

Reading #2: Arrival of Columbus

Christopher Columbus was a sailor who was possibly born in Italy. He lived in the 1400s, a time when European countries wanted to control, or conquer, other parts of the world.



Kings and queens supported the explorers by giving them money and ships. Columbus got his money and ships from King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. Columbus wanted to be the first European to get to Asia by sailing across the Atlantic Ocean.



Columbus started his trip, but he made a mistake. He thought he could go to India, to find gold, silk, and spices. He did not know there was land in between Europe and Asia, and he ran into the islands in the Caribbean Sea.

That is why when he first saw the Taínos, he called them Indians. He thought these islands were off the coast of China. The first island he went to was what is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic. He called it “Hispaniola” and said that it now was part of Spain.



The Taínos did not have wars in Boriken, so they did not fight Columbus and his men. The Taínos wore tiny gold earrings and other gold jewelry. Columbus began taking the Taínos as prisoners. He thought they could take him to find more gold.

Columbus wrote to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to ask them for more money and ships, and people. He told them he had found a lot of gold and other metals. This was only a little bit true, though. He did not find as much as he said he did.

On his second trip, Columbus brought more men with him. The king and queen of Spain promised him 17 more ships and 1,200 men. They wanted Columbus to find more gold and take it back to Spain. They also wanted to conquer, or own, the places that Columbus visited. Columbus went to many islands on this trip, including Puerto Rico. Even though these places already had people living on them, the king and queen of Spain decided these places should belong to Spain.



Columbus gave Spanish names to many of the islands and claimed them for Spain. He and his men killed many Taínos. They also used them as slaves to find gold. If they did not bring back enough gold, Columbus and his men cut off their hands. Some Taínos tried to fight the Spanish. The Spanish men had swords, and the Taínos did not.



Soon, there were few Taínos alive in the Caribbean islands. By the 1500s, most of them had died from diseases that came with the Spanish. Their bodies were not accustomed to these diseases, so they got very sick. Some Taínos killed themselves because they did not want to become slaves to the Spanish. When Columbus arrived in Boriken, there were about 30,000 Taínos. 30 years later, there were less than 2,000.

In the United States, many places celebrate “Columbus Day” as a holiday. In many Latin American countries, Columbus Day is instead called “el Día de la Raza”, which celebrates the roots and culture of Latinos.

In the United States, some states and cities have changed the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day. This is one way of celebrating the original people of the Americas.



This activity is from, "Teaching about the Taínos, Columbus, and Indigenous Peoples' Day in a Middle School English Language Learners Classroom," a lesson By Alicia Lopez, M.Ed. It will be in the upcoming new edition of *Caribbean Connections: Puerto Rico*, published by Teaching for Change (<https://www.teachingforchange.org>).