

A stylized illustration featuring a person riding a horse. The horse's head is replaced by a futuristic, mechanical design with orange and white stripes and circular elements. The background is a solid orange color. In the upper right, there are white silhouettes of people riding horses. In the lower right, there is a red circle with the text "SAMPLE MATERIAL".

# Nelson SOCIALS

**SAMPLE  
MATERIAL**



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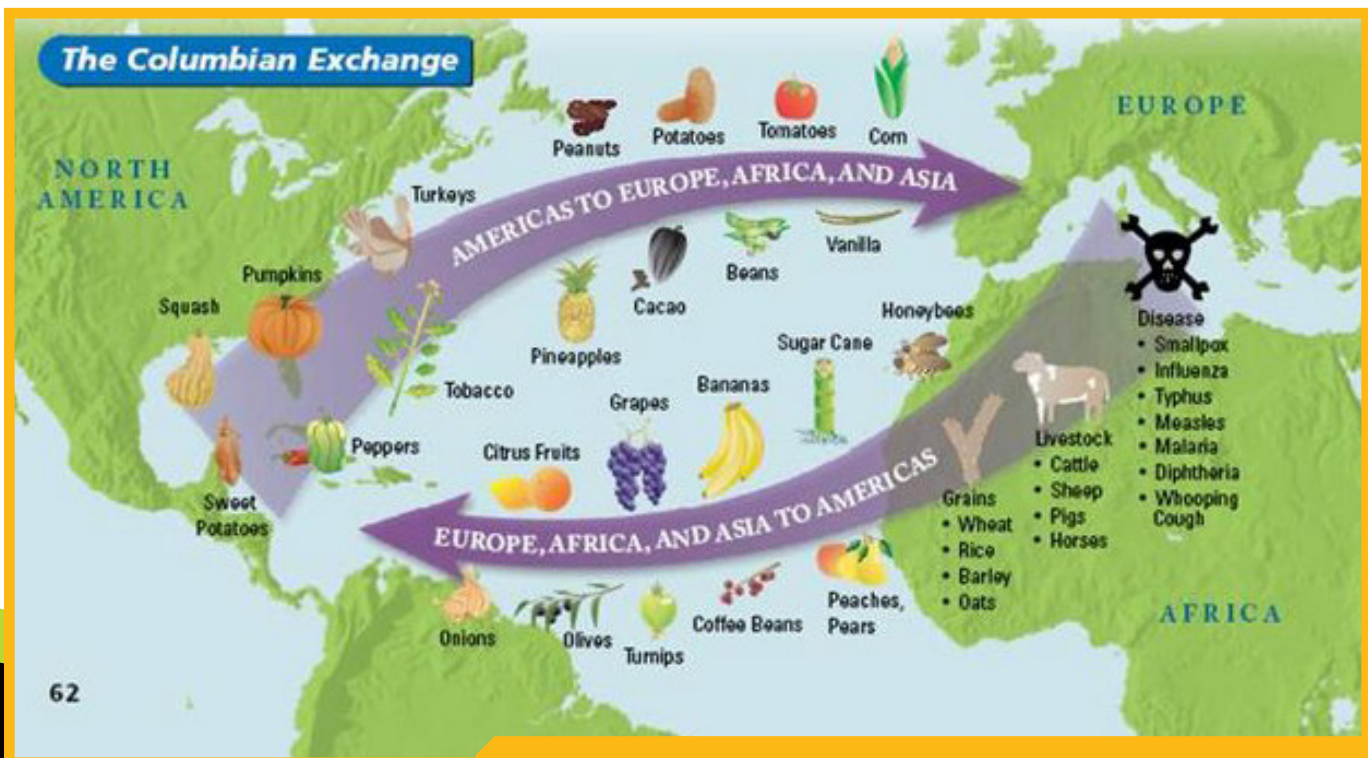
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# WHY WAS THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE SIGNIFICANT?

The Columbian Exchange refers to the movement of people, food, animals, goods, ideas, and diseases between Europe and the Americas. The Exchange began after Christopher Columbus reached the Americas in 1492. This date began a new period of global connection and trade. The connection between Europe, Africa, and Asia and the Americas became permanent.

The Columbian Exchange



**Q:** Examine the movement of goods and disease. Which goods and diseases are most significant for your life today?



A hamburger from Canada (left); Neapolitan pizza from Italy (centre); and somtum (papaya salad) from Thailand (right). **Q:** Examine the images and the map, how might these foods be different without the Columbian Exchange?

## FOOD

The Columbian Exchange dramatically changed the way the world eats. The exchange led to farmers planting new successful crops in places they had never grown before. For example, potatoes became widely planted in Europe and crops such as sugar cane and oranges were planted throughout the Americas.

## ANIMALS

Animals that arrived in the Americas from Europe had significant consequences. Indigenous peoples had lived with and had hunted native animals for thousands of years. Livestock animals such as pigs, cows, and sheep were new food sources in the Americas. **Q:** How might new livestock have had a significant positive impact on Indigenous peoples' lives? What significant negative impacts might have occurred?

“... improvements that followed upon Columbus’s voyages did not cause— history is not that simple—but made possible an increase in the number of humans from about 500 million in 1500 to an awesome six and a half billion in 2000....”

– Alfred Crosby, *author and creator of the term “Columbian Exchange”*

The arrival of horses, donkeys, and mules altered transportation, hunting, and agricultural practices. This 1867 image by Alfred Jacob Miller shows Indigenous people hunting Bison on the plains. **Q:** How would hunting have been different before the Columbian Exchange? How might the transportation available from horses have a significant impact on a society’s way of life?



## DISEASE

Smallpox, malaria, bubonic plague, measles, influenza, and cholera are all diseases that were introduced to the Americas by early European explorers and settlers. Indigenous peoples of the Americas had no previous experience of immunity to these diseases. Scholars estimate that these new diseases led to the deaths of between 80 to 95 percent of Indigenous societies in the Americas, within 150 years after the arrival of Columbus.

### Smallpox in Nahua Society



This 1577 Aztec image shows the stages of smallpox in a Nahua person. (The Nahuas are a group of Indigenous people who originated in central America.) Diseases like smallpox spread quickly by air and touch.

“

... [The disease] brought great desolation: a great many died of it. They could no longer walk about, but lay in their dwellings and sleeping places, no longer able to move or stir. They were unable to change position, to stretch out on their sides or face down, or raise their heads. And when they made a motion, they called out loudly. The pustules that covered people caused great desolation; very many people died of them, and many just starved to death; starvation reigned, and no one took care of others any longer.”

– From a 1500s Nahua description of the impacts of smallpox

**Q:** Think about the smallpox illustration and quote above. Why was the introduction and spread of smallpox a significant consequence of the Columbian Exchange?

### Syphilis in Europe

Few diseases moved from the Americas to Europe. One possible exception is **syphilis**. Syphilis is a bacterial disease that is contracted by infection. Though some historians disagree, many argue that syphilis was a disease that came to Europe with Columbus' men. When the men returned to Europe the disease quickly spread. Studies of human remains and written accounts from the time period reveal that syphilis was spread through Europe by armies at war. The first major outbreak in Europe was recorded in 1494. Syphilis reached Russia by 1497, Africa by 1498, and China by 1505. **Q:** What does the spread of syphilis tell us about the impact of the Columbian Exchange for the entire world?

# THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

In the early 1500s, Europeans needed workers to grow crops in the Americas to sell in Europe. Much of the Indigenous population had been killed by disease, war, and enslavement, so Europeans looked to Africa for workers. They purchased or traded for enslaved Africans or captured free Africans, enslaved them, and brought them to the Americas. The first enslaved African people arrived at Hispaniola in 1502. Between the 1500s and 1800s, it is estimated that over 12 million Africans were transported as slaves. Historians estimate that 1.5 to 2.5 million of these people died on the ship journey across the Atlantic which was known as the **middle passage**.

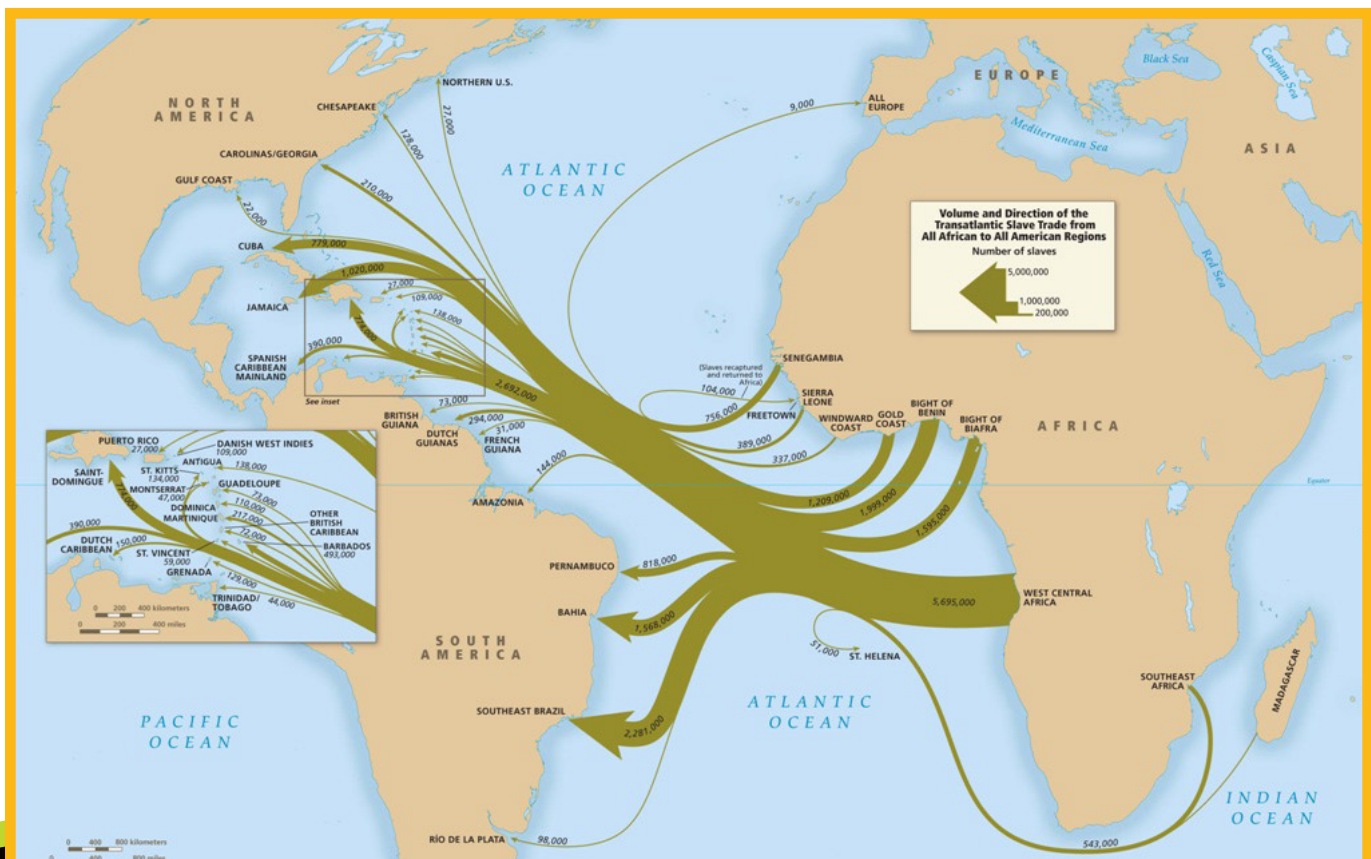
## ACCOUNT OF THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

*Olaudah Equiano lived in the 1700s. He grew up in West Africa and was kidnapped by slave traders. This is an excerpt from his autobiography, published in 1789.*

The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time ... The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us .... The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror....

**Q:** What makes the experiences of enslaved people in the middle passage historically significant?

## Slave Trade Across the Atlantic



**Q:** Using the map, where were most enslaved people from and where were most taken to? Why was this movement of people significant for societies on both sides of the Atlantic?

## DETERMINE SIGNIFICANCE

Trying to decide what makes an event, person, or object from the past significant helps us understand what is worth studying and what is not. When determining historical significance, it is helpful to question if the person, event, or object

- led to long lasting change
- impacted many people
- had a profound or deep impact on people's lives
- was revealing or symbolic of greater historical trends

Compare and contrast the significance of **quinine** and tobacco and rate their historical significance.

1. **Identify:** Look at the excerpts, picture, and graphs in this activity to identify the impacts of quinine and tobacco on Europe, Africa, and Asia.
2. **Compare:** Compare and contrast the impacts of quinine and tobacco.
3. **Rate:** Rate the historical significance of each object and provide reasoning. Use a scale from 1 (not at all significant) to 5 (highly significant).
4. **Identify Patterns:** How does the significance of quinine and tobacco reflect the Columbian Exchange as a whole?

### QUININE

*In the following excerpt from The Journal of Economic Perspectives, economists Nathan Nunn and Nancy Qian discuss the significance of quinine.*

Quinine, an important medicinal "gift" from the New World [the Americas], had significant consequences for the relationship between Europe and its tropical ... colonies, particularly its African colonies.... Quinine ... [is] derived from the bark of **cinchona** trees native to the Andes [Mountains in South America]. The trees grow in scattered clumps in the eastern mountainous forests of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia.... Quinine was the first effective treatment of malaria....

The British government, amidst the expansion of its empire into many malaria ridden regions, and seeing the potential benefits of quinine, encouraged the Royal Society to research the properties of quinine and explore the possibilities of farming it outside of the Andes.... Estimates suggest that by 1880, enough was produced to supply ten million people with a daily dose.... The standard view is that Europe's colonization of Africa would have been virtually impossible without quinine.

This 1872 image shows a cinchona tree plantation in India.



## TOBACCO

*In the following excerpt from The Journal of Economic Perspectives, economists Nathan Nunn and Nancy Qian discuss the significance of tobacco.*

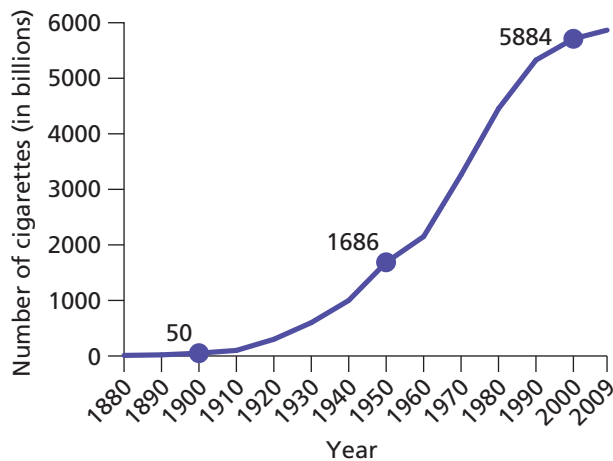
It is believed that Native Americans began to use tobacco around the first century BCE. There is no evidence that Native Americans ever consumed tobacco recreationally....

Ramon Pane, a monk who accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, gave lengthy descriptions about the custom of smoking tobacco. He described how natives inhaled smoke through a Y-shaped tube. The two ends were placed in the nostrils and the third end over a pastille (small packet) of burning leaves.

Although the exact manner of smoking differed between regions, the practice of smoking tobacco appears to have been universal.

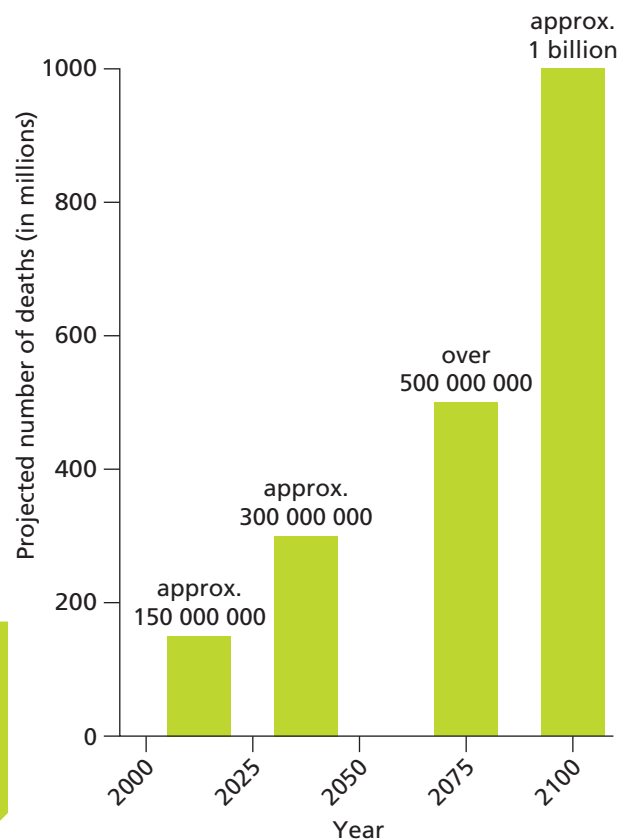
Tobacco was quickly adopted by Europeans. At first tobacco was regarded and consumed only as a medicine. In 1560, the French ambassador to Portugal, Jean Nicot de Villemain (from whom the term "nicotine" originates), proclaimed that tobacco had ... medicinal properties. In 1561, Nicot sent tobacco leaves to Catherine de Medici, the Queen of France. She was so impressed with the plant that she decreed that tobacco be called Herba Regina (the Queen's Herb).... In England, tobacco was first introduced ... in the 1580s. It was chiefly used by sailors.... By the beginning of the 1600s, tobacco had spread to all parts of Europe.

**Global Cigarette Consumption in One Century**



These charts were created by the World Health Organization in a publication known as *The Tobacco Atlas*. Although the increase in the use of tobacco has begun to slow down, the number of deaths connected to tobacco use continues to rise.

**Projected Deaths Caused by Tobacco Use**



## Notes





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