



Yale-New Haven
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2007 Volume II: Voyages in World History Before 1500

Who First Reached America: The Vikings, the Chinese Admiral Zheng He, or Columbus?

Guide for Curriculum Unit 07.02.09
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My unit is primarily focused on the reading for information skills and on the connected writing skills which are required by the English curriculum. The unit will start with the following essential questions: Who reached America first: the Vikings in 1000, the Chinese Admiral Zheng He in the 1420s, or Columbus in 1492? What were these travelers looking for? What did they actually find and what benefits did they get? The students will be authentic 'researchers' whose primary goal is to determine whether the Vikings, Zheng He, or Columbus reached North America first. We may use the word 'discover' but the students will learn that the Amerindians, of course, knew that America existed. They will use primary sources - the travelers' writings - and a few secondary sources. The unit will analyze visual materials and written texts in order to understand, to compare and contrast, to synthesize, and to evaluate causes and effects. It will also require various writing activities - quick writes, analytical essays, written responses, summaries, peer's revisions and editing activities - and a final project that will be in the form of a documented essay with a visual presentation, or a simpler documented visual for those students who have special needs.

(Developed for College English and Pre-AP Language/Honors, grade 11; recommended for Language Arts, College English, AP Language and Composition, grades 11-12)

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