

Running head: EXPLORERS OF THE NEW WORLD

Software Evaluation:
Explorers of the New World

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General Description

Title: Explorers of the New World
Publisher: SoftKey
Platforms: Macintosh and IBM CD-ROM
Subject Matter: European history, explorers of North and South America (1400-1625)
Grade Level: upper elementary - junior high
Price: unknown, free with purchase of another product (probably \$20 - 30)

Minimum Requirements:

Windows: 486SX, 25 MHz processor or better, 4 MB of RAM minimum (8 MB recommended). SVGA (640 X 480 X 256) graphics card with compatible monitor, double-speed CD-ROM drive with MSCDEX. Mouse or other windows pointing device. Windows compatible sound card. Windows 3.1 or later.

Macintosh: 68030, 25 MHz processor or better, 4 MB of RAM minimum (8 MB recommended). 13" color monitor or larger. Double-speed CD-ROM drive. System 7.1 or later.

Introduction

Explorers of the New World is an interactive reference CD-ROM about 58 European explorers, mostly Spanish (see Appendix B, Table 1), of the American continents between 1400 and 1625 A.D. The program includes a searchable database with portraits, textual information, and maps of voyages for each explorer. It also includes portraits and textual information of 18 historical figures, mostly royalty, who were associated with the explorers.

The program focuses on three explorers, Christopher Columbus, Hernando Cortes, and Ferdinand Magellan. It includes dialogue between the explorers and other people, personal journals, and specific events that happened on their voyages, using video and audio clips to deliver the information. Although it may not have been intentional, all three men were commissioned by Spain, even though Cortes was the only Spaniard.

The program also includes two other features. The first is a timeline that includes events that happened in the lives of the explorers as well as events that happened in world between 1400 and 1625 A.D. Most of the world events occurred in Europe with a few events from Asia and South America (see Appendix A). The second is a section on the impacts the “Old World” had on the “New World” and vice versa. These impacts are limited to the transmission of crops (food and tobacco) and animals.

A sample of computer screens from the program is available in Appendix C. C1 includes the beginning screen of the program which acts as an index for the different sections of the program and one section of the timeline. C2 includes two screens from the supplemental material on Columbus. C3 and C4 includes four screens from the searchable database.

Critical Analysis

This reference is intended to be a supplementary resource for student research reports in the elementary school social studies curriculum. It can be a helpful resource if it is used in conjunction with other reference materials. Its use of video and audio clips is especially helpful to those students who are not reading at grade level or who have difficulty reading traditional reference materials such as encyclopedias. It is also a very easy program to operate and uses the multimedia and interactive properties of CD-ROM computer programs effectively. The background music is soothing and the program is aesthetically pleasing. However, it is not a comprehensive resource on the lives of these men and exhibits a very Eurocentric view of this time period.

In the users manual, The Captain's Log, Gedzelman (1995), the writer for this multimedia product, expresses the intentions for this product best when she states:

This complete multimedia product, with more than 100 video clips, amazing images and illustrations, detailed maps and journals, and hundreds of pages of informational text in this companion, brings to you centuries of history, adventure, thrilling voyages, narrow escapes, and the imagination that inspired a breed of men bold enough to live the life of an explorer. (page i)

The goal of this program is not to give a “detailed account of the lives of the Explorers covered in this program” (Gedzelman, 1995, p. 4), but to provide a history that focuses on the exciting adventures of a select group of men. The accounts in this program are filled with battles, uprisings, and conquests from the explorer’s perspective. The Americas are seen as a wild place, ready for conquest by brave men. The men who conquered them are heroes, people who should be esteemed.

The program reinforces the idea that Europeans, especially European men, are most important in history. Other historical figures are mentioned to enrich the background of the explorers. All of the explorers mentioned are European men, almost 60% of whom are Spaniards (see Appendix B, Table 1). Only one, Isabella I, the queen of Spain, is a woman, and most of the information given about her is related to her husband, Ferdinand II. Also, only Moctezuma II, an Aztec emperor, is not a European (see Appendix B, Table 2). He is depicted as a greedy and strict monarch who was kidnapped by Cortes and his men. Other Native Americans are mentioned briefly, often only by tribal name, as wild, conquered, or rebellious people who were quickly overpowered by European explorers.

This program is lacking the Native Americans' perspective on these events and setting. They were not wild and uncivilized people; on the contrary, the Native Americans had established and highly developed civilizations prior to their encounters with the European explorers. When they warred against the Europeans, they were not merely being rebels; they were fighting for their freedom and attempting to return to the autonomous lives they previously had.

The program also reinforces a Eurocentric world, even though two features, the timeline and impact sections, could have broadened the historical view to include other cultures. Even though the timeline includes over 120 events, only seven events are outside Europe or European conquests or actions in other countries (see Appendix A). Most are isolated events that seem to have been chosen haphazardly to fulfill a multicultural requirement because most refer to cultural or a simple historical event rather than events that involved more than one country, such as wars or treaties, or dates when inventions were first used.

In order to give a more balanced view of world events, the timeline could include more colonization efforts by other nations, inventions that other nations used in exploration, and events that occurred when two or more nations came in contact with each other. These events could be integrated into the existing timeline by grouping all the exploration events together and the world events together, regardless as to which continent the event is taking place.

The Impact section focuses on crops and animals that were either brought to or from the “New World.” For example, the main contributions of the Americas to Europe the program gives are turkeys, hammocks, tobacco, paprika, corn, potatoes, beans, tomatoes, pineapples, and chocolate while the main contributions of Europe to the Americas are horses, cattle, pigs, bananas, grapes, sugar, olives, and coffee. It also mentions that smallpox epidemics helped the Europeans to conquer the local tribes. The program does not include any substantial cultural impacts, either positive or negative.

The impact section could include the impacts of religion, values, or technologies on Europe and the Americas. How did the cultures of Europe and the Native Americans change after they encountered one another? How were the perspectives of the people changed as they interacted with one another? Some Native Americans may have welcomed the strangers at first, possibly even helped them survive, but how did their views change as they learned more about the Europeans and their goals? The answers to these questions would broaden this section and put the focus on ideas and values rather than physical objects.

Conclusion

Although this program, like many materials and resources available in the United States, is very biased toward Europeans, it is a well-designed program that can be used to motivate and instruct students. Its use of multimedia can facilitate bringing history to life, showing students that they are studying people that really existed. The speech feature incorporated in this program can read selections to those students who have difficulty reading the text, so reading ability does not interfere with students' comprehension. Its interactive ability allows students to be in control of their learning and the pace at which information is presented.

Before its use, teachers need to teach students to look at the program critically and understand that these accounts are from the explorer's point of view. The teacher will need to provide students with complementary resources that expose students to the perspectives and cultures that have been omitted from this resource. Also, since these accounts are from the explorer's point of view, teachers need to teach students to identify the writer's bias and to state the facts like a good reporter would. Otherwise, students are more apt to think that the Europeans were the only important people in history.

An extension to using this program may be searching for the omitted information. Students can form groups to research the histories of the Native Americans between 1400 and 1625 and discover how they viewed the conquest by the European explorers. During this activity, students will learn that the different Native American nations had their own perspectives of history as well as their own heroes. Teachers can expand this activity to include nations in Asia and Africa with the ultimate lesson being that all cultures have worth and none of them is better than the others.

A foreseeable difficulty for teachers is locating and gathering resources that are not Eurocentric in nature. The information presented in this CD-ROM is what has been traditionally taught in United States history. More importantly, at least in relationship to the schools and students, it is what teachers have learned as they went through the school system. Therefore, teachers need to be informed, possibly through inservices, that their textbooks and other reference materials do not contain the whole truth and that they should be looking for supplementary materials. Furthermore, since this should be a district concern, the school district should be involved with either purchasing existing resources on Native American history or developing them.

References

Gedzelman, L. J. (1995). Explorers of the new world [CD-ROM]. Cambridge, MA: SoftKey.

Gedzelman, L. J. (1995). Explorers of the new world: The captain's log. Cambridge, MA: SoftKey.

Appendices

Appendix A: Timeline

Appendix B: Ethnicity Statistics

Appendix C: Presentation Materials

World Events Timeline (events happening apart from European influence)

1421: Ming emperor Yung-Lo builds imperial palace (now called “Forbidden City”) in
Beijing

1502: Moctezuma II ascends to throne of Aztec Empire

1550: Kabuki theater develops in Japan

1556: Major earthquake in central China kills 830,000 people

1556: Akbar, greatest emperor of Mogul Empire, begins reign (India)

1592: Japan attempts unsuccessfully to conquer Korea

1597: First persecutions of Christians in Japan

Table B1

Explorers

| Nationality | Number of Explorers | Percent of Total |
|-------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Spanish | 34 | 58.62% |
| English | 10 | 17.24% |
| Portuguese | 5 | 8.62% |
| Italian | 5 | 8.62% |
| French | 3 | 5.17% |
| Dutch | 1 | 1.72% |
| Total | 58 | |

Table B2

Royalty and their Followers

| Nationality | Number of People | Percent of Total |
|-------------|------------------|------------------|
| Spanish | 10 | 55.56% |
| Portuguese | 4 | 22.22% |
| English | 2 | 11.11% |
| German | 1 | 5.56% |
| Aztec | 1 | 5.56% |
| Total | 18 | |

Table B3

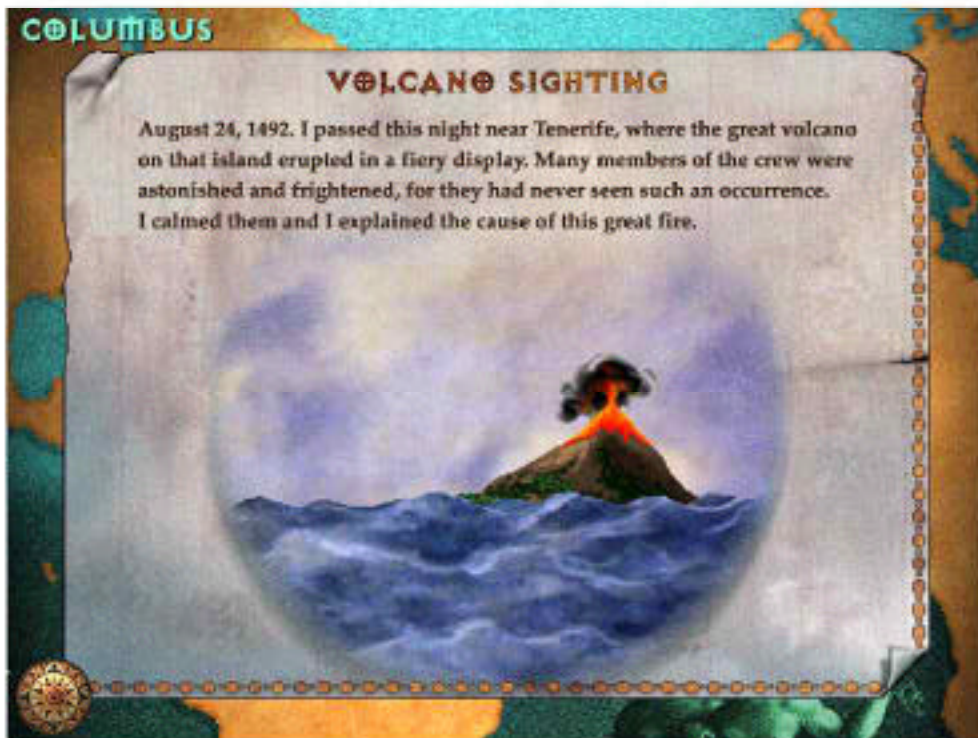
Historical Figures Included in the CD-ROM

| Nationality | Number of People | Percent of Total |
|-------------|------------------|------------------|
| Spanish | 44 | 57.89% |
| English | 12 | 15.79% |
| Portuguese | 9 | 11.84% |
| Italian | 5 | 6.58% |
| French | 3 | 3.95% |
| Dutch | 1 | 1.32% |
| German | 1 | 1.32% |
| Aztec | 1 | 1.32% |
| Total | 76 | |

Transparency C1



Transparency C2



Transparency C3


DATABASE

SEARCH INDEX

FIND

- Charles V King of Spain
- Columbus, Christopher**
- Cordoba, Francisco Ferdinand
- Coronado, Francisco Vasquez
- Corte-Real, Gaspar and Miguel
- Cortes, Hernan
- Coe, Juan de la
- Da Gama, Vasco
- Davis, John
- De Soto, Hernando
- Dias (Diaz), Bartolomeu
- Diaz de Solis, Juan
- Diez del Castillo, Bernal
- Drake, Sir Francis

Columbus, Christopher



Portrait of Christopher Columbus, a man with a long beard and a hat, looking slightly to the right.

PORTRAIT TEXT MAPS PRINT

DATABASE

SEARCH INDEX

FIND

- Charles V King of Spain
- Columbus, Christopher**
- Cordoba, Francisco Ferdinand
- Coronado, Francisco Vasquez
- Corte-Real, Gaspar and Miguel
- Cortes, Hernan
- Coe, Juan de la
- Da Gama, Vasco
- Davis, John
- De Soto, Hernando
- Dias (Diaz), Bartolomeu
- Diaz de Solis, Juan
- Diez del Castillo, Bernal
- Drake, Sir Francis

Columbus, Christopher
1451-1506



A world map showing Christopher Columbus's voyage. The map is labeled with continents: NORTH AMERICA, SOUTH AMERICA, AFRICA, EUROPE, and ASIA. A red dot in Europe is labeled 'Genoa'. A blue line shows the voyage route from Genoa to Hispaniola, then to Trinidad, and back to Hispaniola. A white line shows the return route from Hispaniola to Europe.

Hispaniola Trinidad

PORTRAIT TEXT **MAPS** PRINT

Transparency C4


DATABASE

SEARCH INDEX

FIND

Magellan, Ferdinand
 Martínez de Irujo, Domingo
 Menéndez de Avilés, Pedro
Moctezuma II
 Moscoso de Alvarado, Luis de
 Narváez, Pánfilo de
 Ojeda, Alonso de
 Oñate, Juan de
 Orrellana, Francisco de
 Ovando, Nicolás de
 Pedrarias Davila
 Philip II
 Pinzón, Martín Alonso
 Pinzón, Vicente Yáñez

Moctezuma II



PORTRAIT TEXT MAPS PRINT

DATABASE

SEARCH INDEX

FIND

Magellan, Ferdinand
 Martínez de Irujo, Domingo
 Menéndez de Avilés, Pedro
Moctezuma II
 Moscoso de Alvarado, Luis de
 Narváez, Pánfilo de
 Ojeda, Alonso de
 Oñate, Juan de
 Orrellana, Francisco de
 Ovando, Nicolás de
 Pedrarias Davila
 Philip II
 Pinzón, Martín Alonso
 Pinzón, Vicente Yáñez

Moctezuma II

Moctezuma II (or Montezuma II) (1466-1520), ninth Aztec emperor of Mexico, famous for his confrontation with Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. He succeeded his uncle, Moctezuma I, in 1502. His empire stretched from Tenochtitlan (present-day Mexico City) to what is now Honduras and Nicaragua.

Moctezuma II was trained for the priesthood before ascending to the throne, and during his reign, the rate of human sacrifice increased dramatically. Moctezuma also devoted his attention to improving the legal system and internal administration. He had a taste for luxury, built a magnificent household and embellished the capital. He imposed heavy taxation to pay for his lifestyle; this, combined with his strict administration and many expeditions of conquest, led to continual revolts by conquered peoples.

When Cortés landed in Mexico with his small army in 1519, Moctezuma and other Aztecs feared that he was Quetzalcoatl, an Aztec god who was supposed to return and rule over the empire.

At first, Moctezuma II welcomed Cortés to Tenochtitlan, but Cortés suspected it was a trap and kidnapped the Aztec emperor. For several months, Cortés and his men had free reign in Tenochtitlan as the populace was afraid to rise against the emperor's captors. However, after a massacre initiated by the Spanish, the Aztecs rebelled. During the revolt, Moctezuma was killed by his own subjects when he tried to address them, and the Spanish were forced to flee the city. A year later, the Spanish returned and conquered the city and destroyed the Aztec empire.