

# Lesson Plan: Columbus Day



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# Columbus Day

[1] Columbus Day is a federal holiday in the United States. It was created to honor the **explorer** Christopher Columbus. He was an Italian explorer who worked for the Spanish government. He wanted to sail west from Europe and find a faster route to Asia.

[2] The three ships on his first **voyage** were named Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria. They arrived in the Bahamas, a group of islands in the Caribbean Sea, on October 12, 1492. Columbus believed he had reached Asia, but he was in North America.

[3] Like other explorers, Columbus kept a diary to document his travels. He also brought back **artifacts**. He used these to write a report about his voyage in 1492. His report made him famous in Europe.

[4] Columbus returned to the Caribbean three times. On his later voyages, he also **explored** parts of Central and South America. Before his final trip, Columbus collected official documents, called the *Book of Privileges*, that described the money and other benefits Columbus received from the Spanish government for his **exploration**. There were only four copies of the *Book of Privileges* created in 1502. One of them can be found in the U.S. Library of Congress.

[5] Some of the founding fathers of the United States admired Christopher Columbus and his voyages. On October 12, 1792, the first Columbus Day was celebrated in the U.S. It was the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus' arrival in North America. Columbus was also honored in the U.S. by people naming places after him and by building **statues** or other monuments.

[6] In 1892, on the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christopher Columbus's first voyage, President Benjamin Harrison invited the nation to celebrate Columbus Day. He asked teachers, poets, and politicians to use the holiday to teach Americans about the explorer and also think about what they could do to honor the United States. Some cities held **parades** and other events. In 1971, Columbus Day became an official federal holiday.

[7] Today, U.S. presidents celebrate Columbus Day by reading an official proclamation about Columbus' achievements. Banks, the U.S. Postal Service, and other federal agencies are closed during the holiday. Some places, like the Library of Congress, have special **exhibits** and events. People can visit museums to view artifacts and learn more about Christopher Columbus. Some cities and towns in the United States have Columbus Day parades. The largest Columbus Day parade is in New York City.



## Overview

This 90-minute lesson introduces students to the U.S. holiday of Columbus Day through activities that encourage the development of both language skills and analytical skills.

## Goals

Students will:

- Practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills
- Strengthen collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills on the topic of exploration
- Learn about Christopher Columbus and Columbus Day holiday traditions in the context of U.S. culture
- Make connections between their local or regional culture and how Columbus has been honored in the United States

## Lesson Materials

1. Printed or projected copy of the photo page at the beginning of this lesson
2. Printed or projected copy of the **Columbus Day** article included with this lesson
3. Paper, pens, markers, sticky notes, and paper for students to draw and write ideas

## Preparation

1. Read through this lesson in its entirety.
2. Review the **Columbus Day** article and the **Vocabulary from the Reading** list below.
3. Consider traditions in your own country around honoring Columbus or other important people.
4. Determine whether you will need to activate prior knowledge, pre-teach, or otherwise provide scaffolding, or support, for your students beyond the suggestions in the **Procedures** section.

## Vocabulary from the Reading

- **artifacts** (plural noun) – Objects made by people that are discovered during exploration and studied to learn about the people who made or used them.
- **exhibits** (plural noun) – Collections of objects that have been put out in a public space for people to look at.
- **exploration** (noun) – The act of exploring something.



- **explore** (verb) – To travel to a place in order to learn more about it or to find something.
- **explorer** (noun) – A person who travels to new places to learn about them.
- **honor** (verb) – To show admiration for someone or something in a public way.
- **parade** (noun) – A public celebration of a special day that usually includes many people and groups moving down a street by marching or riding in special vehicles.
- **statue** (noun) – A kind of three-dimensional art made from a hard material, like stone or metal, that looks like a person or animal.
- **voyage** (noun) – A long journey over water to a distant or unknown place.

## Procedures

### Introduction: What Do You Know About...? (5 minutes)

1. Show students the image on the first page of this lesson.
2. Distribute sticky notes and ask students to write down anything they know about the image for this lesson. (As an alternative to sticky notes, students can write their words directly on a classroom chalkboard or whiteboard.) Students can share words, phrases, or sentences. Some examples might be:
  - Water, wood, boat, sky, blue, white, red, ocean, waves, wind
  - Sailboat, old ship, sailing on the ocean, wooden ship
  - The boat is sailing across the ocean. The sky is blue. People used to sail in boats like this.
3. Ask students to put their sticky notes on the board or near a printed copy of the image.
4. Read out loud the words, phrases, and sentences the students have written.

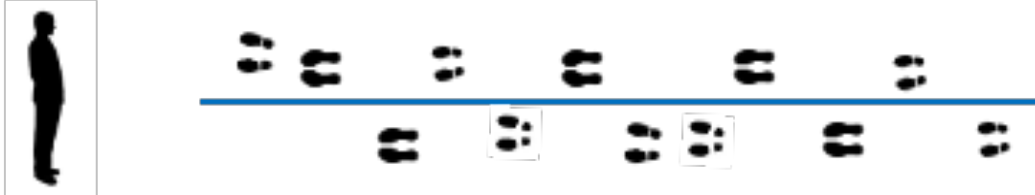
### Reading Activities: Columbus Day (15 minutes)

#### Pre-reading

1. Ask students to line up in the middle of an open part of the classroom, from the front to the back, facing the teacher.
2. Write the six statements below on the board.
  - Christopher Columbus was from Italy.
  - In 1982, Columbus sailed to the U.S.
  - Christopher Columbus did not collect any artifacts from his travels.
  - Columbus kept a diary about his voyages.
  - The U.S. built statues to honor Christopher Columbus.



- Columbus Day is celebrated in the U.S. through dancing.
3. Read each statement and ask students to decide if it is true or false.
  4. If students think the statement is true, ask them to step to the left. If they think the statement is false, ask them to step to the right. (See visual below.)



5. Introduce the vocabulary from the reading.

### While reading

6. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups and read and discuss the Columbus Day text. Encourage students to underline parts of the reading that relate to the true-or-false statements written on the board.

### Post-reading

7. Repeat steps 1, 3, and 4 and ask students to correct any statements they think are false. Ask students to share the number of the paragraph where they found the correct information.

## Listening and Speaking Activity: Who Should Have a Statue in Your Community? (20 minutes)

1. Remind students that one way people in the U.S. honored Columbus was by building statues.
2. Put students into small groups and ask them to brainstorm two or three people from their local or regional community who deserve to be honored with a statue.
3. Ask students to share and write their candidates on the board.
4. Lead students in voting for their favorite candidate.
5. Ask students to work in their small groups to sketch a design and choose a location for their statue.

## Writing and Creativity Activity: Exploring and Displaying Artifacts (20 minutes)

1. Remind students that explorers like Columbus brought back artifacts to help others learn about their travels.
2. Ask students (individually or in small groups) to choose somewhere in the universe where they would like to explore. Students should consider and discuss why they

want to visit this place and what they want to explore (that is, see, eat, hear, and do) during their visit.

3. Ask students to draw (or find an image or digital file of) one artifact they want to share to represent their trip.
4. Ask students to write a short description of their artifact. This might include where they found the artifact, what materials it is made from, and why it was made.
  - Place: O’ahu, Hawaii. U.S.A
    - Artifact: Shell necklace
    - Sketch idea: A string of colorful shells with tiny beads
    - Description: I found this necklace buried in the sand. It has many shells. I think someone wore it to celebrate or remember the ocean.
5. Display the artifacts with descriptions around the room and let students visit the class exhibit.

### Collaborative Writing and Creativity Activity: Travel Diary Entry (25 minutes)

1. Remind students that explorers kept travel diaries to document their travel experiences. Share typical information included in an explorer’s diary, such as date and time, crew information, weather, observations, comments, etc.
2. Divide students into small groups and provide categories or a starter sentence for each small group.
  - Categories example with sample student answers
    - Date and Time: *August 7, 2025. 10:00 AM.*
    - Location: *island of O’ahu, Hawaii. U.S.A.*
    - Crew Members: *Rosa is the leader. Mateo is the map reader. Lily is the notetaker.*
    - Weather: *Sunny with warm wind. Some clouds in the sky. No rain.*
    - Observations: *We saw tall trees and colorful flowers. We heard birds singing and water from a waterfall. We found a shell necklace in the sand on the beach.*
    - Comments: *Lily thinks the necklace was made a long time ago. Mateo marked the place we found the necklace on our map. We will come back tomorrow to explore more near the waterfall. Everyone is excited!*
  - Sentence starter examples
    - Date and Time: Today is... We started exploring at...
    - Location: We are exploring...
    - Crew Members: Our crew has... people. Their names are... The leader is... The person reading the map is... and ... writes notes.



- Weather: The weather is... We see... in the sky. It is... (for example, hot, cold, windy, sunny, cloudy, rainy).
  - Observations: We saw... We heard... We found... It looks like... We think it was used for...
  - Comments: ... thinks... We marked... on our map. We will... tomorrow. Everyone feels...
3. Ask students to work together to fill in one category.
  4. Ask students to give their diary to another group.
  5. When students get a new diary, they should fill in a blank or add another sentence.
  6. Repeat steps 3 to 5 as many times as you wish.
  7. Share the travel diaries by reading them out loud or displaying them in the room.

### Closing Activity: Now, What Do You Know About...? (5 minutes)

1. Ask students to review what they wrote in the Introduction Activity.
2. Show them the same image from the first page of this lesson plan.
3. Ask students to add more information to the image. They can add new sticky notes or return to the existing notes and add more information.
4. Read out loud the new words, phrases, and sentences the students have written.

## Variations and Extensions

You may wish to extend the lesson over two days in order to incorporate the Artifact Story and/or the Let's Build a Boat activity.

### Artifact Story (30 minutes)

The Artifact Story activity can be used instead of, or in addition to, the Writing and Creativity Activity: Exploring and Displaying Artifacts.

1. Ask students to choose somewhere in the universe where they would like to visit. Students should consider and discuss why they want to visit and what they want to experience (that is, see, eat, hear, and do) during their visit.
2. Ask students to draw (or find an image or digital file of) one artifact they want to share to represent their trip.
3. Ask students to write a story about the artifact. Some questions they can consider include:
  - What kind of object is this?
  - Who made it?
  - What was it used for?
  - What is it made of?



- When was it made?
  - Where was it found?
  - What does it tell us about the people who used it?
4. Guide students to give a performance-based presentation sharing the story about their artifact.

### Let's Build a Boat (30 minutes)

This activity can be used instead of, or in addition to, the Collaborative Writing and Creativity Activity: Travel Diary Entry. For this activity students will need materials – like bottles, cardboard, or straws – to reuse. They may also need scissors, tape, glue, or string.

1. Ask students to look at the recycled materials they want to use.
2. Encourage them to imagine and design a ship for a voyage to explore a new place.

Questions to consider:

- Will it float?
  - Will it carry something?
3. Provide tape, glue, or string to put the pieces together.
  4. If possible, let students test their ship in water (like a tub or bin). If ships do not float, guide students through making changes to create stronger or lighter ships.
  5. Ask students to show their ships to the class. Ask them to share what materials they used and how they made their ships.

