

Year 1:

Unit 1

The "Old" World Meets the "New" - European Colonization in the Americas (1492 - 1754): Introduction

Unit Purpose: Why This Unit?

For thousands of years, native peoples had been living in the land that Europeans named the Americas, establishing many thriving, independent communities across the continent. The arrival of the Europeans fundamentally reshaped the world these communities had created. The landing of Columbus in 1492 sparked a new period of interaction between these two “worlds.” European nations began struggling for power, influence, and control of the Americas and all of their resources. But these plans for rapid colonization had detrimental effects on the native peoples the Europeans encountered. These people, seen by the Europeans as “savages,” were violently pushed off their lands in favor of new European settlements.

Emerging from this period of colonization were the British colonies. In the early 1600s, English settlers first arrived in the Americas and established their first colony, Jamestown, where they faced many hardships. Despite these struggles, by the 18th century the East Coast of North America had been settled into 13 British colonies with distinct cultural systems and values. British colonists came to the Americas for many reasons, such as escaping religious persecution or finding economic opportunity. However, not all new arrivals in the Americas came by choice. With the development of new societies in the Americas came a need for increased labor, leading to the establishment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the forced migration of Africans to the Americas.

The study of colonial America is essential because the foundations of the most critical developments in later American history were established in these years. The origins of American self-government and our notions of religion and religious freedom began on the *Mayflower* and continued to evolve throughout the colonial era. Furthermore, this unit lays the groundwork for future understanding of European American relationships with Native Americans and how this relationship will evolve — and devolve — over time.

Last, scholars will be primed to begin their study in the following unit, and many units to come, of the origins of the institution of slavery in the United States.

Unit 1 Learning Goals

Essential Question

If you are successful in this unit, your scholars will be able to answer the Unit 1 Essential Question: *How did the European quest for “gold, God, and glory” affect the Americas during the colonial era?*

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas, outlined below, help answer the Unit 1 Essential Question and reflect the key ideas that scholars must master by the end of this unit. As you teach Unit 1, connect every lesson back to the Big Idea(s) that the lesson helps illustrate. The Unit 1 Big Ideas were adapted from the UCLA National History Standards United States Era 1.

- **Big Idea 1: Early Europeans began exploring and colonizing the Americas, a land already inhabited by many native peoples, resulting in cultural, ecological, and violent interactions among the previously unconnected peoples of the Americas and Europe.**
 - Before the arrival of the Europeans in the late 15th century, many distinct native tribes inhabited the Americas and established complex communities and cultures.
 - As a result of European colonization, Europeans and Native Americans began to interact, introducing new goods and ideas to one another.
 - Europeans, eager for new land, were often in conflict with the Native Americans, slaughtering, enslaving, or displacing many Native Americans.
- **Big Idea 2: Europeans came to the Americas because the “New World” promised to provide opportunities and wealth to European people and nations, who fought among one another for control of the Americas.**
 - Beginning in the Renaissance, an Age of Exploration emerged, leading to European colonial rivalries in the “New World.”
 - Initially looking for new trade routes to India, Europeans quickly discovered the wealth of natural resources in the Americas and the potential of new trade networks.
 - Many British colonists experienced religious persecution in England, fleeing to the “New World” in the hopes of finding new religious freedom.
 - Although Europeans hoped to find wealth and opportunity in the Americas, few Europeans anticipated the struggles they would face in the “New World.”
- **Big Idea 3: The British colonies, the largest and longest enduring colonies in North America, established political, religious, social, and economic institutions that reshaped traditional European structures.**
 - The British colonists established early systems of representative government, such as the Mayflower Compact and early representative colonial legislatures, that defined citizenship rights.

- The British colonies had a number of religious faiths. While the New England colonies had more repressive laws about religion and Puritanism, the Middle colonies promoted religious freedom.
- The New England, Middle, and Southern colonies developed distinct economic systems based on their environments; while the New England and Middle colonies were more urban and industrial, the Southern colonies established large farms and plantations. As a result, distinct societies developed in the colonies.
- To enhance their wealth in the Americas, Europeans began the slave trade, forcibly bringing Africans to the Americas to support growing colonial economies.

Key Terms

The following people, places, and events are foundational to understanding the Big Ideas of this unit. As these words are introduced in each lesson, add them to your word wall and hold scholars accountable for using them in discussion and writing throughout the unit.

- Native Americans
- Native American cultural areas
- Iroquois Confederacy
- Age of Exploration
- Christopher Columbus
- Columbian Exchange
- Colony/colonization
- Missionary
- Transatlantic Slave Trade
- King Philip's War
- British North America
- Jamestown Colony
- Puritans
- Plymouth Colony
- Mayflower
- Salem Witch Trials
- New England
- Middle Colonies
- The South
- Quakers

Geography

The following places are foundational to understanding the geographical context of the unit. As you teach Unit 1, continually reference maps in class, not only to build scholars' fluency with geography but also to develop their geographic reasoning skills as they grapple with the Big Ideas of the unit.

- **Major Native American communities:** Aztec, Huron, Iroquois, Powhatan, Pueblo, and Wampanoag
- **European colonial holdings in the Americas:** British, French, Portuguese, and Spanish

- **Physical features of the Americas:** the Rocky and Andes Mountains, the Amazon Basin and River, and the Great Lakes
 - **Regions of British Colonial America:** the New England, Middle, and Southern colonies
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Intellectual Preparation

Class Materials Once you have internalized the Big Ideas of the unit, to be successful you must study all scholar documents and materials before you teach the first lesson:

- All documents in the [Unit 1 Sourcebook](#)
- All scholar and teacher materials in the [Unit 1 Workbook](#)

Additional Resources The resources below provide additional historical background for the content covered in Unit 1:

- Review the following timelines: “The Americas to 1620” and “Colonization and Settlement” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Read the essays “The Americas to 1620,” “Exploration,” “Colonization and Settlement,” and “Early Settlements” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Read “Why Did Europe Win?” and “The \$24 Myth” from Chapters 6 and 7 of [Teaching What Really Happened](#) by James Loewen.

*To access these readings and more free American History content and resources, create an account on the Gilder Lehrman Institute website.

Unit 1 Lesson Sequence

Essential Question: How did the European quest for “gold, God, and glory” affect the Americas during the colonial era?

The first three lessons set the stage for understanding the Europeans’ interactions with the native peoples of the Americas. While Lesson 1 introduces scholars to the distinct cultures and lifestyles of the native peoples in the Americas before the arrival of Columbus and the Europeans, Lessons 2 and 3 begin to explain the long-term effects — both beneficial and devastating — of colonial-native interactions, known as the Columbian Exchange. By the end of these lessons, scholars will be prepared to examine later in the unit how Native American and European colonial relationships evolved beyond the initial exchanges of goods and bewilderment during these first encounters.

Lesson 1: Native Peoples of the Americas (Jigsaw)

- **Central Question:** How did Native American societies differ across the Americas?

Lessons 2–3: Columbus and the Americas (Video Analysis, Map Study)

- **Central Question:** How did Christopher Columbus’ arrival in 1492 change the Americas for centuries to come?

Lessons 4 and 5 develop scholars' understanding of why Europeans began colonizing the Americas. Both lessons examine the diverse motivations of European colonists in the 16th and 17th centuries, ranging from both individual and national economic interests to imperial power and glory. By the end of Lesson 5, scholars should be able to explain why different Europeans came to the Americas and will be prepared to dive deeper into how these differing motivations ultimately influenced both native and colonial societies over time.

Lessons 4–5: European Colonization (Jigsaw, Exit Ticket Revision)

- **Central Question:** Why did different peoples come to the Americas in the 16th and 17th centuries?

Lessons 6 through 9 build upon scholars' understanding of early Native American and colonist encounters and explain how these interactions evolved over the course of European colonization. Lessons 6 through 8 focus on perceptions of the other: how Native Americans perceived European invaders, and how Europeans saw these “uncivilized” peoples in an unfamiliar land. Mastery of the ideas in Lessons 6 through 8 will help scholars access Lesson 9 and understand why conflict ultimately broke out between Native Americans and European colonists. By the end of Lesson 9, scholars should be able to explain how these different points of view and regional conflicts affected both Native Americans and European colonists.

Lessons 6–8: Encounters in Colonial America (Jigsaw, PBL)

- **Central Question:** How did Europeans and Native Americans view one another?

Lesson 9: Colonial Conflicts with Native Americans (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did war erupt between Native Americans and European colonists?

Lessons 10 through 14 introduce scholars to the societies that colonists from England established in the Americas. Lesson 10 introduces scholars to life in the very first English colonies, focusing specifically on Jamestown and the hardships settlers faced there. Lessons 11 through 13 focus on another one of the earliest English colonies: Massachusetts. Scholars will engage with the complex religious beliefs that characterized this Puritan society and the impact of these beliefs on the people of New England. In Lesson 14, scholars will look more broadly at the British colonies established in North America by the turn of the 18th century and the distinct cultures that developed within them. By the end of these lessons, scholars must be able to explain how British colonists reshaped the economic, political, and cultural traditions of “Old World” European society in the colonies of the “New World.”

Lesson 10: The Jamestown Colony (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did early English colonists struggle to survive in North America?

Lessons 11–12: Religion in the Colonies (Source Analysis, Exit Ticket Revision)

- **Central Question:** How did religion influence early European colonists' views of the Americas?

Lesson 13: The Salem Witch Trials (Simulation or Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did the Salem Witch Trial hysteria erupt in Puritan Massachusetts?

Lesson 14: The 13 Colonies (Jigsaw)

- **Central Question:** To what extent did colonial life differ across British America by the turn of the 18th century?