

People to Know / Vocabulary

Lesson 2

As You Read

Who:

- *What did this person do for a living?*
- *Where are they from?*

Importance:

- *What did this person accomplish that made a difference then and/or now?*
- *How did they affect others then and/or now?*

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) was an Italian sailor who reasoned that someone could become wealthy and powerful if they could cross the ocean and establish a direct trade route with Asia.

In 1492, Spain agreed to fund Columbus' expedition. Three ships sailed west for five weeks before spotting land, on October 12, 1492. Columbus mistakenly thought he was near China. He made three more voyages to the area but never found Asia.

Spain, however, quickly realized Columbus had found a new world. Soon, Spain became a world power built on the gold, silver, and natural resources it took from North and South America. This led other European powers to begin colonization of their own in hopes of becoming wealthy, too. For the natives, European diseases killed millions of indigenous people and forced assimilation changed their way of life.

Hernán Cortés

Hernán Cortés (1485-1547) worked for Spain in the New World. Longing for adventure, in 1519, Cortés led 500 Spanish soldiers into Mexico and attacked the capital of the Aztec empire, Tenochtitlan. The Aztecs forced Cortés to retreat, but one of the Spaniards killed in the fighting and left behind had the smallpox virus. By the time Cortés returned in May of 1521, thousands of Aztecs had already died from smallpox, thus making it easier for Spain and its Native allies to defeat the Aztec Empire.

The success Cortés had against the Aztecs encouraged Spain to conquer land to the south and north, spreading the Spanish language and Catholicism as they went. In addition, the wealth of the Aztecs helped make Spain the most powerful country in the world.

Francisco Pizarro

Francisco Pizarro (1471-1541) sailed to the New World as a part of a military force in 1509. After two unsuccessful expeditions Pizarro finally landed in Peru with an army of less than 200 men. The Inca ruler, Atahualpa, saw the Spanish army as no serious threat to his empire. When he met with Pizarro at Cajamarca on November 16, 1532, Pizarro attacked the Inca army killing thousands of Inca warriors. Pizarro had Atahualpa executed some months later.

The smallpox virus had killed hundreds of thousands of Inca before the Spanish had arrived. This made it easier for

Spain to conquer the Inca and take their treasure. The conquistadors forced the surviving Incas to learn Spanish and convert to Catholicism.

Pocahontas

Pocahontas (c. 1595-1617) was an American Indian born in present-day Virginia and the favorite daughter of Chief Powhatan of the Powhatan Confederacy.

Pocahontas took great interest in the English settlers that built Jamestown. According to John Smith, Pocahontas saved his life by convincing Chief Powhatan not to execute him. In the early years of English settlement, Pocahontas encouraged trade for food and goods between Jamestown and her people.

Pocahontas' life changed when in 1613, Samuel Argall took Pocahontas hostage. Talks with the Powhatan broke down and Pocahontas remained with the English. She learned to speak English and converted to Christianity.

In 1614, Pocahontas married John Rolfe and the couple had a son. Their marriage produced a period of peace between the Powhatans and Jamestown giving the colony a chance to grow. In 1616, Pocahontas sailed to England, met with the king and queen, and became a huge celebrity. Unfortunately, exposure to Old World diseases resulted in illness and she died possibly of tuberculosis or pneumonia.