II. Early Exploration of North America

What Teachers Need to Know

In Grade 5, students will examine European exploration in a global context under the section “European Exploration, Trade, and the Clash of Cultures” in the World History guidelines. In teaching the following section, you need focus on only the explorers and events specified below. The concepts developed here will aid students in extending their learning in Grade 5.

A. Early Spanish Exploration and Settlement

Background

In developing the information about early Spanish exploration and settlement, it is important to place these activities in their geographic context first.

Geography of Early Spanish Exploration

Christopher Columbus made first landfall off the coast of the Americas on an island in the Atlantic, one of the islands of the modern nation of The Bahamas. He did not see the Caribbean Sea until 1493. But it was from the islands in the Caribbean that the Spanish moved westward to the mainland of the Americas, eventually claiming territory from what is now the United States to the southern tip of South America.

The Greater and Lesser Antilles separate the Atlantic from the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. Together with The Bahamas, these island groups are often called the West Indies. These are the first islands that Columbus saw when he approached the Americas. The West Indies span the area from the Florida peninsula to Venezuela on the northern coast of South America.

The Caribbean Sea lies between the West Indies to the north and east, Central America to the west, and South America to the south. The Caribbean is actually an arm of the Atlantic Ocean.

The Gulf of Mexico borders the southeastern United States and the east coast of Mexico. The Strait of Florida allows access to the Atlantic Ocean, and the Strait of Yucatan provides access to the Caribbean Sea. Both the Mississippi and the Rio Grande empty into the Gulf of Mexico.

The Mississippi River has played an important part in the expansion and development of the United States. Control of the Mississippi switched back and forth several times between the French, who first claimed it in 1682, and the Spanish, until the United States bought it from France in 1803 in the Louisiana Purchase.

In 1496, the Spanish established a settlement in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic, part of Greater Antilles) and used it as its base to explore and colonize other areas. By 1511, Cuba, also part of the Greater Antilles of the West Indies, was settled by the Spanish and was one of the first islands to which the Spanish introduced African slave labor. The island is the largest one in the West Indies, and is geographically well suited to agriculture. The climate is subtropical, and there are vast stretches of fertile farmland.

Puerto Rico, also part of the Greater Antilles of the West Indies, was one of Columbus’s landfalls in 1493. Ponce de León, whom students will learn about
later in this section, established a colony there in 1508. Today, Puerto Rico is a self-governing commonwealth in association with the United States, and Puerto Ricans have United States citizenship. Puerto Rico has a series of forested mountains as well as a fertile coastal plain.

**Settlement of Florida and Ponce de León**

Juan Ponce de León was born in Spain. He is believed to have sailed to the “New World” on the second voyage led by Christopher Columbus in 1493, but, unlike Columbus, he did not return to Europe. In 1508 he led an expedition that conquered the island of Puerto Rico. In 1513 he sailed north from that island in search of gold and a fabled Fountain of Youth. He landed on the North American mainland thinking it was another island, claimed it for Spain, and named the new land Florida, meaning “full of flowers.” The area actually included the present state of Florida and parts of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia.

Ponce de León did not find a fountain of youth and soon left. But he returned in 1521 to establish a settlement at what is today Tampa Bay and to continue the search for gold. Having been with Cortés during his lucrative conquest of the Aztec, Ponce de León was confident there was more gold in Florida. The Spanish and the native Calusa people who lived in the Tampa Bay area soon clashed over Spanish treatment of the Calusa. In a skirmish, Ponce de León was shot with a poison arrow. His men carried him back to Cuba, where he died.

**Hernando de Soto**

Hernando de Soto was born in Spain about 1500, and, despite his family’s hope that he would become a lawyer, he sailed for the “New World” when he was just a teenager. He fought beside other Spanish conquistadors, first in Panama and later in Peru. During the conquest of Peru (which students should have studied in Grade 1), he served as one of Pizarro’s top commanders and befriended the Inca emperor, Atahuallpa. When Pizarro had Atahuallpa put to death despite de Soto’s objections and the large ransom raised by Atahuallpa’s people, de Soto became disgusted with his commander and decided to return to Spain. He returned in 1536 with a massive fortune of Inca gold. In Spain, de Soto married and lived as a wealthy gentleman but soon decided to return to the New World. He may have been influenced by stories of the fantastic adventures of another Spaniard, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. In 1528, Cabeza de Vaca was part of a group led by Pánfilo de Narváez that set out from Cuba to establish a settlement in Florida. The party faced many hardships and only four men survived, among them Cabeza de Vaca and an African named Estevanico. The four men wandered for eight years overland, meeting many native peoples, before finding another group of Spaniards. Cabeza de Vaca eventually returned to Spain, and in his published account of his adventures, he noted that various natives had told him of a province in North America in which there was much gold.

Fired by the stories of Cabeza de Vaca, and thinking he could make a second fortune to add to the wealth he had gained in Peru, de Soto organized an expedition of about 700 men and 10 ships. After stopping in Cuba, he sailed north. His expedition landed at Tampa Bay on the Florida coast in 1539.

De Soto’s army trudged overland, first north and then west, but they could not find the gold they were seeking despite the fact that they abducted Native Americans to serve as guides. De Soto told the Native Americans he was immortal,
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Teaching Idea

In discussing the treatment of Native Americans by the Spanish, it is necessary to walk a fine line. The attitude of the Spanish at this time was no different from that of the English toward Native Americans—or toward Africans. Both groups were seen as uncivilized—inferior—by the Europeans. The Native Americans did not dress like, speak the same languages as, worship as, or have the same values as the Europeans. Students have been exploring this idea in age-appropriate discussions of African slavery and European treatment of Native Americans since Kindergarten.

Teaching Idea

Point out to students that St. Augustine was founded 43 years before the first permanent English settlement, Jamestown. Complete a Venn diagram with the class comparing and contrasting St. Augustine with Jamestown.

a “child of the Sun.” Their journey took them into parts of what are today the states of Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and Arkansas, and brought them into conflict with many Native American groups. In 1541 they became the first European expedition to reach the Mississippi River. They built boats, sailed across the river, and continued their wanderings in what are now Arkansas and Louisiana. In 1592, they turned back, but de Soto caught a fever, fell ill, and died. His body was dropped in the Mississippi River so the natives would not discover it and realize that de Soto’s claim of immortality was false.

The remaining members of the expedition made their way down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico and then to Mexico. Although they never found the gold they sought, they were the first Europeans to explore what is now the southern United States and the first to explore the Mississippi River. They also gave the first European description of native peoples of this region, including the Cherokee, Seminole, and Creek tribes.

Founding of St. Augustine

The first permanent settlement in Florida resulted not from the Spanish desire for gold but from their desire to keep the French out. When it became apparent in 1564 that the French had established a fort near what is the present-day city of Jacksonville, Florida, the Spanish king instructed his forces to drive the French out and take the fort. The following year, Pedro Menendez de Aviles built a fort, which he called St. Augustine, as a base of operations and attacked the French. He succeeded in defeating them and ended for a time French claims to the area.

St. Augustine is the oldest continuously inhabited European settlement in the United States. Oraibi, a Hopi pueblo in Arizona, is the oldest continuously inhabited Native American community in what is the present-day United States. It dates to the 12th century CE.

B. Exploration and Settlement of the American Southwest

Background

The Southwest discussed here comprises the present states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. During the Spanish occupation, these lands were part of the Vice-royalty of New Spain, which included Central America and extended north to the Canadian border.

Geography: Grand Canyon and Rio Grande

The Grand Canyon is a huge gorge that was cut through rock by the Colorado River over the span of 2 million years. The spectacular chasm is 1 mile deep, 8 to 14 miles wide, and 200 miles long. On his expedition through the Southwest looking for gold, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado’s expedition became the first European expedition to see the canyon. (For more on Coronado, see next section.)

Some members of Coronado’s expedition also found the Rio Grande. The name Rio Grande means “grand, or large, river.” The Rio Grande originates in the Rocky Mountains in southwest Colorado and flows into New Mexico, where it flows southward to El Paso, Texas. From there, it continues on a southeasterly
The earliest exploration of the Southwest occurred as a result of the accident that left Cabeza de Vaca and his companions shipwrecked along the Gulf Coast (see previous section about Hernando de Soto). Cabeza de Vaca and the African Estevanico became the first non-Native Americans to travel through Texas. Eventually Cabeza de Vaca published a narrative of his adventures that would inspire the expeditions of de Soto and Coronado.

**Coronado and the Seven Cities of Cíbola**

During their journey, Cabeza de Vaca and Estevanico had heard repeatedly of the Seven Cities of Cíbola, which were supposedly so wealthy that their streets were paved with gold. In 1539, Estevanico and Fray Marcos de Niza returned to the Southwest with soldiers to find the Seven Cities. They explored Arizona and western New Mexico but found nothing. Estevanico was killed, and Fray Marcos de Niza returned to Mexico, more certain than ever that the cities existed. Native Americans always agreed with the Spanish that the cities existed—just a little farther north, “over there” somewhere—probably in an effort to get the soldiers to leave.

A number of other Spanish explorers went looking for the Seven Cities of Cíbola. The last major expedition was that of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado. He set out in 1540 to explore north of Mexico with about 300 Spaniards, hundreds of Native Americans and slaves, and many horses, sheep, pigs, and cattle. For two years Coronado’s expedition traveled through what are today New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Coronado and his men endured great hardship, traveling over deserts and mountains. He lost men to Native American attacks, and many horses, along with cattle that he took along for food, perished from lack of food and water. His party split up; one group became the first Europeans to gaze upon the Grand Canyon, and another group traveled as far as the upper Rio Grande. Coronado himself came upon the villages of the Zuni, which he called pueblos, but he found no gold.

In a report to the Spanish leader in the New World, Coronado wrote:

*It now remains for me to tell about this city and kingdom and province, of which [Fray Marcos de Niza] gave Your Lordship an account. In brief, I can assure you that in reality he has not told the truth in a single thing that he said, but everything is the reverse of what he said . . . . The Seven Cities are seven little villages, all having the kind of houses [pueblos] I have described . . . .

The lack of treasure along with the opening of Mexican silver mines ended Spanish interest in the borderlands for almost 60 years.

**Spanish Interest in California**

There was even less interest in California. In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sailed north from Mexico along the Pacific Coast looking for the Northwest Passage, which students will learn about in the next section. He landed in the area where San Diego is today and claimed the land for Spain, but, finding no gold, he returned empty-handed to Mexico.
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The next effort to explore California occurred in the late 1500s. The Spanish decided to establish a station to warn Spanish bullion ships of pirates lurking in the waters off California. Sebastián Vizcaíno explored the coastal areas in 1596 and 1602, but, like Cabrillo, found no riches. The station was built at Monterey Bay, and that ended Spanish explorations until the mid-1700s, when other nations began to take an interest in California. To support their claim to California, the Spanish built 21 missions; three presidios, or forts; and three towns along the coast.

Missions

The priests who started the missions believed that they were carrying out God’s will by converting Native Americans to Christianity. Public officials, soldiers, and colonists were likely to see the missions as a way to control Native Americans.

The Native Americans who converted were often made to live at the mission and work in the mission’s fields and orchards. Some Native Americans were taught crafts, such as carpentry, woodworking, soap- and candle-making, and weaving. The day was punctuated by religious services and religion classes. While their parents and older siblings worked, the children were taught to read and write—in Spanish, not in their own language.

The mission itself was centered around the church, which was typically made of either adobe (sun-dried bricks made of clay) or stone. The missionaries lived in one building, and the Native Americans had their own houses, all made of adobe. There were also storerooms for the crops, the school, and the craft shops. Surrounding the mission proper were the mission’s farms and orchards and, in some areas, cattle ranches.

El Paso, established in 1659, was the first mission in Texas. (The Alamo, another famous Texas mission, was founded in 1718.) Beginning in 1691, Fray Eusebio Kino established 24 missions in Arizona. Missions were also established in New Mexico.

California missions were not begun until 1769, when Fray Junipera Serra built the first one at San Diego. The Spanish founded 21 missions in California. These were the first European communities in California. Many of the sites went on to become prominent cities, including San Francisco, San Rafael, San Jose, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and San Diego.

Conflict Between the Spanish and the Pueblos

The first area that the Spanish settled in the Southwest was New Mexico. In 1598, Juan de Onate led 400 colonists from Mexico into the upper Rio Grande Valley and claimed the area for Spain. In establishing their settlements, they demanded that the Pueblos submit to Spanish rule. The peaceful Pueblos agreed, especially after Onate’s soldiers burned a pueblo to the ground when a colonist was killed in an argument.

Onate resigned in 1607 because of this and other abuses including ones against his own colonists, but later governors treated the Pueblos a little better.

In 1680, Popé, a Pueblo leader, united the villages and led a rebellion against the Spanish. Pope’s goals were to drive the Spanish out and eradicate Spanish and Christian religious and cultural ideas, so that the people could return to their ancient religious and cultural practices. At first the rebellion was very successful.
The Pueblos killed 21 Franciscan friars and more than 400 Spanish colonists. Many others fled. Popé gave orders that churches and religious decorations be destroyed. He announced punishments for those who continued to speak Spanish or exhibited other influences from the Spanish.

In 1692, Spanish soldiers arrived to put down the rebellion and retook the territory. However, the Spanish gave the Pueblos more freedom to practice their religion and customs upon their return, and even today there are still influences of both groups in the area.

C. The Search for the Northwest Passage

**Background**

*By the 1520s, Europeans were beginning to realize that Columbus had not found the Indies. Explorers began to look for an all-water route through North America. This much-sought-after route was known as the “Northwest Passage.”*

**Geography**

The explorers thought that their best chance for an all-water route lay to the north of the present-day United States, in Canada. They saw the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes as a possible Northwest Passage to Asia.

The St. Lawrence River links Lake Ontario with the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The Great Lakes are freshwater lakes that form a chain from western New York State to northern Minnesota. From east to west the lakes are Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan, and Superior. Today, the lakes are connected by a series of rivers, canals, and locks. They provide a navigable waterway from Minnesota to the Atlantic Ocean. However, this was not true when Europeans, trying to find an all-water route to Asia, explored them. The explorers found no water connections between Lakes Erie and Ontario.

One outcome of the interest in finding a Northwest Passage was the French claim to Canada and the northeastern and upper midwestern sections of what is today the United States. Beginning in 1608 (when the settlement of Quebec was founded), the territory claimed by France steadily grew. By 1682, Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle, had claimed all the lands in the Mississippi River Valley for France, and the colony of New France reached all the way down the center of the continent to the Gulf of Mexico. In 1663 Quebec became its capital. France lost the colony to Great Britain in 1763 after the French and Indian War.

**Cabot and the Search for the Northwest Passage**

Although an Italian by birth and a citizen of Venice, John Cabot made his voyages of exploration in the service of the English monarch Henry VII. Cabot had the same dream as Columbus: to reach Asia by sailing west. He thought the best chance of sailing to Asia would be to sail at a northern latitude, where the distance around Earth would be substantially shorter than the distance at the Equator. King Henry VII gave Cabot a charter to explore and claim land for England.

Cabot's first attempt in 1496 was a failure. He evidently had a disagreement with some members of his crew. Also, he was short of food and ran into bad
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Teaching Idea
Make an overhead of Instructional Master 30, The Search for the Northwest Passage, to orient students to the voyages of the explorers looking for an all-water route through North America to Asia.

If you have already taught about the Vikings, remind students that the Vikings had established a short-lived settlement on Newfoundland about 600 years before Champlain explored the area.

Champlain and New France

The Frenchman Samuel de Champlain also searched for a Northwest Passage for many years. Champlain’s father was a captain in the navy, and Champlain spent some time sailing to the West Indies, Central America, and Mexico. During these years he suggested that the Atlantic and Pacific might be connected by digging a channel, or canal, through Panama—an idea that would be realized hundreds of years later.

In the early 1600s Champlain turned his attention to North America, hoping to find a passage through the continent to Asia. He explored the St. Lawrence River, northern New York (where he discovered the lake that bears his name), and the Great Lakes Huron and Ontario. From 1604 to 1607, he explored Nova Scotia. In 1608, he founded the settlement of Quebec, which is the oldest city in Canada. The first winter he and his men spent in this new trading post was so brutally cold that only 9 of the 33 men in the party survived.

During his explorations Champlain came into contact with many native peoples, including the Algonquins, the Hurons, and the Iroquois. In several skirmishes Champlain helped the Algonquins and Hurons fight against the Iroquois.

Champlain published a number of books on Canada and his voyages, which contained many observations of the lands he explored and the native peoples he met. His explorations were the basis for French claims to the colony of New France, of which Champlain later became governor. Champlain died in Quebec in 1635.

Henry Hudson

Henry Hudson was an Englishman. In 1607 he was chosen to lead an expedition that hoped to sail across the Atlantic Ocean from the North Pole to China. This expedition ran up against impassable polar ice fields and was unsuccessful. A second voyage also failed.

In 1609, Hudson obtained a contract from the Dutch East India Company to search for a Northwest Passage. He first explored along the lower coast of North America around what is now New York and came across the mouth of the river
that now bears his name. He sailed north on it to what is now Albany. Finding no
passage, he returned downstream. His voyage of exploration was the basis for the
Netherlands’s claim to the area.

In 1610, Hudson, again sailing for his native England, tried a more northerly
route. Sailing north and then west around Newfoundland, he found a strait and
sailed through it into a huge bay. Both the strait and the bay are now named for
him. Hudson spent many weeks exploring the bay. Eventually winter came and
his ship was frozen in the bay. When food ran low, his crew mutinied and put
Hudson, his son, and seven others in an open boat with no oars and no supplies
of any kind. When spring came, the bay thawed, and the crew sailed back to
England, but Hudson, his son, and his loyal crew were never heard from again.

**America**

In 1507, the cartographer Martin Waldseemueller created a new map on which
he used the name *America* for the continent we now call South America. This is the
first known use of the term *America*. Where did the name come from? Many people
believe the name is derived from the name of the explorer Amerigo Vespucci.
Between 1499 and 1502, Vespucci explored the coasts of North and South America.
He was the first to recognize that South America was a continent. However, not
everyone believes that the continents are named for Vespucci. One alternative theory speculates that the name may come from the Amerique Mountains, an area in
Nicaragua that Columbus learned about during one of his voyages.

**Review**

Below are some additional ideas for ongoing assessment and review activities.
These are not meant to constitute a comprehensive list. Teachers may also refer
to the Pearson Learning/Core Knowledge History & Geography series for addi-
tional information and teaching ideas.

- Invite students to do a little additional research on an explorer of their choice.
  Then practice writing paragraphs by using the information they learned. Each
  paragraph should include a topic sentence, supporting details, and a concluding
  sentence.
- Have students design the front page of a newspaper describing the voyages
  and exciting discoveries of one explorer from this section. Have each student
  choose an explorer and identify the country for which the explorer worked. Then
  have students design the front page of a newspaper from that country. Students
  will design the illustrations and write articles about the explorer. Make sure that
  students include why the explorer left the country and what he hoped to find. You
  may want to bring in some newspapers to review the parts of a newspaper story.
- Invite students to speculate about what might have happened to one of the
  lost explorers, either Cabot or Hudson, or what it might have been like to be a
  member of one of the expeditions described in this section. This can be the basis
  for an imaginative writing assignment.

**The Big Idea in Review**

*Spanish explorers crisscrossed the Americas in search of gold and riches; other European explorers searched for a route through the Americas to Asia.*