

Rethinking First Contact: the Effects of European...

Summary

The student will combine their knowledge of Christopher Columbus with information about first contact among the Great Basin tribes to understand the many consequences of contact between Indians and Europeans in the Great Basin.

Main Core Tie

Social Studies - 4th Grade

[Standard 2 Objective 1](#)

Additional Core Ties

Social Studies - 4th Grade

[Standard 2 Objective 2](#)

Social Studies - 5th Grade

[Standard 1 Objective 1](#)

Social Studies - 5th Grade

[Standard 1 Objective 2](#)

Social Studies - 5th Grade

[Standard 4 Objective 1](#)

Time Frame

2 class periods of 30 minutes each

Materials

Teacher Materials

- [At a Glance: Utah's Indians and First Contact](#) (pdf)
- [Map of the Ancestral Lands of Utah's Indians](#) (pdf)
- [Map of European Expansion into the Great Basin](#) (pdf)

Video: [We Shall Remain: The Navajo](#)

Video: [We Shall Remain: The Goshute](#)

Video: [We Shall Remain: The Paiute](#)

Video: [We Shall Remain: The Ute](#)

Video: [We Shall Remain: The Northwestern Shoshone](#)

Student Materials

- [Blank Map of the Original Territories of Utah's Indians](#) (pdf)
- Crayons or colored pencils

Background for Teachers

The persistent myth that "Columbus discovered America" ignores the rich American Indian cultures that already lived in--and traveled throughout--the so-called "New World" long before the arrival of Euro-Americans. Placing Columbus, a European, at the forefront of American history suggests that all important contributions to this country's past have been made by Europeans, and this Euro-centric point of view downplays the historical importance of native societies and overlooks the impact first contact had on these cultures.

Moreover, textbooks that do explore the consequences of contact generally focus on New England and/or Plains Indians, effectively erasing the histories of Great Basin tribes. By telling the story of

Columbus in a way that includes the people he first contacted and comparing it to the experiences of Great Basin Indians, students can form a new understanding of American history that recognizes the impact of colonization on non-European cultures. They will also understand that the tribes of Utah experienced the consequences of contact and exchange well before whites began to settle the area in the mid-nineteenth century.

Instructional Procedures

Ask the students what they know about Columbus, and have a brief discussion about the story of Columbus and why he is so famous. Ask the students what they think "discovered" means. Point out that while people say that Columbus "discovered" America, there were already people in America with families and communities who called it their home. When Columbus met these first Americans, it was a moment of "first contact" for both the Indians and the Europeans.

Explain that first contact was an exchange of cultures and ideas; you might want to briefly mention some of the foods and animals that would have been exchanged between the Indians and the Europeans (e.g. Indians: corn, potatoes, tomatoes; Europeans: wheat, horses, cattle). Note that contact changed the cultures of both the Europeans and the Indians. Explain that, for native people, this process often led to very difficult changes, as Europeans brought diseases that the Indians had never encountered and, thus, for which they had no immunities. In addition, European settlers often treated the Indians very badly. Point out that while first contact was an enormously challenging process for all Indian communities, native people survived.

Next, ask the students to think about what "first contact" might have been like for the Indians living in what is now Utah. Show them the Map of the Ancestral Lands of Utah's Indians. Give them the blank map of Utah, and have them draw in the ancestral territory of the each tribe and fill in each of those territories with a different color. Using information in the At a Glance, the brief histories of each tribe, and material from the films, explain what life was like for each of Utah's tribes.

Next, show the students the Map of European Expansion into of the Great Basin. Have them draw in and label the routes that explorers and settlers from Spain and the United States took through Utah. Have them look at the ancestral Indian lands that these routes went through and think about the Indians these explorers and emigrants would have met. Using material from the At a Glance and the films, explain what these encounters were like. This may be a difficult topic for some students, but you can emphasize that Utah's Indians adapted and survived and that their descendents are alive and an important part of Utah's culture today.

Extensions

Show the students the national documentary, *We Shall Remain: After the Mayflower* (chapters 2 and 3, available to Utah Educators in [eMedia](#)), and have them compare the New England experience to the Great Basin experience.

Have students create a new poem about first contact in the Great Basin in the style of "In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue."

Have students discuss their own--or a family member's--immigration experience, focusing on what it was like to experience "first contact" with new people in a new place. Have the student think about how that contact experience might have been similar to, or different than, a Utah American Indian's first experience meeting a European or American.

Assessment Plan

Completed map.

[End of Unit Assessment](#)

Bibliography

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The University of Utah's [American West Center](#) (AWC) produced the curriculum materials in consultation with the [Utah Division of Indian Affairs](#), [Utah State Office of Education](#), [KUED 7](#), and the Goshute, Northwestern Band of the Shoshone, Southern Paiute, and Ute nations.

Authors

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