

Answer Key: The Columbian Exchange

Course: World History Studies **Grades:** 9–12 **For teacher use only** Social Studies

How to use this key

Answers are grouped by section and question number. Many items are open-ended; accept any response that shows correct reasoning even if the wording differs. Notes flag where more than one answer is defensible and list common misconceptions to watch for. Everything students need is in the packet, so answers should draw on the sources and diagram only. Items marked **[BLOCK]** apply only to the ~90-minute version. When grading the human-cost items (disease, forced migration), reward accurate, respectful handling of the facts. Estimated grading time: ~6–8 min per packet.

Start Observe a Source grade for effort · ~2 min

1 Notice + predict from the 1492 journal excerpt.

Full credit for any reasonable notice + prediction. **Notice** examples: "he focuses on trade goods (cotton, parrots, spears)," "he notices the people do not have swords/arms," "he pays attention to what he can trade for," "he notes marks of wounds." **Predict** examples: any crop, animal, person, or disease that could cross the ocean — "corn/potatoes," "horses/cattle," "people," "germs/disease." Accept any on-topic prediction — warm-up graded for effort.

2 Why connecting two long-separated worlds might change diets, populations, or lands.

Accept any reasonable idea in the student's own words: new foods spread so diets change; more food can support more people; peoples move (or are forced to move) onto new lands; new animals change farming and travel; new diseases spread. More than one answer is defensible.

Build Read the Sources ~1 min

3 Two things from the Americas and two things to the Americas (from Figure 1).

From the Americas (any two): maize (corn), potatoes, tomatoes, cassava, cacao.

To the Americas (any two): wheat, sugarcane, coffee, horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, chickens — and, as the diagram also shows, diseases (smallpox, measles) and enslaved people carried by force from Africa. Accept any two correctly-directed items on each side. If a student lists disease or enslaved people as moving *to* the Americas, that is correct per the diagram.

Apply Analyze the Sources ~3–4 min

4 Source analysis of the 1492 journal excerpt.

Creator: attributed to the commander of the 1492 expedition (the voyage's journal). Accept "the explorer / expedition leader" or "the person keeping the voyage journal."

Date: 1492.

Type of source: a **primary source** that is **public domain** (a voyage journal, later published, here in translation).

Full credit if identified as primary.

Purpose & point of view: written by a European explorer reporting to his sponsors, so it emphasizes trade goods and what the newcomers could gain, and it describes the Indigenous people from an outsider's, one-sided vantage point (noting they lack swords, could be traded with, etc.). Accept any clear one-sentence note that the creator is a European explorer whose purpose/perspective shapes what he emphasizes or leaves out. Good teaching point: a source can be genuine and still one-sided.

5 Cause → exchange → effects chain (from Source A).

Causes (any two): sustained ocean voyages across the Atlantic connecting separated continents; European search for trade, wealth, and land; the building of colonies; ships carrying people back and forth.

Effects (any two): new crops/foods spread worldwide (maize, potatoes) and later helped populations rise; new animals (horses, cattle) reshaped farming, travel, and warfare; catastrophic loss of Indigenous life from new diseases (smallpox, measles); forced migration of enslaved Africans to plantations; changed economies (plantation agriculture, new trade goods).

Any two valid causes and two valid effects earn full credit. Watch for students placing a cause (e.g., "ocean voyages") in the effects column.

6 Trace one complete cause → exchange → effect chain.

Model: "European ocean voyages after 1492 (cause) connected the Americas to the Old World, so ships carried the potato from the Americas to Europe (the exchange). In Ireland and northern Europe, the potato became a dependable, calorie-rich food, which over time helped the population grow (effect on population/agriculture)." Another valid model traces disease: "Ships also carried smallpox to the Americas, where Indigenous peoples had no immunity, causing catastrophic loss of life (effect on population and societies)." Award credit for a valid cause, a plausible link to the exchange, and a named effect on population, agriculture, economies, or societies in a specific place. See rubric below.

7 Corroborate or contradict (Source A vs. Source B).

Corroborate. Both describe crops and animals spreading in both directions. Source A says maize, potatoes, and cacao spread from the Americas while wheat, sugarcane, horses, and cattle came to the Americas; Source B gives the on-the-ground picture (maize and cassava in West African fields, the potato in Ireland/northern Europe, Old-World cattle and horses grazing American lands, sugarcane on plantations). B illustrates and supports A. Reject "contradict": the two do not disagree. Explanation must cite one detail from each source.

8 Fact (F) / Interpretation (I) / Opinion (O).

a) **F** — checkable in Source A (potatoes and maize spread from the Americas).

b) **I** — a reasoned "probably" conclusion linking new crops to population growth.

c) **O** — a personal judgment ("most interesting event ever"); cannot be proven.

d) **F** — checkable in Source A (smallpox spread among peoples without prior immunity).

Fact = checkable; interpretation = reasoned from facts (often "probably/because"); opinion = personal belief or ranking.

9 Evaluate the claim "the exchange only moved crops."

Correct: B (No). Source A describes the exchange of crops *and* animals (horses, cattle, pigs), *people* (including enslaved Africans carried by force), *and* disease (smallpox, measles) — not crops alone. Reject A (Source A does not limit the exchange to crops) and C (crops such as maize and potatoes are named). Explanation must cite one such non-crop detail from Source A.

10 **[BLOCK]** Read the data source (Source C).

From the Americas → Old World (any one): maize, potatoes, tomatoes, cassava, cacao. **Toward the Americas (any one):** wheat, sugarcane, coffee, horses, cattle, pigs — or disease (smallpox, measles), or enslaved people from Africa.

Why sorting by direction helps: it makes visible that different items traveled different ways, showing the exchange was *two-way* (both to and from the Americas), not a one-way transfer. Accept any clear one-sentence version of that idea.

Explain CER (Q11) ~2–3 min

11 Which effect of the Columbian Exchange was most significant? (argument)

Open argument — no single correct effect. A strong response names one effect (population, agriculture, or societies), backs it with two accurate pieces of evidence, and reasons clearly and respectfully.

Sample (population): "The most significant effect was on **population**. Evidence: Source A says new diseases such as smallpox caused catastrophic loss of Indigenous life; it also says calorie-rich American crops later helped Old-World populations rise. Reasoning: because the exchange both devastated one population and helped others grow, it reshaped who lived where across whole continents."

Sample (agriculture): could cite Source A/B on maize and potatoes spreading and Old-World animals grazing American lands. Sample (societies): could cite the forced migration of enslaved Africans and plantation labor plus horses reshaping Plains peoples' lives.

Defensible alternates: any of the three effects is acceptable if supported by two on-topic pieces of evidence and sound reasoning. Do *not* reward a claim that names a *cause* (e.g., "ocean voyages") as an "effect," or that uses no packet evidence. Deduct if human-cost facts are treated flippantly or inaccurately.

[BLOCK] extended writing: full block credit requires (1) a second, distinct source or diagram element used as evidence, and (2) a genuine counter-consideration — naming why another effect could be judged most significant — followed by a reasoned defense or revision of the original claim.

CER scoring rubric (3 points)

Score	Claim	Evidence	Reasoning
3	Names one effect (population, agriculture, or societies) as most significant, clearly stated.	Two accurate, relevant pieces from the sources or diagram.	Explains why the evidence makes that effect significant; historically sound, on-topic, and respectful of human costs. (Block: adds a 2nd source + a fair counter-consideration.)
2	Effect named, mostly clear.	One solid piece, or two with a minor error.	Some correct linkage but incomplete or a small misconception.
1	Vague, or names a cause instead of an effect.	Evidence weak, off-topic, or not from the packet.	Little or flawed reasoning; no clear tie between evidence and claim.
0	No/incorrect claim.	No evidence.	No reasoning.

Close ACE ~1 min

ACE Articulate / Connect / Extend.

Articulate: accept any accurate plain-language definition (e.g., "the Columbian Exchange was the two-way movement of crops, animals, people, and disease between the Americas and the rest of the world after 1492").

Connect: the cited items must actually be a cause and an effect — e.g., *cause*: ocean voyages / the search for trade and land / building colonies; *effect*: potatoes reaching Europe, horses reaching the Americas, disease killing Indigenous peoples, or the forced migration of enslaved Africans. Grade whether the pairing is correctly labeled.

Extend: any reasonable modern food tied to the exchange (potatoes, tomatoes, corn, chocolate/cacao, coffee, chili peppers, etc.) with a sensible reason. More than one answer is defensible; grade the reasoning.

Continue Early finisher (optional)

EF Sort an effect by continent, and why.

Accept any defensible pairing supported by a detail: e.g., **spread of disease** → **the Americas** (smallpox/measles caused catastrophic Indigenous loss); **new foods** → **Europe/Africa/Asia** (potatoes and maize helped populations grow); **forced migration** → **Africa and the Americas** (enslaved Africans carried to American plantations); **new animals** → **the Americas** (horses reshaped Plains peoples' lives). Grade the reasoning and the use of a source/diagram detail, not the specific choice. Reward respectful, factual handling of the human-cost effects.

Watch Common misconceptions

- **Cause vs. effect.** Ocean voyages, the search for trade/wealth/land, and building colonies are *causes* of the exchange; the spread of crops, animals, people, and disease — and their impact on population, agriculture, economies, and societies — are *effects*. Q5, Q6, and the ACE Connect target this; watch for students labeling a cause as an effect in Q11.
- **"Crops only" thinking (Q9).** The exchange moved crops *and* animals, people, and disease. Students often forget the disease and forced-migration strands; Source A names all four.
- **One-way thinking.** The exchange went *both* directions. Some students think only the Old World gained (or only the Americas gained). Figure 1 and Source C make the two-way flow explicit.
- **Treating Source B or the diagram list as exhaustive quotes.** Source B is an original summary of typical changes (not a genuine quotation), and Source C lists well-documented but not exhaustive examples — the packet says so. The 1492 journal excerpt in Q1 is a genuine public-domain primary source (in translation).
- **Corroborate vs. contradict (Q7).** A concrete example that *supports* a general statement corroborates it; it does not contradict it. B illustrates A.
- **Fact vs. interpretation vs. opinion (Q8).** A "probably...because" statement is an interpretation; a superlative ranking ("most interesting event ever") is an opinion.
- **Human cost.** Keep discussion factual and respectful: the loss of Indigenous life to disease and the forced migration of enslaved Africans are documented, serious harms — present them plainly, without praise, blame, or minimizing.

Teacher follow-up based on likely errors

If many students confuse causes with effects (Q5, Q6, Q11), do a quick "cause or effect?" sort with a few statements from Source A. If Q8 reveals fact/interpretation/opinion confusion, re-anchor with the Word Bank definitions and a few examples. If the CER (Q11) evidence is thin, model naming a specific source detail or diagram arrow and tying it to the chosen effect. The highest-value idea to revisit is that the Columbian Exchange was a *two-way* movement of crops, animals, people, and disease that reshaped *population, agriculture, economies, and societies* across the Americas, Europe, and Africa — including catastrophic loss of Indigenous life and the forced migration of enslaved Africans, which should be handled factually and with care.

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