

Should we Still Celebrate Columbus Day?



A Structured Academic Controversy Lesson

By

Robert Wnukowski

World History II

Phoebus High School

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Overview:

In this lesson students will explore issues surrounding the celebration of Columbus Day. Using their text, an interview, and a number of researched arguments, students will answer the question, should we still celebrate Columbus Day? Students will work together in small groups of four to deliberate the issue. Within the group, students will pair up; each pair taking turns delivering arguments for and against the celebration. In the course of working towards a consensus, students will learn about Christopher Columbus, First Americans, slavery, exploration, and colonization of the New World. To assess comprehension of the material and successful presentation of arguments, students will write an editorial discussing if and how Columbus Day should be celebrated.

Grade Level/Class:

This structured academic controversy lesson is designed for a World History II class composed of tenth and ninth graders.

Time:

This lesson is designed for a 90 minute block schedule class.

Background Information:

The first recorded celebration to honor European discovery of America took place on October 12, 1792 on the 300th anniversary of Columbus landing in the New World. One hundred years later, President Benjamin Harrison urged American citizens to celebrate the 400th anniversary, resulting in the creation and recital of the Pledge of Allegiance. The first state to recognize the day as a holiday was Colorado in 1905. It was FDR that finally established October 12th as the official day and Nixon in 1971 who made it a national holiday.

Today Columbus Day is celebrated with parades, parties, and festivals throughout the country. Businesses, government buildings, and schools close to honor the accomplishments of Christopher Columbus. The day has morphed into an Italian heritage day in many portions of the country, combining patriotism and a cultural celebration. There are however several groups, and a growing amount of people who do not celebrate Columbus Day, and hope to strike it from the calendar. Several Native American organizations, civil liberties groups, African Americans, and others disagree with a celebration of the man who began the series of events that led to conquest, destruction, and removal of the indigenous population, as well as the dawn of African slavery in America. The divergent interests of a number of actors have led to the current controversy.

Rationale:

A lesson on the controversy surrounding Christopher Columbus Day is a valid topic to teach. Through this lesson students will learn about Christopher Columbus, his accomplishments, and the implications of his exploration. Students will also learn about early exploration and Spanish colonization of the New World. This lesson provides information on Columbus that is sometimes left out of textbooks and overlooked by teachers. In a larger context of historical understanding, students will understand how a singular event can profoundly affect the world and history. The content contained in the lesson satisfies almost all objectives for the

VA SOL 4 for World History while presenting and describing the aspects of the Columbian exchange. Of added importance is the opportunity to discuss historical implications of slavery, the middle passage, and the role of forced African immigrants to the New World.

The benefits of implementing a structured academic controversy are numerous. Aside from learning content material, students will engage in discussion. In small groups students must participate and contribute to the deliberation. A SAC also helps students to build discussion skills, their ability to present an argument, and defend it. Participation in a SAC improves a student's aptitude for analyzing information and working cooperatively to solve a problem. Another benefit of a SAC is that students understand the value of learning both sides of an issue to either dismiss or strengthen previous conceptions. Lastly, it differentiates the way in which students learn and gives them more control over their learning while providing more opportunities for them to lead discussions.

Objectives:

1. Students will understand how Christopher Columbus, conquistadors, and early Spanish Colonization impacted the European Age of Discovery (WHII 4a.).
2. Students will learn the components of the Columbian Exchange and the triangular trade between Europe, Africa, and the New World.
3. By exploring Columbus Day's cultural and historic issues, students will demonstrate they know how to form reasoned judgments and present structured arguments (NCSS 1g.).
4. The class will demonstrate they have learned the ability to support an argument for both sides of the issue by writing a letter to an editor.

Assessment:

In order to assess comprehension of the content and the ability to deliver a supported argument, students will write a letter to an editor. The class will write a letter to an editor which answers the question, should we celebrate Columbus Day? If students believe that Columbus Day should be celebrated, they must support their answer with evidence from their argument sheets. They must also discuss how Columbus Day should be celebrated, whether they would leave it the way it is, or modify it. Students that argue Columbus Day should not be celebrated must use support from their list of arguments. Students who disagree with a celebration of Columbus will then tell the editor how they would change the holiday, or if they would create a new one. Students will closely follow the attached rubric.

Content and Instructional Strategies:

- I. The Issue
 - The Perennial Issue-celebration of historic figures
 - The Case Issue-Should we still celebrate Columbus Day?

- II. The Hook-**10 minutes**

To engage students in the issue students will watch a recent video interview that explores the controversial issue of celebrating Columbus Day. Students will then read background information which presents a historical context for the holiday and controversy. Following this students will answer several questions that clarify their understanding of what a controversial issue is, and why this is an example.

Students will be organized into groups of four. They will further be broken down into pairs. Pairs will work together to formulate arguments and present their positions. Because this is the first SAC my students are participating in, they will receive a short briefing on proper participation in a SAC. They will be given a worksheet that outlines the steps and requirements for successful participation while the instructor explains each point.

III. **Round One-20 minutes**

Groups will all receive handouts that present opposing positions on the controversial issue. Half the group will read a position for celebrating Columbus Day, and the other half will receive a position that opposes the celebration. Explain to each group that they will have 7 minutes to read their argument sheet. Afterwards they will have 5 minutes to work with their partner and rank the top three or four arguments they want to propose to the other pair in the group. To scaffold their notes, they will rank their arguments on a worksheet titled "SAC Notes."

After they have prepared their argument, the "for celebration" pair will have three minutes to present. The other pair will then have a one minute clarification session to ask questions about the other group. Afterward they will switch roles. The "against celebration" pair will have three minutes to present, followed by another one minute clarification session

IV. **Round Two- 20 minutes**

Round one will be repeated except this time student pairs will swap positions. Pairs will receive new positions sheets with different arguments. Pairs that were for celebration of Columbus Day will now argue against the celebration while those that opposed the celebration will now present a position that supports the celebration. The group will spend 7 minutes reading their position, and then 5 minutes ranking arguments on their worksheet and preparing their argument.

Once each group has prepared their position, the new "for celebration" pair will present, followed by a one minute clarification session. Next the new "against celebration" group will present their position, again followed by a one minute clarification session.

V. **Group Discussion-10 minutes**

After each pair has had a chance to present both positions on the issue, the group will participate in a discussion. In this discussion students will attempt to reach a consensus. Groups will have 5 minutes to talk amongst themselves about the strongest arguments for each position and try to come up with an answer to the question, "should we celebrate Columbus Day?"

After groups have worked towards consensus, the teacher will lead a 5 minute class discussion. Groups will share their positions and debrief.

VI. Assessment-30 minutes

The teacher will present a worksheet explaining the assessment students will complete. Students will receive their assessment along with a rubric for how it will be graded. After students understand what they need to do, they will have the remainder of the class period to complete it.

Resources:

- Columbus Day Controversy Video
<<http://pahomepage.com/content/fulltext/?cid=49601>>
- “Should Columbus Day be Celebrated?” background information
- The Order of Sons of Italy in America in Washington D.C.
<http://www.osia.org/public/pdf/Celebrate_Col_Day.pdf>
- University of North Carolina Department of Geography.
<<http://www.unc.edu/~grdobbs/nocolumb.html>>.
- The Conquest of Paradise by Kirkpatrick Sale
- “The Christopher Columbus Controversy.” *The Los Angeles Times*
- “In Person; In Defense of Columbus.” *The New York Times*
- Mac notebook
- Computer projector

Differentiation:

This structured academic controversy lesson is designed for a class of majority 10th graders with some 9th graders as well. Many of the students read below their grade level. Because a significant portion of students read at a seventh or eighth grade reading level, positions sheets have been excerpted into bulleted form. For students with higher reading ability, or for a gifted class, I would distribute the original sources, and introduce students to op ed articles. In order to assist students with reading difficulties, I have allotted more time for each round. The teacher should be vigilant in their observation of how the lesson is carried out and move on or slow down as needed.

When presenting a SAC lesson to students who have never encountered such a learning style, the teacher should model the proper conduction of the lesson. In this lesson students will receive a SAC skills worksheet that outlines proper student participation. Before beginning the lesson, the teacher will go over the worksheet with the class. If possible, instructors may choose to show a video highlight of a successfully conducted SAC lesson. As my students become more comfortable with a SAC, I hope to videotape a final lesson to be used next year as a model.

Adaptations/Accommodations:

The following is a list of adaptations and accommodations of students with an IEP or 504 Plan that will participate in the lesson, and are relevant to instruction. The following accommodations have been implemented for students diagnosed with AD/HD.

- Preferential seating conducive to academic performance
- Extra class periods to complete assignments and homework
- Use of positive reinforcement by teacher
- Students who become frustrated may step outside the class or use another room for quiet independent study

- Provide study guides, class notes, written copies of oral instruction, and completed versions of worksheets.

Reflection:

The biggest issue I expect to face in teaching this structured academic controversy is participation. My students have not participated in a SAC before. I plan on briefing them on a SAC, and how they should participate, but I don't have a concrete model I can present them. Although we will go over proper participation and the structure of the lesson, I will reinforce instruction as students begin each portion of the lesson. My students are accustomed to lecture and worksheets, so I am not sure how they will react to this much discussion.

Structured Academic Controversy

Should Columbus Day be Celebrated?

Columbus Day Controversy

Reported by Eric Sheiner- October 13th, 2008

Directions:

After watching the video clip of a recent interview, and reading the background information below, answer the following questions on your own, on a separate sheet of paper and turn it in.

Background Information:

The first recorded celebration honoring the discovery of America by Europeans took place on October 12, 1792 in New York City. The event celebrated the 300th anniversary of Columbus' landing in the New World.

San Francisco's Italian community held their first Columbus Day celebration in 1869. In 1892, President Benjamin Harrison urged citizens to participate in the 400th anniversary celebration of Columbus' first voyage. It was during this event that the Pledge of Allegiance, written by Francis Bellamy, was recited publically for the first time.

Colorado was the first state to observe the holiday in 1905. In 1937, President Roosevelt proclaimed October 12 as "Columbus Day" and in 1971, President Nixon declared the second Monday of October a national holiday.

Today many schools and businesses across the nation are closed in honor of Columbus Day. The nation observes the day with parades and parties, as well as with protests, demonstrations, and alternative holidays. Many Americans see Columbus as a hero, but more attention is being directed towards Columbus' connection to the conquest of the Native Americans, spread of disease, forced religious conversion, and slavery.

Questions:

1. In your own words, what is a controversial issue?
2. What makes the celebration of Columbus Day controversial?
3. Who do you think supports the celebration of Columbus Day?
4. What groups of people might be opposed or against the celebration of Columbus Day?

Columbus Controversy-Round ONE

Arguments FOR

- Columbus Day recognizes the achievements of a great Renaissance explorer who founded the first permanent European settlement in the New World. The arrival of Columbus in 1492 marks the beginning of recorded history in America.
- Columbus Day celebrates the beginning of cultural exchange between America and Europe. After Columbus, came millions of European immigrants who brought their art, music, science, medicine, philosophy and religious principles to America. These contributions have helped shape the United States and include Greek democracy, Roman law, Judeo-Christian ethics and the tenet (belief) that all men are created equal.
- Columbus Day is one of America's oldest and most Patriotic holidays. The holiday has been celebrated since 1792. Then in 1892, the pledge of allegiance was written in honor of the 400th anniversary of his first voyage. That year, President Benjamin Harrison declared Columbus Day a legal holiday.
- By opening America, Columbus brought the ideas and technology of scientists, philosophers, inventors, writers, and thinkers that contributed to the creation and success of the United States as a democracy and world power.
- The United States has a significant collection of Columbus memorabilia, including his desk, papers, and the cross he used to claim the New World for Spain. These are in the Columbus Chapel in Boalsburg, Pennsylvania.
- In 1971 Columbus Day became a federal holiday in all 50 states after Congress passed a law declaring the second Monday in October Columbus Day.
- Columbus Day commemorates the arrival on these shores of more than 5 million Italians a century ago. Today, their children and grandchildren constitute the nation's fifth largest ethnic group, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Columbus Day is the only day on which the nation recognizes the heritage of an estimated 26 million Italian Americans.

References:

(OSIA) The Order of Sons of Italy in America in Washington D.C. *Why we should celebrate Columbus Day*. <http://www.osia.org/public/pdf/Celebrate_Col_Day.pdf>.

Columbus Controversy-Round ONE

Arguments AGAINST

- Christopher Columbus did not discover America or the New World. Millions of indigenous people lived in that hemisphere when Columbus arrived. The ancestors of these people arrived in the New World over 1,300 years ago.
- We honor Columbus as one of the most famous explorers, but in reality he failed to achieve his goal. His mission was to find an all water route to East Asia. America was discovered by accident.
- When Columbus arrived on the Island of Hispaniola, he claimed the land for Spain, later claiming more land than he would actually step foot on. This land was already inhabited by thousands of indigenous people.
- During his first voyage Columbus recognized that, “with fifty men they [the native Taínos] can all be subjugated and made to do what is required of them.”
- Celebrating Columbus Day means that we honor a slaveholder. Columbus began the first institutionalized slavery in America. During his second voyage he ordered the native people he encountered to be captured and sold in Spain as slaves.
- Columbus began Spanish colonization in the New World. Spain’s presence resulted in the forced conversion of Native Americans they encountered. Native Americans were converted against their will through violence while those that refused to convert were often conquered and made slaves or killed.
- The first people Columbus encountered were the Taino on the Island of Hispaniola. Forty years after Columbus first arrived, between 80% and 90% of Tainos were dead as the result of being overworked, or victims of warfare and disease.
- Because of the success of Columbus voyage, hundreds of thousands of slaves were imported from Africa to the New World, and an American economy driven by millions of enslaved people.

Dobbs, Rebecca. “Why we should abolish Columbus Day.” University of North Carolina Department of Geography. <<http://www.unc.edu/~grdobbs/nocolumb.html>>.

Sale, Kirkpatrick. *The Conquest of Paradise*. Plume. New York, NY. Sept. 26, 1991.

Columbus Controversy-Round Two

Arguments FOR

- For many years Italian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, as well as a number of Christian and ethnic groups embrace the holiday as an occasion to celebrate their ethnic and religious heritage.
- Columbus did not start slavery; slavery dates back to Ancient Egypt. Columbus instituted slavery as a business undertaking which was seen as acceptable by society at the time and place he lived.
- The arrival of Europeans to the New World was bound to happen. Columbus was the first European to make a significant impact on European interaction with the Americas. If he had not arrived, other explorers would have. For that reason it is unfair to blame Columbus for all negative results of European colonization.
- The United States has long admired Columbus. America has more monuments to Columbus than any other nation in the world.
- Columbus' expedition resulted in the Columbian Exchange. He brought wheat, melons, grapes, coffee, sugar, cattle, pigs, and chicken. The Spanish horse gave the nomadic peoples of western North America a new and more effective way to hunt buffalo.
- In exchange for European goods, food native to the New World made its way to Europe. As a result, there is worldwide reliance on potatoes and corn which provide the only source of food for some of the poorest people around the world today.
- Columbus established the first successful European colonies in the New World. The migration of people to the Americas prevented overpopulation in Europe and provided a better life and opportunities for many.
- The arrival of millions of people from Europe and eventually the entire world, has led to a multicultural society in the United States today.

Berliner, Michael S. "The Christopher Columbus Controversy." *The Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 30, 1991.

Castronovo Fusco, Mary Ann. "In Person; In Defense of Columbus." *The New York Times*. Oct. 8, 2000.

(OSIA) The Order of Sons of Italy in America in Washington D.C. *Why we should celebrate Columbus Day*. <http://www.osia.org/public/pdf/Celebrate_Col_Day.pdf>.

Columbus Controversy-Round Two

Arguments AGAINST

- Christopher Columbus was not the first European to reach American soil. Vikings from Iceland and Greenland reached Newfoundland in North America almost 500 years before Columbus set sail.
- Columbus did not discover America, he invaded it. He forcibly took land and gold, and made slaves of the people he encountered.
- Many Italian-Americans use Columbus Day as an opportunity to celebrate their heritage, but there are no other federal holidays that celebrate ethnic, religious, social or cultural groups.
- Before he became an explorer for Spain, Christopher Columbus transported African slaves to Portugal.
- The Columbian exchange he initiated resulted in the spread of ideas, technology, animals, language, religion, and food. It also resulted in the importation of hundreds of thousands of slaves and diseases like small pox that killed thousands of slaves and Native Americans.
- Although the Taíno people inhabited Hispaniola long before Columbus ever set sail for the New World, Christopher Columbus conquered them and forced them to pay tribute. According to their tribute every adult was forced to pay gold or several pounds of cotton every three months. If the Taíno could not afford it, their hands were cut off.
- Columbus' arrival in the Caribbean and conquest of the Taíno set an example for other European nations to follow. During the next two centuries the Spanish, French, English, and Dutch conquered Native Americans and forcibly removed their land. This resulted in the complete removal of Native American people by the United States in the 19th century.
- There is a new movement in the country to celebrate alternative holidays on Columbus Day. In South Dakota, the day is officially a state holiday known as "Native American Day", not Columbus Day. In Berkley, California, October 12th is known as Indigenous People's Day, and is celebrated with a Native American pow wow.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Background Information:

An editorial is an article in a newspaper or magazine that expresses the opinion of the editor, editorial board, or publisher. Many newspapers contain sections where readers can write letters to the editor. These letters are short opinion pieces that respond to the topic of an editorial. Frequently they are written to support or argue against the opinion expressed by the editor.

Directions:

After participating in a structured academic controversy lesson on Columbus Day, you will have the opportunity to write a letter to an editor. The editor has posed the following question:
Should we celebrate Columbus Day?

In a short three to five paragraph essay, respond to the editor's question above. If you think we **should** celebrate Columbus Day, explain why and how we should celebrate it. If you think we **should not** continue celebration of Columbus Day, explain why and how you would change it.

You *MUST* use examples from the positions presented in your arguments sheets to support your opinion.

Grading Rubric

Your letter to the editor will be graded using the following scoring guide.

Essay Structure- 10 Points

- Essay contains three to five paragraphs- 2 points
- A clear thesis statement is included at the end of the first paragraph- 2 Points
 - The editor should be able to know from your thesis statement if you support celebrating Columbus Day or want it changed.
- Topic sentences begin each paragraph- 2 Points
- Sentence structure/fluency- 2 Points
 - Have you written complete sentences?
 - Does each paragraph focus on the same idea/topic?
- Grammar and Spelling- 2 Points

Essay Content- 10 Points

- The student identifies and consistently maintains an opinion on Columbus Day - 2 Points
- The student identifies at least three factors that support their opinion-3 points
- The thesis is supported by evidence presented in their argument sheets- 3 Points
- The student acknowledges and disproves any arguments against their thesis- 2 Points

STRATEGIES FOR PARTICIPATING IN A STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY (SAC)

The Purpose:

A structured academic controversy lesson presents students with a controversial issue in history. It provides students the opportunity to work in a group, discuss material, and interact with one another. Students have the chance to lead discussions and do the majority of the talking. Students also have the opportunity to make their own decisions about what positions are important to them while learning necessary material¹.

The Steps

Learning the Positions: The student reads either a list of arguments or an article that presents a position on a controversial issue. Working with a partner, plan how to support the position you have been assigned effectively. Presenters should understand the information in a way that is meaningful to them.

Presenting Positions: Each pair will take turns presenting the position they have been assigned. When presenting, look directly at the other members of your group when speaking. Sit directly across from them, look in their eyes, and present your position in an understandable way. When listening to presenters, sit directly across from the presenter, look at them, and pay attention. Take notes if you need to, and think about questions you might have for question time.

Question Time: After a pair presents a position, the other pair will have short chance to ask clarifying questions about something they want addressed, explained, or more information about.

Discussing the Issue: Students will present arguments for a position, but there is no need to actually argue. Presenters should be persuasive and respectful. Personal opinions should not be shared. Every side has a chance to present both sides of the issue and listen attentively. The discussion should be focused only on the information supplied in research and position worksheets

Reversing Perspectives: Working as a pair, students present the opposing pair's position in round two. The goal is to be sincere and forceful about the position, and should not simply copy or restate what the other pair presented when they had this position.

Reaching a Decision: At this point each student must ignore the position they have been assigned to argue. Together both pairs in the group must work to summarize and identify the best arguments for both points of view. Pairs will reach a consensus or agreement about how to decide the issue.

Debriefing: As an entire class, groups share their thoughts with the teacher about the issue and how the lesson went.

¹ Adapted from Larson and Keiper. Instructional Strategies for Middle and High School. Taylor & Francis Group, LLC 2007. New York, NY.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Block: _____

Structured Academic Controversy Notes

ROUND ONE

Rank the top three or four arguments from your positions page below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

ROUND TWO

Rank the top three or four arguments from your new positions page below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

NOTES: