

The Columbian Exchange

Before Columbus crossed the Atlantic, the Eastern Hemisphere (that is Europe, Africa and Asia, also called the “Old World”) and the Western Hemisphere (that is the Americas, also called the “New World”) were two very different ecosystems. These ecosystems had been developing in biological isolation for thousand and thousand of years. This meant that there were two different disease pools and two sets of flora and fauna, as well as two sets of culturally diverse peoples.

The differences between the two hemispheres was often noted by those who were present at the time when Europeans were making their first incursions into the Americas.

- Many Native Americans upon seeing Europeans and their animals for the first time were so shocked at what they saw that they did not know what to make of the invaders. Some thought the Europeans were gods, and when they saw men on horseback they were not sure if they were looking at two animals or one.
- Europeans were equally impressed by the differences. Christopher Columbus wrote that *“all the trees were as different from ours as day from night, and so the fruits, the herbage, the rocks, and all things.”*
- A Frenchman in Brazil in the 16th century wrote that America is so truly *“different from Europe, Asia and Africa in the living habits of its people, the forms of its animals, and, in general, in that which the earth produces, that it can well be called the new world....”*

Two biological ecosystems interacted to create a new whole world ecology. A system of trade between the “old” world and the “new” world. The trade exchange included plants, animals, and diseases. It was called the Columbian Exchange

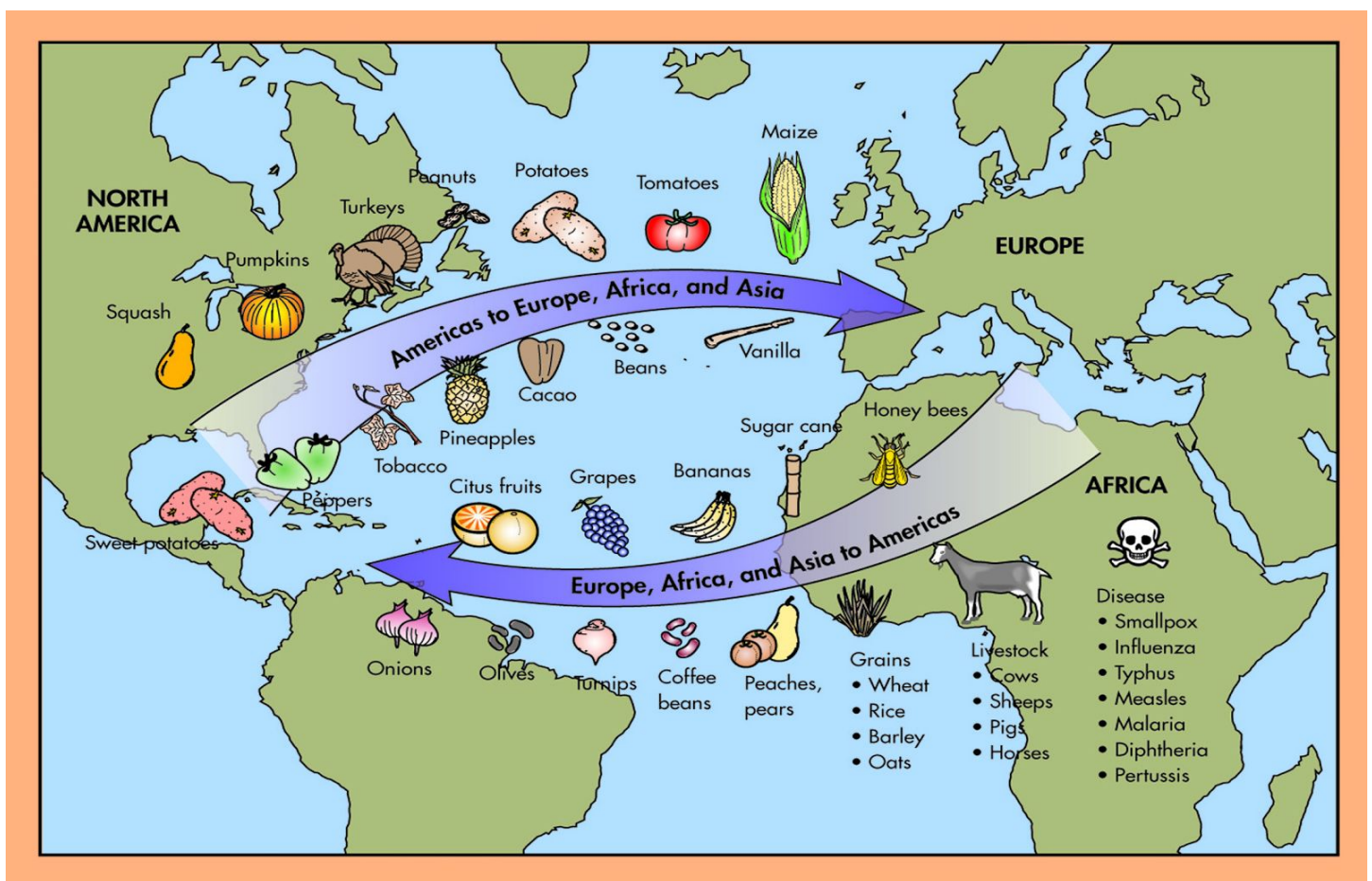
There have been both negative and positive effects from the Columbian Exchange, but initially for Native Americans the consequences were devastating. By the time Columbus set sail, the people of the Old World held the distinction of being thoroughly diseased. By domesticating pigs, horses, sheep and cattle, they had infected themselves with a wide array of pathogens. And through centuries of war, exploration and city building, they had kept those agents in constant circulation. Virtually any European who crossed the Atlantic during the 16th century had battled such illnesses as smallpox and measles during childhood and emerged fully immune.

With the possible exception of syphilis, the great germ migration was largely a one-way affair. This was also the case with most livestock. The first contingent of horses, cattle, chickens, dogs, sheep and goats arrived with Columbus on the second voyage in 1493. The animals, preyed upon by few or no American predators, troubled by few or no American diseases, and left to feed freely upon the rich grasses, roots and wild fruits of the New World, reproduced rapidly.

Their numbers increased so rapidly, in fact, that doubtlessly they had much to do with the extinction of certain plants, animals, and even the Native Americans themselves, whose gardens they often trampled upon. Especially impressive was the explosive growth of herds of cattle and horses on the vast open plains of the Americas (North America, Llanos, Pampas).

The greatest impact of the Columbian Exchange, however, was the exchange of different food crops.

Items the Old World gave the New World:	Items the New World gave the Old World:
<u>Plants</u> : Coffee beans, Sugarcane, Wheat, Rice, Barley, Oats	<u>Plants</u> : Cocoa, Tobacco, Quinine (a malaria cure), Potatoes, Vanilla, Quinoa, Amaranth
<u>Fruits and Vegetables</u> : Olive, Onion, Grape, Citrus fruits, Turnip, Peach, Pear, Banana	<u>Fruits and Vegetables</u> : Peanuts, Cassava, Peppers, Pineapple, Pumpkin, Avocado, Squash, Maize (corn), Tomato
<u>Animals</u> : Cattle, Horses, Pigs, Sheep, Goats, Dogs, Chickens, Honeybees	<u>Animals</u> : Turkey, Alpaca, Beaver, Guinea Pig, Llama
<u>Diseases</u> : Flu, Smallpox, Malaria, Measles, Typhus, Whooping Cough, Diphtheria	<u>Diseases</u> : Syphilis



Name:

Date:

Block:

The Columbian Exchange

1. What was the world like before the Columbian Exchange (before Columbus crossed the Atlantic)?
2. What was the Columbian Exchange?
3. How did it change the world?
4. What was exchanged or traded during the Columbian Exchange?
5. What were some Negative effects of the Columbian Exchange?
6. What were some Positive Effects of the Columbian Exchange?
7. What diseases came from Europe to the Americas? What about from the Americas to Europe?
8. What impact do you think the exchange of diseases had on the Native American population?
9. What were some of the foods that came from the Americas to Europe?
10. What were some of the foods that came from Europe to the Americas?