



National History Day welcomes you to explore the theme, *Exploration, Encounter, Exchange in History*, during the 2015-2016 academic year. This theme is broad enough in scope to encourage investigation of topics ranging from local to world history and across any geographic area or time period. Consider this theme an invitation to look across time, space, and geography to find examples in history of when people took a risk and made a change.

You can begin brainstorming for possible topics by thinking about subjects you are interested in, whether it is science, sports, art, travel, culture, or even specific people. Make note of any areas of interest, creating a list of possible subjects. Talking with your classmates, teachers, and parents about your list can help you narrow down your selection. Throughout this process, keep in mind that your topic must relate to *Exploration, Encounter, Exchange in History* and must be historical, not a current event.

A million ideas flood your mind when you think about exploration, encounter, and exchange, especially because they can mean many different things. So let us first look at them one at a time.

Exploration

Exploration likely conjures up visions of travelers setting out on a journey to discover new lands. Consider the voyages of Vasco da Gama, Hernán Cortéz, or Ferdinand Magellan. Certainly we can see this in Christopher Columbus' attempt to find a quicker sea route to the Indies, where spices and other desired goods could be found and then sold back in Europe. Of course, we know that while the original goal of that exploration was not achieved, Columbus and his party did succeed in transforming the Americas, Europe, and Africa forever. Can you think of other examples where exploration led to unforeseen consequences?

Exploration also can be examined in the field of science. Researchers are constantly undertaking scientific explorations to find new medications or possible cures for diseases such as cancer. How did Jonas Salk's exploration into a vaccine for polio lead to better industry standards in producing vaccines? How did the work of Francis Watson and James Crick in exploring the structure of DNA lead to cracking the code of the human genome? Consider Sigmund Freud's exploration of psychoanalysis and the developments of various theorists in the field of psychology.

The search for new modes of movement has captivated humans since the beginnings of recorded time. This form of exploration has resulted in the invention of a variety of vehicles that could make excellent topic choices. From the invention of the wheel to the development of the space shuttle and the International Space Station, there is a range of explorations, encounters, and

the magnetic compass, printing press, and silk to the West. To China, it brought precious stones, furs, and horses. One of the road's best known travelers, Marco Polo, recorded his observations in his *Travels of Marco Polo*. But as we know, exchange is not necessarily mutually beneficial.

When Europeans were exploring the New World, they brought with them diseases such as smallpox and measles that were contracted by many members of the native tribes they encountered. Having no previous exposure to these illnesses, the natives' immune systems could not naturally fight these diseases, nor did native healers have the knowledge to treat them. As a result, many natives perished because of their encounter and exchange with the Europeans.

But exchanges do not happen only in the physical realm. The sharing of ideas, beliefs, and customs can have widespread consequences for the people and cultures involved. Consider the spread of any of the world's major religions. Sometimes the exchange of new or controversial ideas within a society can have a significant effect on how that society thinks and acts. What changes occur within the society because of that exchange? How did Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, for example, lead to the cultural conflicts of the 1920s?

Politics also can be an area of dramatic exchange. In 1971 the American table tennis team, in Japan for the world championships, was unexpectedly invited by the Chinese team to visit the People's Republic of China. At that time it had been more than 20 years since a group of Americans had been invited to China, since the Communist takeover in 1949. How did that exchange help President Richard Nixon renew diplomatic relations with China? Did it lead to future encounters and exchanges between the two countries? Establishing relationships is often a major part of new encounters and exchanges.