

L.O: To understand how America
was discovered





Who discovered America?

Americans celebrate "Columbus Day," which is an annual holiday that commemorates the day on October 11, 1492, when the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus officially set foot in the Americas, and claimed the land for Spain. It has been a national holiday in the United States since 1937.

It is commonly said that "Columbus discovered America."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHIJzBNnhqI>

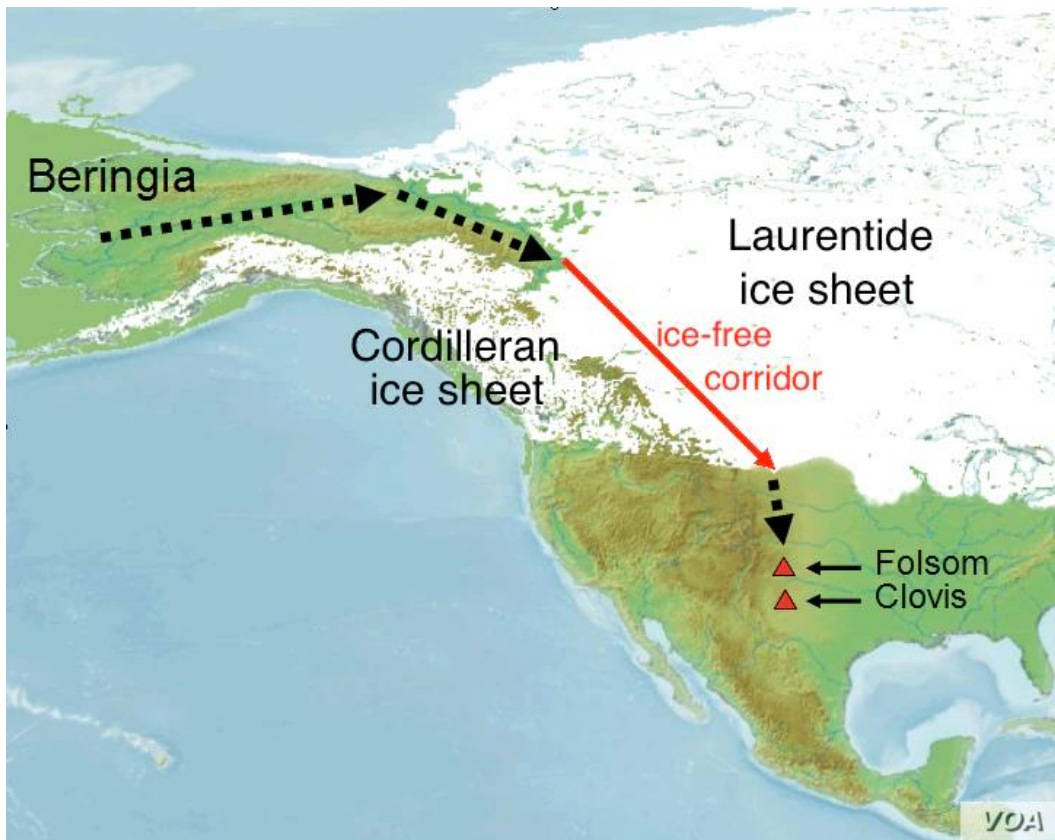


It is commonly said that "Columbus discovered America." However, it would be more accurate, perhaps, to say that he introduced the Americas to Western Europe during his four voyages to the region between 1492 and 1502.

Colombus paved the way for the massive influx of western Europeans that would ultimately form several new nations including the United States, Canada and Mexico.

But to say he "discovered" America is not truly accurate, because there were plenty of people already there when he arrived!





Beringia Land Bridge

It is likely that the first people to come to America were actually from Asia around 15,000 years ago.

They walked across the Bering land bridge that back in the day connected what is now the U.S. state of Alaska and Siberia. Fifteen-thousand years ago, ocean levels were much lower and the land between the continents was hundreds of kilometers wide.

The area would have looked quite sparse with very little trees. But despite this, life thrived there.

According to the U.S. National Park Service, "the land bridge played a vital role in the spread of plant and animal life between the continents.

Many species of animals - the woolly mammoth, mastodon, scimitar cat, Arctic camel, brown bear, moose, muskox, and horse — to name a few — moved from one continent to the other across the Bering land bridge. Birds, fish, and marine mammals established migration patterns that continue to this day."



Archaeologists say that humans followed, in a never-ending hunt for food, water and shelter. Once here, humans dispersed all across North and eventually Central and South America.

These first Americans had a name: the Clovis peoples. They get their name from an ancient settlement discovered near Clovis, New Mexico, dated to over 11,000 years ago.



However in time the Clovis peoples long disappeared but were still existent in the genetic code of nearly all native Americans. But those people arrived on the western coast. What about arrivals from the east?

Was Columbus the first European to set foot in America?

There is proof that Europeans visited what is now Canada, about 500 years before Columbus set sail. They were Vikings, and evidence of their presence can be found on the Canadian island of Newfoundland at a place called l'Anse Aux Meadows.



It is now a UNESCO World Heritage site and consists of the remains of eight buildings that were likely wooden structures covered with grass and soil.

Today the area is barren, but a thousand years ago there were trees everywhere and the area likely was used as winter stopover point, where Vikings repaired their boats and sat out bad weather. It's not quite clear if the area was a permanent settlement, but it is clear that the expansion-minded Norsemen were here long before Columbus.



A reconstruction of the Viking settlement in Newfoundland

There is also more evidence to support that Columbus was not the first to discover America. The vegetable, the sweet potato!

This humble pinkish-red vegetable is native to South America. And yet, there have been sweet potatoes on the menu in North America as far back as 1,000 years ago. So how did it get there?

By comparing the DNA of North American and South American sweet potatoes, scientists think it's clear that someone either brought them back after visiting South America, or islanders brought them from South America when they were exploring the Pacific Ocean.



This is the 500 year old map that Christopher Columbus used to discover the Americas.

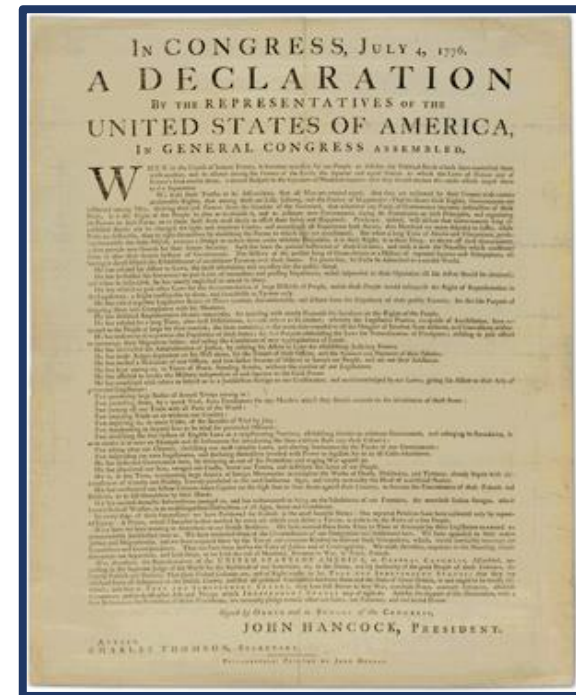


The Declaration of Independence

In 1776, the thirteen American colonies produced a document detailing why they wished to break away from British rule and become independent states, known as the United States of America.

The document listed why the colonies were unhappy with British rule and explained what they believed in. The document was signed by 56 congressmen and sent to the British government.

On 4th July 1776, Congress officially adopted the final version of the Declaration of Independence.



The History of Independence Day

In the USA today, July 4th is a patriotic event where people celebrate what it means to be an American.

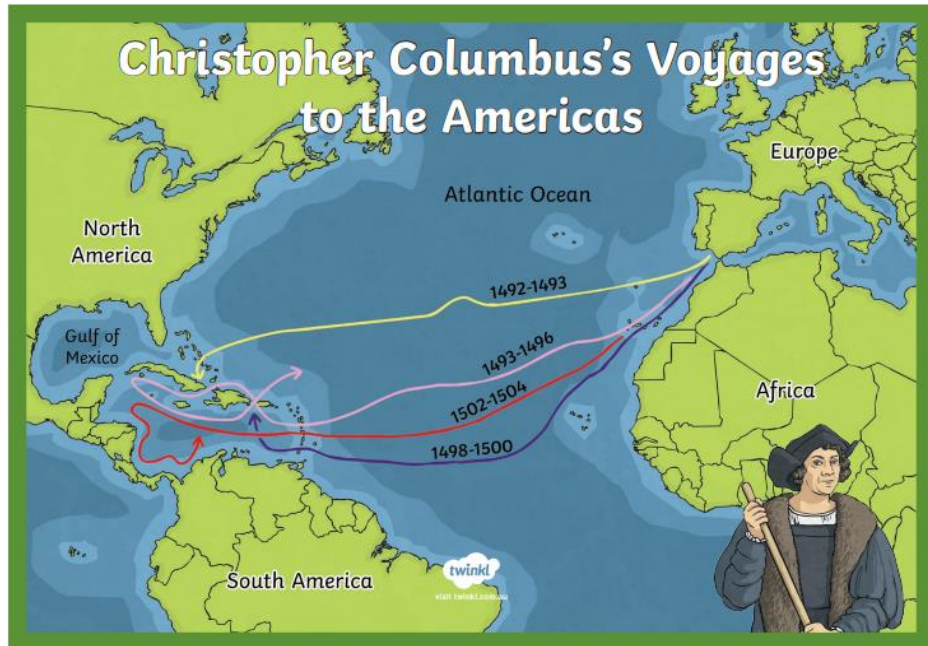
Families and communities gather for parties, parades, and concerts. Politicians often make speeches.

The American flag is much in evidence during the celebrations; it is displayed prominently in homes and public places. Patriotic songs, such as the national anthem 'Star-Spangled Banner', are played. Firework displays have become a big part of the Independence Day tradition and spectacular displays are held all across the country.



Main Task

Christopher Columbus travelled to the Americas in four separate voyages. Mark out these voyages on your map along with the dates.



Christopher Columbus's Voyages to the Americas

