ChronoZoom

Atlantic Encounters Lesson

# Essential Question

How did Atlantic encounters shape North America?

# Rationale

Drawing upon recent historical scholarship, we have framed our lessons around *encounters* rather than *contacts*. Framing these events (i.e., the Taino encounter with Columbus, etc.) as encounters instead of first contacts reflects a more comprehensive and complete understanding of what actually happened. What follows is a rationale for why we have framed our lessons this way; please use this to shape discussions with your students about the important differences between encounters and contacts.

Oftentimes, the standard historical approach is to characterize these events as *first contacts*. However, this approach is problematic. *Contact* implies a precise – and often isolated – moment when two or more cultures first experience each other. Additionally, framing these events as first contacts usually privileges the European perspective, assuming that dynamic European explorers “discovered” new lands and “less-civilized” peoples, as if the latter were frozen in time, waiting for the moment of discovery by the former. Thinking of these events as *first* contact events is also misleading. News of newcomers and their goods, or cultural expectations the historical actors brought to these moments, often meant that these were not *new* contacts. Perhaps most importantly, though, characterizing these events as moments of contact obscures the much larger historical processes leading up to these events and the consequences that resulted from them. These lessons help students understand the greater historical context within which these encounters unfolded.

New scholarship about encounters usually focuses upon a number of interrelated themes: performance, ambiguity, and power. The first theme, *performance*, reflects the fact that actual performances occurred during many encounters. Both sides in an encounter tried to demonstrate their power and identity while appearing open and interested in exchanges, especially those involving the trade of goods and information. Unfortunately, many participants in encounters were unable to understand each other through speech, so they had to perform their intentions through gestures. As historian John Lutz notes, these were often “elaborately staged, intensely theatrical, performances” that involved singing, dancing, speeches, and other important actions.[[1]](#endnote-1) Yet encounters were fraught with *ambiguity*. Because the participants could not speak mutually intelligible languages – or had limited capacity to do so – what each side actually meant to communicate was often unclear. This resulted in encounter participants reading what they wanted into the other’s actions. This was why translators and cultural mediators (i.e., Tisquantum, La Malinche, and Pocahontas) emerged as such important historical figures during early encounters. But the most important theme, *power*, exerted a strong influence over encounters. Power was a key component of performances. Each side had to demonstrate to the other that they could not be pushed around. But power was also ambiguous – each side often misunderstood or did not see the other side’s power or what constituted power in a radically different society. As students will see through their research, indigenous peoples were the powerful ones throughout many of these encounters. But for each encounter, there came a turning point when Europeans gained the upper hand. However, this was not automatic or fated to happen. Europeans were not inherently more powerful than indigenous peoples.

Exploring the theme of Atlantic encounters will provide your students with a deeper understanding of the complexities of these events. We have found that students enjoy complicating the preconceived notions of what happened during these encounters. Framing these as *encounters* instead of *contacts* better enables students to think critically about these important historical events.

John S. Lutz, *Myth and Memory: Stories of Indigenous-European Contact* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 7.

# Learning Objectives

**Students will understand:**

* That the Atlantic encounters among indigenous Americans, Africans, and Europeans were major turning points in the history of the world.
* That the Columbian Exchange shaped the lives of peoples in the Americas, Africa, and Europe in different ways.
* The different scales of historical context, as illustrated through using ChronoZoom, relative to specific events and peoples engaged with Atlantic encounters.

**Students will know:**

* The circumstances of the lives of indigenous peoples and Europeans prior to encountering each other.
* That Europeans pursued exploration of the Americas for a variety of complex and interrelated reasons, including financial gain, religious freedom, competition for resources and power, and intellectual curiosity.
* How indigenous peoples and Europeans interacted with each other to make the best of their changing worlds as a result of encounters.
* The major figures of these encounters.
* How various individuals and communities suffered and/or profited from the encounters.
* Ways in which these encounters shaped the lives of indigenous Americans, Africans, and Europeans.

**Students will be able to**

* Research an assigned encounter in a group and answer a guiding question or set of guiding questions.
* Use primary and secondary sources to support their conclusions.
* Create an exhibit (or exhibits) with related artifacts on a timeline in ChronoZoom.
* Leverage online resources and strengthen their technology skills.

# AHA History Discipline Core

**Core Competencies** (Numbers) and **Learning Outcomes** (Bullets)

**1. Engage in historical inquiry, research, and analysis**

* Develop a disciplined, skeptical stance and outlook on the world that demands evidence and sophisticated use of information.
* Understand the dynamics of change over time.
* Explore the complexity of the human experience; across time and space.
* Evaluate a variety of historical sources for their credibility, position, and perspective.
* Read and contextualize materials from the past with appropriate precision and detail.

1. **Generate significant, open-ended questions about the past and devise research strategies to answer them**

* Seek a variety of sources that provide evidence to support an argument about the past.
* Develop a methodological practice of gathering, sifting, analyzing, ordering, synthesizing, and interpreting evidence.
* Identify and summarize other scholars’ historical arguments.

1. **Craft historical narrative and argument**

* Generate a historical argument that is reasoned and based on historical evidence selected, arranged, and analyzed.
* Write effective narrative that describes and analyzes the past for its use in the present.
* Understand that the ethics and practice of history mean recognizing and building on other scholars’ work, peer review, and citation.
* Defend a position publicly and revise this position when new evidence requires it.

# Assessment Tool(s)

Student groups will be assessed on a common rubric on their application of historical thinking skills in researching and creating their exhibits in ChronoZoom.

# Materials/Resources

* Access to computers and internet
* Encounters Research Guides with specific guiding questions

# Instructional Procedures/Process

1. Help students define *encounters* between indigenous Americans and Europeans, differentiating it from *contact* (See Rationale Above).
2. Introduce ChronoZoom to students by showing examples of timelines, exhibits, and artifacts. Ask students about what they see in a museum exhibit, and have them explain how collections of artifacts make an exhibit. Then ask students how they view an exhibit, leading to the answer that they either explore on their own or have a tour guide. For the first activity students will explore the Powhatan-English Timeline on their own or in small groups.
3. Have students review the Powhatan-English Timeline example in ChronoZoom.

Students will answer the following guiding questions for the Powhatan-English Encounter by perusing the exhibits of primary and secondary sources on the timeline. (Teachers may review over this timeline as a class or allow students time to browse through the timeline and answer the research questions below on their own.)

* What were conditions like in England that encouraged the English to start their own colonies in North America?
* What was the Powhatan Confederacy? How did it form?
* Who were the key historical actors in the founding of Jamestown and the early encounters between the English and the Powhatans? How did these individuals interact with each other?
* What systems of labor did early Jamestown experience?
* How did the Powhatan-English encounter change from one of tense peace to conflict?
* How was Bacon’s Rebellion (1676) a turning point for the English-Algonquian dynamics of power in the region?

1. Using ChronoZoom, classes or groups within a class will create timelines representing one Atlantic encounter.

Encounter Assignments (one per class or group)

* Taino/Spaniards in the Caribbean (1492)
* Aztecs/Spaniards in Mesoamerica (1519)
* Hurons/Champlain on the St. Lawrence (1608)
* Algonquins/English around Plimoth (1620)

Note: We have designed this lesson so it can be scaled to a variety of classroom settings, depending upon access to technology, grade level and ability of students, available time in the curriculum, teaching assignments, etc. Below are two options for assigning students encounters to research for creating exhibits.

Option A: Assign each encounter above to different classes. Divide each class into 6-8 small groups. Assign each group a guiding question for their encounter. Students will then use the research guide to write a summary answering their guiding question and find 2-3 pieces of evidence such as various primary and secondary sources (i.e. documents, images, maps, charts, videos) that supports their summary.

Option B: Assign encounters above to various groups within one class. Each group will divide up the research questions among its members, and then each group member will create an exhibit for their group’s timeline.

*\*Research Questions also available for Beothunks/Beothunks in the Northwestern Atlantic (990s), Mi’kmaqs/European Fishermen in the Northwestern Atlantic (1510s), and Algonquians & Mohawks/Hudson in Southern New England (1609) – see additional materials. Use these for additional classes or as challenge projects for groups that finish early.*

1. ChronoZoom will be used to represent student research. The teacher should create a timeline for each encounter first in Chronozoom for students to populate with exhibits. See the “How to Create in ChronoZoom” directions in additional materials for video and written instructions.
   1. What goes on a timeline?
   2. What kind of information doesn’t fit well on a timeline?
   3. Students will be instructed to focus on dated events to organize their exhibits with important information presented and supporting artifacts.
   4. As an example, students can be shown the “Formation of Powhatan Confederacy” exhibit. This exhibit has a date for the creation of the Powhatan Confederacy but also includes information and artifacts about the geography and subsistent farming patterns that do not have specific dates.
2. Students will watch the video/tour on how to create an exhibit in ChronoZoom, or the teacher can lead them through creating an example exhibit with the “How to Create in ChronoZoom” directions in additional materials.
3. Students will then populate an exhibit in Chronozoom using their summary and evidence/visuals. The exhibit will be included in the class or group’s timeline around their assigned Atlantic encounter.
4. Once the timeline(s) have been populated with exhibits, students should review the entire project and work together to remove redundancies or repeated information. They should pay special attention to images used more than once and duplicated events and concepts.

# Extension Activities

* Show an example of a tour on ChronoZoom such as the [Mayans,](http://www.chronozoom.com/#/t00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000@tour=5) [Japanese internment](http://www.chronozoom.com/#/t00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000@tour=4), or another at the teacher’s discretion. Then they may develop a tour in ChronoZoom that answers the essential question (How did Atlantic encounters shape North America?) through a particular topic lens. Either in the same groups or in new groups, students will create a tour using the timelines in the Atlantic encounters overall timeline to answer the essential question through a particular lens from the following list: Trade, European competition, Labor/ Social status, Geography, Conflict, Religion/Spirituality, and Governance. This activity only works if the overall Atlantic encounters timeline is populated with four or more encounters.
* Individually students may create their own piece of evidence through a RAFT.  They will take on a role, write for a specific audience, choose a particular format, and focus on one topic that shows their understanding of the lesson objectives around Atlantic encounters. (See additional materials for the assignment, planning guide, and rubric.)

1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)