

SOLAR

Subject: 5th Grade Social Studies

Materials:

A map of the world for each student

Colored pencils

Copies of the following handouts: “Columbus's Voyages”, “Just Where Was Columbus?”

Atlases

Standards

Objectives

- Students will be able to map out Columbus's four voyages.
- Students will create a key for a map

Lesson

1. Have a small discussion introducing the idea of exploration.
 - What does exploration mean to you, what does it make you think of?
 - Are there still people exploring today?
2. Distribute the [world maps](#) and colored pencils to each students.
3. Distribute the [Just Where Was Columbus?](#) and [Columbus's Voyages](#) handouts, go over them with the students and have a short class discussion using the following questions:
 - What were Columbus's *intended* destinations for each voyage?
 - *Why* was he trying to get to each destination?
4. Review some basic geography before students begin plotting Columbus's voyages. Ask students the following questions and have them locate the points on the map of the world:
 - Where is Europe?
 - Where is Asia?
 - Where is North America?
 - Where is South America?
5. Have students plot each of Columbus's voyages in a different color.
6. Students can make a key to indicate the meaning of each color.

***For an extension: ask students to calculate the distance (using the scale) that Columbus traveled on each voyage.

Assessment

The students will be assessed on their voyage map and accuracy

Reflection

When I got up in front of the class and asked the introduction questions, I found out that the students really did not know much about Christopher Columbus so I was not able to continue on with my lesson. The class spent the social studies class time working in partners researching anything they could find about Christopher Columbus and mapping out his four Voyages.

Columbus's Voyages

First Voyage,

1492-1493

San Salvador,
The Bahamas
Cuba
Hispaniola

Second Voyage,

1493-1494

Dominica
Hispaniola
Guadeloupe
Antigua
Puerto Rico
Cuba
Jamaica

Third Expedition,

1498-1500

St. Vincent
Grenada
Trinidad
Margarita
Venezuela

Fourth Expedition,

1502-1504

St. Lucia
Martinique
Honduras
Nicaragua
Costa Rica
Panama

Just Where Was Columbus?

Christopher Columbus, of course, thought he had arrived in the "Indies," the medieval name for Asia. Using Marco Polo's *Travels* among other sources, Columbus calculated that his voyage would lead him to Cathay (China), Cipango (Japan), the Spice Islands (the Mollucas), and India.

A Slow Boat to China

After landing on a small island on Oct. 12, 1492, in what he believed were the Indies, Columbus sailed along the coast of Cuba, certain that he had finally reached the continent of Cathay. He searched in vain for the magnificent cities Marco Polo had described, hoping to deliver a letter from the Spanish monarchs to "the great Khan," the Chinese emperor. "Afterwards," Columbus wrote on Oct. 21, "I shall set sail for another very large island which I believe to be Cipango, according to the indications I receive from the Indians on board." Columbus's Japan proved to be the island of Hispaniola.



Refusing to Ask for Directions

Three voyages later, Columbus still resolutely maintained that he had reached Asia despite growing contrary evidence. Amerigo Vespucci's 1501 voyage along the coast of South America convinced most explorers and their patrons that a huge unexplored continent existed across the Atlantic—what Vespucci called *Mundus Novus*, the New World. Columbus, however, died in 1506 still insisting that he had found a new route to Asia.



Columbus's arrival point in the New World is still contested.

Where in the New World is San Salvador?

But confusion over where Columbus landed in the New World has not been restricted to the explorer himself. For centuries scholars have hotly debated where Columbus first set foot in the Western Hemisphere—the so-called landfall controversy. All have agreed that Columbus arrived on an island in the Bahamas that he named San Salvador (Holy Savior), and that the island's Arawak inhabitants called Guanahani. But dozens of different islands have been bandied about by numerous historians as the genuine San Salvador. The three most popular contestants have been Watling's Island (called San Salvador today), Cat Island, and Grand Turk (which today is no longer part of the Bahamas).

Guanahani/Watlings/San Salvador

More than 500 years later, there still is no definitive answer to the landfall question, but the general consensus is that Columbus landed on what was known until 1926 as Watlings Island. The island was named for a local pirate famous for his piety—marauding and pillaging was strictly forbidden on Sundays. The residents of Watlings renamed their island San Salvador in 1926, figuring the right name was key to their claim as Columbus's island.

The 400th Centennial

Among the early historians involved in the landfall controversy was Washington Irving, whose volume, *Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), suggested that the explorer first landed on Cat Island, to the northeast of Watlings. As the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World drew near, a special investigation of various Bahamian islands was commissioned, meant to clear up the controversy once and for all. The report, however, just emphasized how muddled the controversy had become:

...No two investigators agree as to the first landfall without disagreeing as to the second; and if they happen to coincide on the first, it is only to fall out over the fourth.

— **Frederick A. Ober**, *In the Wake of Columbus* (1893)

Not Just Another Pretty Island

The difficulty in pinpointing Columbus's first landing is in part the result of the sketchy information provided in his captain's log. The island is described as large, level, and with a lagoon, and like all the other islands he encounters, "these lands are the most fertile, temperate, level and beautiful countries in the world." With so little to go on, it is easy to make an argument for nearly any beautiful lagoon in the Bahamas.

Another difficulty is the lack of archeological evidence. Columbus landed only briefly on the island—he was far more interested in moving on to richer and more promising parts of the Indies. No definitive trace of his presence has been uncovered. And although a number of early maps show the island of Guanahani, the island is found in various locations depending on the vagaries of the cartographer.

More Centennial Squabbling

In 1986, the landfall controversy again grew tempestuous. As the 500th Columbus centennial approached, *National Geographic* presented a sophisticated argument claiming that Samana Cay was the true island of Columbus's landing. This stirred up the waters, but most historians, including such luminaries as Samuel Eliot Morison, maintained that Watlings/San Salvador was the true landfall.

Columbus Slept Here

Which is a perfectly agreeable conclusion according to San Salvador's 539 inhabitants, who depend on Columbus-inspired tourism for their livelihood. The present-day San Salvadorans are the descendents of freed slaves—the original inhabitants, the Arawaks, have long since vanished. The island boasts "Discovery Bay," where Columbus allegedly made his first landing, the "Three Ships" restaurant—and a Club Med for sybaritic history buffs.

The Voyages
First Voyage, 1492-1493
San Salvador, The Bahamas Cuba Hispaniola
Second Voyage, 1493-1494
Dominica Hispaniola Guadeloupe Antigua Puerto Rico Cuba Jamaica
Third Expedition, 1498-1500
St. Vincent Grenada Trinidad Margarita Venezuela
Fourth Expedition, 1502-1504
St. Lucia Martinique Honduras Nicaragua Costa Rica Panama