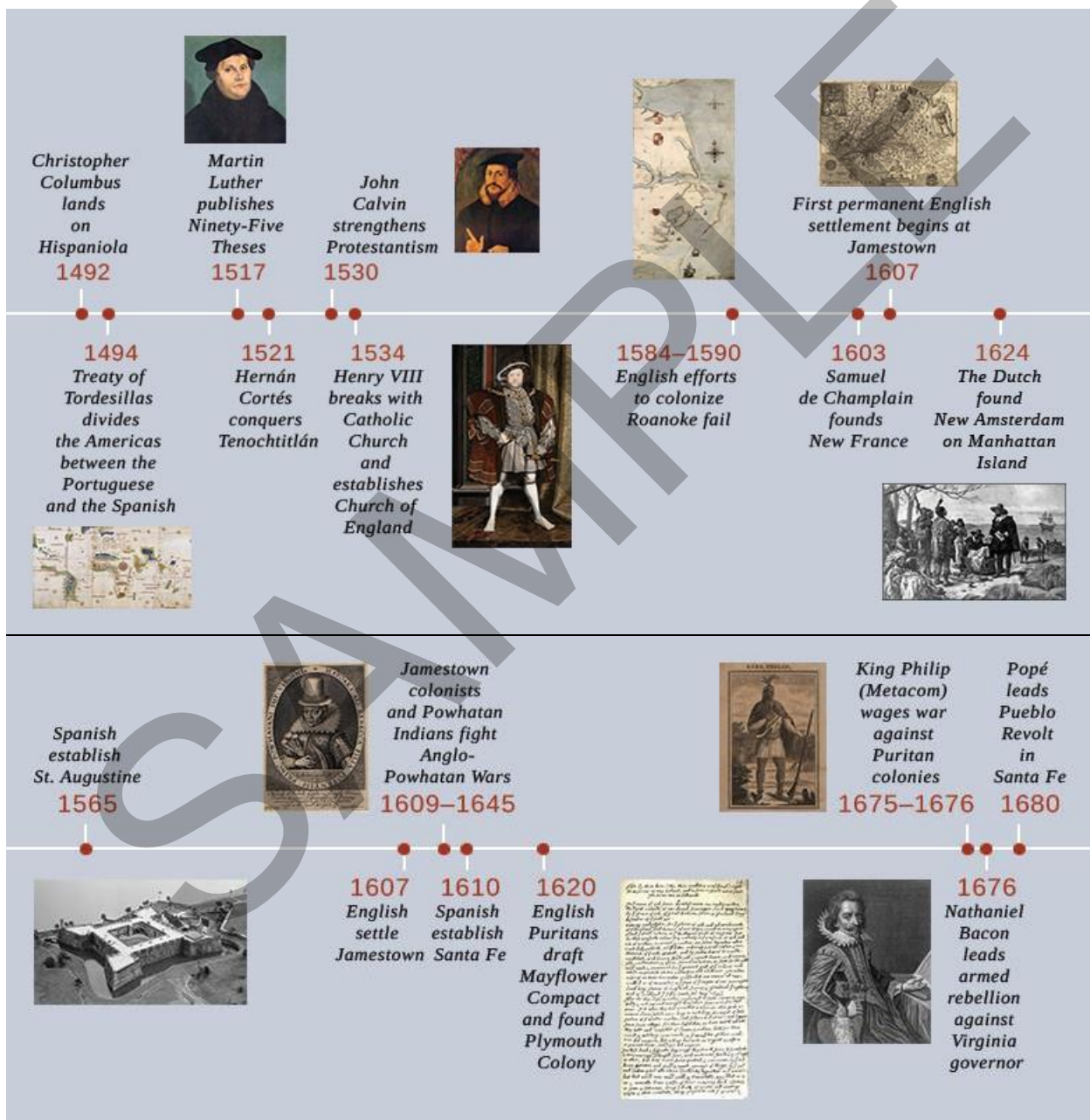
² Excerpted from *U.S. History* by Corbett et al., 2016, page 41. Modified for daily use under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). Download for free at <http://cnx.org/content/col11740/latest/>.

Spanish Renaissance culture. One of this period's most famous works is the novel *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, by Miguel de Cervantes. This two-volume book (1605 and 1618) told a colorful tale of an *hidalgo* (gentleman) who reads so many tales of chivalry and knighthood that he becomes unable to tell reality from fiction. With his faithful sidekick Sancho Panza, Don Quixote leaves reality behind and sets out to revive chivalry by doing battle with what he perceives as the enemies of Spain.

SAMPLE

Week 1: Day 3: Roanoke

As in any history course, you will need to keep a timeline of events. Many of these events may not be covered in this course, but they will give perspective for you to understand what was happening in the world at the time. Here are some events for you to include on your timeline. If, as you study, you find others you would like to include (such as dates and places of different explorers), feel free. It's your timeline.



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What did the arriving Europeans think of the people they encountered?

- Read [The First English Colony](#) in Roanoke and write a paragraph answering the following questions:
 - Why were the English exploring this area at this time?
 - What were the problems they encountered?
 - What was the outcome of this first attempt at colonization?
- Read the background material on [Thomas Harriot, Trumpet of Roanoke](#).

Thomas Harriot's Introduction³

The treatise whereof for your more readie view & easier understanding I will divide into three speciall parts. In the first I will make declaration of such commodities there already found or to be raised, which will not onely serve the ordinary turnes of you which are and shall bee the planters and inhabitants, but such an overplus sufficiently to bee yielded, or by men of skill to bee provided, as by way of trafficke and exchange with our owne nation of England, will enrich your selves the providers; those that shal deal with you; the enterprisers in general; and greatly profit our owne countrey men, to supply them with most things which heretofore they have bene faine to provide either of strangers or of our enemies: which commodities for distinction sake, I call Merchantable.

In the second, I will set downe all the comodities which wee know the countrey by our experience doeth yeld of it selfe for victuall, and sustenance of mans life; such as is usually fed upon by the inhabitants of the countrey, as also by us during the time we were there.

In the last part I will make mention generally of such other commodities besides, as I am able to remember, and as I shall thinke behooffull for those that shall inhabite, and plant there to knowe of; which specially concerne building, as also some other necessary uses: with a briefe description of the nature and maners of the people of the countrey.

(Don't you love their unusual spelling? Webster's dictionary, which standardized English spelling, wouldn't be written for a couple more centuries.)

- Put yourself in the place of a person in England in 1590. You have just read about Harriot's book. You must write a letter to a friend, who has not seen it, describing to him:
 - What types of things would be in the book? Provide details.
 - How did Harriot come to write it?
 - What is the book's significance? What does it show about the New World and Europeans' early reactions/interactions with it?
 - What are your reactions to the images?
 - Would you consider migrating to this new world, based on what you have seen? Why?

³ ["Images of the New World,"](#) National Endowment for the Humanities. Modified for daily use under [CC BY 4.0](#).