GED Social Studies
Worksheet: Lesson 2

FOCUS: EUROPEAN EXPLORATION OF THE “NEW WORLD” / EARLY EXPLORERS

VOCABULARY:
Find the definitions of the following words and use them in a sentence.

1. exploration  
2. civilization  
3. archeological  
4. inhabitants  
5. seafaring  
6. missions  
7. continents  
8. envoy  
9. alternate  
10. mirage  
11. foreign  
12. conquistadores (conquistadors)

MARCO POLO

In 1298, Marco Polo dictated an account of his travels through Asia to a writer from Pisa. The book, which Polo called “Description of the World,” was the first known travel account, and opened the little known world of Asia to Europeans. Marco Polo’s great skill at story telling, combined with the wealth he had brought back from his travels, caused many Europeans to favor developing trade with Asia. Since travel over land was generally difficult and dangerous, explorers like Columbus and da Gama began to look for alternate ways to reach Asia by sea.

Marco Polo’s adventures began when he was 17 years old, when he left with his father and uncle for China. Nikola and Mate Polo had recently returned from a 15 year journey in Asia, where they had served at the court of Kublai Khan, the Mongol emperor who ruled over two thirds of Asia. The Khan had asked the Polos to bring some European scholars to his court so that they could teach him about Christianity. The explorers traveled overland from Palestine to China. Marco describes the many sights and cultures he saw along the way, sometimes with great accuracy and sometimes with fanciful imagination. In fact, when Marco Polo was on his deathbed, he was accused of making up many of the stories he told. However, we now know that some of the accounts that seemed difficult to believe...
are actually based in fact. For example, few Europeans believed Marco’s description of desert travelers getting separated from their caravan and then seeing false figures of their fellow travelers in a completely different direction from the caravan. We now know the combination of extreme thirst and waves of heat from the ground create mirages.

When the Polos arrived in China, Marco was presented to Kublai Khan by his father. The Khan was impressed with Marco’s wisdom, behavior, and his ability to learn the Asian customs and languages quickly. When Marco was sent as an envoy to one of the Khan’s distant provinces, he did the job with intelligence and excellence. From that time, Marco enjoyed the favor and affection of the Khan. Seventeen years later, the Polos returned to Italy, sailing from China to India as escorts for a Mongol princess traveling to Iran.

When Marco returned to Venice, he and his family earned the respect of the city when he showed them the great wealth with which he returned. Marco’s stories opened European minds to the wealth and cultures of China, Japan, and India.

Later, when Marco was 44 years old, Venice went to war with its rival Italian city-state, Genoa. Marco had the knowledge and skill needed to command a ship in a naval battle, strong leadership skills and the finances to equip a ship. However, the battle did not go well for the Venetians and Marco was taken captive and imprisoned. While in prison, he dictated an account of his experiences for his book.

**QUESTION:**
Which of the following was not a long term result of Marco Polo’s legacy:

a) Europe was introduced to previously unknown parts of the world.
b) Europeans brought Christianity to Asia for the first time.
c) Europeans desired to trade with India and China.
d) Columbus tried to find a route to China by sea.
e) Europeans learned that desert travel could be dangerous.

**THE VIKINGS**

The Vikings were seafaring explorers who had traveled over much of northern Europe, as far as the rivers of Russia in the east and North America to the west. By 1000 AD, they had established a thriving colony on Iceland and a small outpost on the less hospitable island of Greenland.

The Vikings were the undisputed rulers of the Atlantic at that time because of the design of their ships. The ships were wonderful for sailing long distances in rough water, but they took much skill to sail properly. They didn’t ride very low in the water, so the Vikings could go into shallow bays without worry, and land their boats on the beach. They also developed a technique that allowed them to use the oars as outrigging when the wind was blowing. The sides of the ships had
a row of shields with holes in the center. The Shields were used to hold the oars at just the right angle so that the boat was lifted slightly out of the water when traveling about 5 knots per hour. This, combined with the sails, allowed the ships to skip over the tops of the waves at speeds of more than 10 knots.

Viking ships were both functional and safe, even though there were no cabins on board. Shelter for the sailor was made by turning 3 small boats upside down and lashing them to the decks of the larger ship. This provided shelter for sleeping etc. and made it easier to use a small boat for exploring. The weight of the boats also provided enough ballast to ensure the ship wouldn’t tip in heavy seas.

Under the leadership of Lief Eriksson, son of Erik the Red, the Vikings set out to explore the waters west of Greenland. Their accounts show that they found a wonderful, bountiful land, which they called Vinland. This was because grapes grew wild there. There is some dispute about what land was actually Vinland, but there is archeological evidence indicating that the Vikings may have sailed up the Mississippi river as far north as Oklahoma.

Because the shipping season in Greenland was very short, it was impossible to adequately explore Vinland if they wintered in Greenland. So Lief built Liefsbdir (Lief’s camp) on what is now called Newfoundland as a place to winter and to repair his ships.

Liefsbdir consisted of a group of buildings. There are 3 larger halls and a few huts for servants and serfs. The largest is hall was Lief’s headquarters. Each of the halls had a specific function, as well as serving as home for the men (60-90 in all). One of the houses was also used for the manufacturing of iron. The Vikings make the nails they needed to keep their boats in good repair. The boat repair was done at a separate building. The middle hall had a carpentry shop, which allows them to make and repair everything they need to continue their explorations. There were a few women living at Liefsbdir, but most of the inhabitants were strong men. It is possible that they may have created additional winter shelter using their ships. The Vikings were known to lay the boat upside down on walls of sod to form a temporary house. The hull was covered with wet sand to keep the wood from drying out, and sod laid on top to keep the sand in place.

**QUESTION:**
According to the passage, Liefsbdir was located in:

a) Iceland  
b) Russia  
c) Greenland  
d) Newfoundland  
e) Oklahoma
FAMOUS EUROPEAN EXPLORERS

**Columbus:** Christopher Columbus, an Italian sailor and navigator, sailed from Spain in 1492 with the belief that the world was shaped like a ball and that ports in the Far East could be reached by traveling west. A desire for valuable trading goods from the Far East motivated seafaring nations in Europe to look for non-land routes that might be faster. In the process, Columbus landed on an island in the Caribbean Sea, south of what is now Florida. He did not realize that this was not India, hence the name given to the native inhabitants - Indians.

Christopher Columbus spent 5 years trying to get approval from the king and queen of Spain for his trip west over the “Sea of Darkness”. He estimated that the Asian islands were only 2600 miles west of Spain. Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand finally agreed to outfit and pay the 90 crewmembers for 3 ships: the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria. Their motivation was to gain riches from shipments of spices, silks and gold. Spain was in competition with Turkey and Portugal, who were trying to perfect a route around Africa.

His first voyage sailed from Palos, Spain on August 2, 1492. They found land, but no riches. Nevertheless, he continued to believe all his life that he had discovered a sea route to Asia. In fact, Columbus made three more trips across the “Sea of Darkness”, trying to prove that Asia lay just beyond the islands he had explored.

**Magellan:** Ferdinand Magellan left Spain in 1519 to head for the Far East via a western route over the ocean. Three years later, his ship returned to Spain with only 18 sick and hungry sailors. While Magellan died during this first voyage of a ship around the world, the completion of journey proved that the world was indeed round and much larger than Columbus had originally suggested.

**Cabot:** Giovanni Caboto, an Italian sailor, shared many of Columbus’ ideas and he too found a land on the North American continent while pursuing a western sailing route to Asia. He sailed from England using his anglicized name, John Cabot, with one ship and only 18 men. He landed on the coast of Canada in 1497. The English later believed that Cabot’s discovery gave them the right to settle North America.

**QUESTION:**
From the above passage, you can conclude that the main reason the Europeans explored unknown territory was:

a) for religious freedom  
b) to found colonies of settlers in foreign lands.  
c) to find a sea route to Asia.  
d) to prove the world was round.  
e) all of the above.
SPANISH EXPLORATION AND SETTLEMENT IN
SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Although Columbus did not find a western route to Asia, his voyages did lead to further exploration of the continents of North and South America. In claiming land in the “New World”, Spain was interested primarily in finding gold and in sending missionaries to convert the continent’s inhabitants to Christianity.

To gain a strong foothold in the Americas, Spain originally relied on conquistadores or conquerors. These professional soldiers were known for their boldness and ruthlessness. Motivated by the lure of adventure and riches, the Spanish crown gave permission to establish outposts & settlements in America. In return, the conquistadores agreed to send back to the crown one fifth of the gold or silver they mined. These military adventurers generally had to provide their own funding for their expeditions.

As Spain gradually gained control of most of South and Central America and parts of North America, the native civilizations and empires were conquered. This included the Aztecs in Mexico and Incas of Peru. The first Spanish settlements were based at Santo Domingo on the island of Hispaniola starting in the late 1400’s. As claims and holdings increased, the Spanish needed a more formal form of government than the one-man rule of the conquistadores. A viceroy, deputy of the king, was sent to govern Mexico as a Spanish colony. A set of rules to govern colonial life was established.

The Laws of the Indies specified three types of Spanish settlements reflecting the main settlement activities: Presidios, Pueblos and Missions. Presidios were designed for military activities, and were built in the shape of a rectangle, fortified by high, thick walls. Inside the walls, there were barracks, storehouses, stables, shops, and even a few houses. Over time, the Presidios became towns as homes and farms grew up around them.

Pueblos were centers of farming, trade and town life that were usually situated in the middle of a huge tract of farmland. They used Spanish architectural style for the homes, shops and churches of these communities. The farming and ranching they supported was a profitable occupation for many Spanish colonists. The Spanish colonists used Native Americans as indentured or even slave laborers for both their farming and mining activities.

The missions were meant to be centers from which the Spanish could carry on the work of converting the Native Americans to Christianity. Roman Catholic priests ran the missions, which often included a few Spanish settlers and a small garrison of soldiers. Each mission was a self-supporting settlement. They farmed, manufactured pottery, blankets, leather, wine, and olive oil. The surplus goods were sold to colonists or exported to Spain. In California, the missions were established a day’s walk apart and have developed into cities with saints names like San Juan Capistrano, San Luis Opisbo etc.
QUESTION:
The main idea of the above passage is:

   a) the Catholic Priests made many converts among the Native Americans
   b) a viceroy was appointed to govern the colonies
   c) the Spanish settled in Presidios, Pueblos and Missions
   d) the conquistadors were bold and ruthless conquerors
   e) the king collected one fifth of the gold mined

TIMELINE FOR MAJOR EVENTS 1492 TO 1608

Place the following events in order on the attached timeline. You might want to make your own timeline, incorporating other events from history.

1494 - line of Demarcation established
1492 - Columbus’s ships land in America
1275 - Marco Polo explores China
1513 - Balboa discovers Pacific Ocean
1534 - Cartier explores St. Lawrence River
1517 - Protestant reformation begins in Europe
1585 - First English settlement at Roanoke
1535 - Charles V appoints first viceroy of New Spain.
1519 - Cortes begins conquest of Aztecs
1000 - The Vikings explore parts of North America
1608 - Champlain founds Quebec
**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:**
Write a short opinion essay on one or both of the following topics. Your essay should include an introductory paragraph stating your opinion, two or three paragraphs with supporting details and a conclusion.

1. Imagine that you live in the early 1500’s and that you have been given the task of finding the right person to explore North America. You have decided that the perfect candidate would be someone like Marco Polo, Leif Eriksson and Christopher Columbus. Review what you know about their lives. What kind a men do you think they were? What traits did they have in common? Based on your observations, write a description of the type of person you need to hire.

2. Compare and contrast the three types of Spanish settlements. Each type of settlement had very different purposes. Do you think their goals and practices showed a unified policy or do you think the work of one type of settlement conflicted with the work of the others?
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Worksheet Answer Key
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MARCO POLO QUESTION:
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THE VIKINGS QUESTION:
According to the passage, Liefsbdir was located in:
d) Newfoundland

FAMOUS EUROPEAN EXPLORERS QUESTION:
From the above passage, you can conclude that the main reason the Europeans explored unknown territory was:
c) to find a sea route to Asia.

SPANISH EXPLORATION AND SETTLEMENT IN SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES AND CENTRAL AMERICA QUESTION:
The main idea of the above passage is:
c) the Spanish settled in Presidios, Pueblos and Missions
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WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:
Answers will vary.