Section 1: Introduction

The Colonial Era

After 1492, voyages by Christopher Columbus and other explorers awakened Europe to the idea that whole new lands existed in the continent of North America. Although estimates vary, millions of native people lived on the western side of the Atlantic Ocean. An exchange of goods between the natives of North America and Europeans eventually brought significant changes on both sides of the Atlantic. Over the next two centuries, Spain, France, and England sent more explorers. Native Americans constantly readjusted to these new cultures and often faced negative consequences.

Each European nation had their own reasons for exploring the New World and each established claims in different areas of North America. Spain claimed much of Central and South America and made inroads into California and Florida. France claimed land in eastern Canada, around the Great Lakes, and down the Mississippi River.

England, the “Mother Country” of the modern-day United States, settled mainly on the east coast of North America. Three distinct regions evolved in the 13 English colonies: New England, the Middle Colonies, and the Southern Colonies. England brought in more permanent settlers than the other nations. Some came for religious freedom, but most came for the economic opportunity to make a living in a land with many resources. A constant need for labor in the colonies resulted in the forced migration of African slaves.

North America, 1713

- England
- France
- Spain

Columbian Exchange begins after voyages of European discovery in 1492
England defeats Spanish Armada in 1588
New France established in 1608
New England colonies established in 1620
Last English colony, Georgia, founded in 1733

Millions of natives live in established cultures in 1565
Spain establishes St. Augustine in Florida in 1607
English Jamestown in Virginia in 1619
New York established in 1664
Benjamin Franklin experiments with electricity in 1752
North American Peoples on the Eve of European Contact

A. First Americans

1 Historians don't know exactly how and when North America was first settled. 2 Historians also debate about the density (number of inhabitants) of the native population in North America when Europeans arrived on the continent. 3 Common population estimates usually range from three to ten million people. 4 One of the first European explorers, Christopher Columbus, was looking for a sea route to the Spice Islands in the Indies off of Southeast Asia. 5 When he landed on the Caribbean Islands in 1492, Columbus mistakenly labeled the native peoples he encountered "Indians." 6 The native peoples did not have a system of writing, so most of what we know today about these early peoples is not based on written history. 7 Instead, those who research Native Americans must piece together their history by using tribal stories and traditions, language patterns, genetic evidence, and archaeological evidence (physical artifacts).

B. Migration Theories

8 Most historians today suggest that ancestors of Native Americans arrived in North America during the last ice age (about 33,000 to 13,000 years ago). 9 Several different theories have been put forth about their migration path. 10 Most scientific findings point to the arrival of the first humans in North America traveling from northeastern Asia across a land bridge called "Beringia" that existed between Siberia and Alaska. 11 As Earth warmed and these ice age glaciers retreated, the ancestors of Native Americans traveled by two main land routes south and settled in different areas throughout the hemisphere. 12 Two smaller groups of researchers believe in different migration theories. 13 One group of scientists suggests that people from Southeast Asia, Australia, and islands in the East Pacific may have sailed east across the ocean to settle in South America. 14 Yet another group of historians say that people from southern Europe, a group called the Solutreans who lived in an area of today's southern Spain, France, and Portugal sailed west across the Atlantic Ocean at the edge of an ice cap during the end of the last ice age.

15 However native peoples migrated, this much is clear. 16 Over thousands of years small, widely scattered groups of people settled in diverse (different) areas throughout North America. 17 The geography of the regions they settled dictated unique ways to create shelters, produce food, dress, and worship. 18 Rich and diverse cultures developed. 19 The Native Americans often interacted with each other through trade and travel and created a way of life that had much in common, despite their differences. 20 Many Native Americans believe their ancestors originated in the Americas. 21 Most tribes have creation stories that tell of their tribal beginnings. 22 Some historians say these creation stories may well reflect the experiences of native ancestors as they journeyed from Asia, across water, ice, and unknown lands, encountering new animals they had never seen before.

C. Northeast Tribes

23 By the time of the arrival of Europeans around 1500, there were several distinct regions of Native American culture in North America. 24 One of those regions was the home of the Northeast tribes. 25 They lived along the Atlantic shore, into the Great Lakes region, and in the forests of the Appalachian Mountains. 26 Tribes in this area were mainly hunters and gatherers. 27 They built permanent longhouses made of bark attached to wooden pole frames. 28 Often described as fierce fighters, tribes in this region often fought one another. 29 By the time of the arrival of the first English colonists in the early 1600s, Native Americans had formed an organization called the Iroquois League to help keep peace among the warring tribes.
D. English Colonies

47 England’s first explorers to America were looking for economic opportunities as well. They hoped to be the first to discover a water route through the continent so they could control trade between Asia and Europe. 49 This new route, if it existed, would have been much shorter than sailing around the southern tip of South America. Perhaps, they thought, gold could also be discovered on the way. 51 This so-called “Northwest Passage” did not exist. 52 However, in searching for it, the English explorers did a good job of mapping the east coast of North America, south of the French claims in Canada and north of the Spanish claims in Florida.

53 The English began settling colonies along the east coast of North America beginning in the early 1600s, about the same time New France was being settled. 54 There were three main English colonial regions: the area from the St. Lawrence River south to Cape Cod and west to the Hudson River (New England), from the Hudson River south to Chesapeake Bay (Middle Colonies), and the area from Chesapeake Bay south to Spanish Florida (Southern Colonies).

55 The English colonies were hemmed in along the coast by the Appalachian Mountains and the possessions of New France west of those mountains. 56 England brought in far more actual settlers than France. 57 Most of the English settlers were Protestant and most were farmers or merchants, not fur traders.

European Claims in North America by 1700

Fun Fact Feature

Looking at a map of California, you can still see the cities of San Francisco, Santa Barbara, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, San Jose, San Gabriel, and Santa Cruz among others.

Why do so many California cities start with the word “San” or “Santa”? 
B. Spanish Lands in America
20Amerigo Vespucci was an Italian explorer and cartographer (map maker) who sailed west from Spain soon after Columbus. 21After several voyages he made a widely distributed map of the lands found in the Western Hemisphere showing Europeans a continent they knew little to nothing about. 22Europeans soon called these western lands “America” after the cartographer. 23His map and the lure of business opportunities trading the New World’s foods, animals, and minerals brought many settlers. 24Spain was first, settling lands in the Caribbean Islands, Central America, and western South America. 25Portugal settled Brazil on the east coast of South America.
26Spanish explorers also claimed the Florida peninsula and started the first lasting European settlement in North America, called St. Augustine, in 1565. 27Spanish priests established missions to convert Native Americans to the Catholic religion in what would later be the American Southwest (New Mexico) and California. 28Over three hundred thousand Spaniards, 90% male, came to American settlements by the 1600s to extract mineral wealth and produce agricultural products. 29When they married native women, they produced a population blend called “mestizo” (mixed Spanish-Native Americans). 30Holland was the first European nation to bring African slaves to the colonies.

C. French Lands in America
31Spain controlled Central and South America in the 1500s and, because of her newfound wealth there, the Spanish military dominated the Atlantic Ocean. 32However, in 1588, a large fleet of Spain’s navy was destroyed when it attacked England in a battle in the English Channel. 33The defeat of the Spanish Armada cleared the way for England and France to send their explorers to America.
34By the late 1500s, the French had explored the east coast of modern-day Canada. 35In this region the French soon found a source of wealth by trading axes, knives, cloth, and glass beads with the natives for furs. 36Generally the French treated the natives fairly. 37It was to the economic benefit of both sides to exchange trading items. 38The French made alliances with the natives to keep other nations, like Spain and England, out of the area. 39The children of French and native couples were called “metis.”
40French explorer Samuel de Champlain pushed further up the St. Lawrence River and established Quebec in 1608. 41Catholic and Protestant missionaries followed. 42French fur trappers and Catholic missionaries continued to push deeper and deeper west into Canada, the Great Lakes region, the Ohio River valley, and down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. 43This area from the Appalachian Mountains to the Rocky Mountains was given the name “New France.”
44The French kings also made inroads into some Caribbean Islands. 45They became far more interested in trading with the islands that produced sugar in the Caribbean and with the Spice Islands in Asia and so, for a while, the French government did little to sponsor emigration to North America. 46The number of French settlers in North America remained small and scattered in the 1600s.
D. Southeast and Plains Tribes
30 In the Southeast, tribes relied heavily on farming for much of their food. 31 They grew maize (corn), beans, and tobacco but also supplemented their diet by fishing and hunting. 32 Their climate was milder so their homes were simple log frames with a roof covered in leaves or grasses. 33 Plains Tribes who lived in the middle of the continent depended on buffalo for tools, meat, and clothing. 34 Buffalo skins also covered their teepees (tent-like housing). 35 Plains tribes were nomadic, moving from season to season, hunting buffalo on foot. 36 After Spaniards brought horses to the Americas in the 1500s, many tribes migrated to the plains and thrived on the grasslands there. 37 Plains tribesmen quickly adapted the horse to their culture.

Native American Regions in North America

E. Southwestern and Basin Tribes
38 Between the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California and the Rocky Mountains was a region where the Great Basin tribes lived. 39 Much of the area was desert and not suitable for farming. 40 Simple tools like bows and arrows, stone knives, digging sticks, and fishing nets allowed these tribes to move about as they hunted and gathered food. 41 The Southwestern Region has a dry, hot climate. 42 Natives here were often called Pueblos because they built permanent villages ("pueblo" is the Spanish word for town). 43 Their homes were made out of thick adobe (sun-dried bricks made of clay and straw) to keep out summer heat and winter cold. 44 Some pueblos were three or four stories high and built under the overhangs of cliffs.

F. Northwest Coast Tribes
45 The Northwest Coast tribes relied heavily on salmon, shellfish, berries, and camas root to provide their foods. 46 Tribes were made up of villages built along the ocean shore or the edge of a bay or river. 47 Native homes along the coast were planked (long, flat timbers) longhouses. 48 They also used local forests to gather materials for woven mats, baskets, canoes, and other wood products. 49 Inland from the coast, east of the Cascade Mountains, were the Plateau tribes. 50 Like the Great Basin and Plains tribes, Plateau tribes were nomadic, moving with the seasons. 51 Annual salmon runs up the Columbia River into the interior plateau region provided a major source of food. 52 Plateau tribes traded widely with the Northwest Coast tribes and the Plains tribes.

Mesa Verde in Colorado is an example of Pueblo architecture.

Fun Fact Feature
- Massachusetts, Indiana, Ohio, Kansas, Illinois, Arkansas, North Dakota, Utah ... these are some modern-day names of states in the United States. What do these names have in common?
1. When European explorers came to North America around 1500, how many Native Americans were probably living on the continent?
   a. only a few thousand
   b. 1 million
   c. 3 to 10 million
   d. about 45 million

Which sentence best supports the answer?  

2. Explain why the name “Indians” is really a mistaken label given the natives by Christopher Columbus.

3. Many Native American tribes believe this about their existence in North America:
   a. creation stories show their ancestors originated here.
   b. Solutreans from southern Spain, France, and Portugal became the first Americans.
   c. Native peoples migrated from northeastern Asia during the ice age.
   d. Australians and southeastern Asians sailed east across the Pacific Ocean.

Which sentences best support the answer?  

4. “Beringia” is the name given to:
   a. the first Native Americans.
   b. the ancestral language group of Native Americans.
   c. the people who may have sailed across the Atlantic Ocean from southern Spain.
   d. the land bridge between North East Asia and Alaska during the most recent ice age.

Which sentence best supports the answer?  

5. Historians have been able to piece together Native American history mainly because of the vast amount of written records kept by Native Americans over the centuries.

Is this statement true or false?  

Which sentence best supports the answer?  

6. Name two Native American regions in North America where the natives used “longhouses.”
   a.  
   b.  

7. Which theory of Native American migration is most popular among scientists today?
   a. Solutrean ocean crossing
   b. Beringia migration
   c. Native American creation stories
   d. Australian, South East Asian, Pacific Island Ocean crossing

Which sentence best supports the answer?  

8. In which region of North America were the natives often referred to as “Pueblos” as a result of the housing structures they created?
   a. Northwest Coast
   b. Southwest Region
   c. Plains Region
   d. Southeast Region

Which sentence best supports the answer?  

9. In which region of North America was the Iroquois League located?
   a. Northwest Coast
   b. Southwest Region
   c. Plains Region
   d. Northeast Region

Which sentence best supports the answer?  