

Columbus Monument in Barcelona



Age group: 15 to 18 years old



Time: 120 to 140 minutes



Key question: How are the perceptions of national heroes changing over time? How do different perspectives of the same figure appear in society?



Materials needed for the lesson: Photo of the Columbus Monument to show in class, one copy of the worksheet for each group of students, and cards with the excerpts. If it is considered necessary, the glossary and the guiding questions. If the activity is done in the classroom instead of in situ, provide photos of the monument's details (printed or on digital support) for each group.

Skills and Concepts developed in the lesson plan:

This lesson will help students develop their analytical and critical thinking skills and learn about Christopher Columbus and the legacy of colonialism. Through this example, students will develop historical knowledge, a critical understanding of the past, openness to other beliefs and worldviews, and the background knowledge to understand different opinions in current society and where they originate.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Analyse primary sources critically
- Have deepened their historical knowledge on Christopher Columbus, the arrival of Europeans to the Americas, and its legacy
- Understand how different perspectives of the same figure and past appear in society.
- Be open to listening to other beliefs and worldviews on historical events

Pedagogical Recommendations:

The lesson teaches about the importance of nuance and multiperspectivity, and that issues of public contestation are complex. The activities encourage engaging with different opinions and worldviews, and while there can be many different opinions on the monument and Columbus' legacy, the historical facts about Columbus' history should be made clear so they do not promote pseudohistory or denialism as an equally valid explanation of historical reality. That is, students should be able to distinguish evidence-based historical information from ideology-based opinions that often distort the historical figure.

In this lesson, students will mainly work with visual interpretation of the monument and primary written sources, so they need reading comprehension appropriate to their level. Students who struggle with reading might need more time and support, which they can obtain from their peers since most activities in the lesson are done in groups. For this reason, it is recommended for groups to be heterogeneous, including one student with a higher reading comprehension and one student with more difficulties, since the texts provided have varying levels of difficulty (the longer texts include more difficult and old-fashioned language, while the shorter texts have easier language). The teacher can distribute them to specific students based on their reading comprehension level, if needed. In addition, some students can think about the contestations without prompt questions, while others will need more guidance. Guiding questions are provided for students who might need them in step 3.

Breakdown of Activities Step-by-step

Step 1

The first step is to introduce the topic and prepare the visit. Ask the students the questions listed below. This conversation is a prior assessment where the teacher should identify students' knowledge level and any widespread misconceptions about this moment in history, while also pointing them toward key aspects to keep in mind later. After the students have shared their answers, the teacher can provide the missing information to build a basic understanding of the monument's background, while still leaving space for students to speak first and share their impressions. It is not necessary to provide an answer to all questions, since some of them can act as questions to be solved in the following steps. In brackets, you can find an idea of what the answer could be. This step should take about **30 minutes**.

- ★ Show a photo of the monument and ask the students if they know what it is and where it is. (Columbus Monument in Barcelona)
- ★ Ask who it is dedicated to and what important event he did that led to future generations dedicating a monument to him. (Christopher Columbus, the first European to lead an expedition that reached the Americas, excluding the Norse, who did not continue the relation)
- ★ How is Christopher Columbus depicted in the statue? (Pointing, with determination, triumphantly)
- ★ Once the class has shared what they know about who Christopher Columbus was and what he did, ask about what he symbolises (common answers might include: discovery, adventure, colonisation, imperialism...)
- ★ When was the monument built? Who sponsored it? (1888, sponsored by the Barcelona City Council and rich donors. It is not necessary to provide the information on why they sponsored it yet, as it will be explored in step 2.)
- ★ Why are there different opinions on the legacy of Christopher Columbus? Why is the monument contested? Since when has it been contested? (See if the students have heard about the contestation; further information will be given in later steps.)
- ★ Are there any other elements in the Columbus Monument besides the statue of him? (Students might mention the tall column, though they might most likely not remember what statues and reliefs are at the bottom of the monument. If they do not know it, it should be left as a mystery to be solved in step 2.)

After the prior assessment, the teacher should offer an introduction on the history of Christopher Columbus, his various journeys to America, and the main consequences this had for both the indigenous people of America and Europeans. This explanation should also debunk widespread misconceptions –such as the idea that Medieval Europeans did not know that the Earth is round prior to Columbus' journey– and propaganda points that will appear in the written sources analysed by students in later steps –such as the idea that the accusations against his abuses during his reign in the islands were unfounded.

Step 2

The second step is the in situ activities. This part of the activity should take between **40 and 50 minutes**, although you should also consider the time it takes to get to the monument. If you choose to take the elevator to the top of the monument, account for the extra time, the monument's opening times, and the need to book tickets in advance. Although you can do this activity in the classroom using photos, we recommend visiting the monument itself because it helps convey the monument's intended sense of awe and allows students to explore autonomously, taking a closer look at each element.

If a visit to the monument is not possible, students can do the same activity in the classroom using photos. Close-up photos of all the elements mentioned in the worksheet are available on the [Viquipèdia page for the Columbus Monument](#). If the activity is done in the classroom, the teacher should provide each group of students with the photos of the elements mentioned in the worksheet, as well as a general photo showing the whole monument where they can see the elements' spatial disposition.

Organise the students in pairs or groups of three. Each pair/group of students should have a printed copy of the worksheet. Give the students 30 minutes to explore the monument (or the photos) and complete the worksheet. When they finish, divide the class into as many groups as there are teachers, so the pairs/groups can share their results with classmates, pointing out the elements and reasoning that led them to their answers. This sharing process should take around 15 minutes and should also be used to correct the exercises, although not all questions have only one correct answer.

Step 3

The remaining steps are post-visit activities in the classroom focused on the monument's values and controversy. All these activities will be done in groups of three students. It is recommended to create heterogeneous groups that include one student with higher abilities and interest, one medium student, and one student with more difficulties. This will allow all groups to be able to read all texts (longer texts include more difficult language, while shorter texts have easier language) and for students to help each other.

For step 3, each student will be given two of the texts below on anonymised cards (with the texts of all three students, each group will have all six texts). The students should read their texts and explain them to their group-mates. With this information, the group should work together to organise the texts following the timeline below. Students should consider when each excerpt was published, keeping in mind what they know about Christopher Columbus' legacy and the construction of the monument in Barcelona. To facilitate this step, the students should be reminded that the monument was built in 1888. This part of the activity should last around **20 minutes**.

Students who need extra support can be given the following guiding questions:

- Does the author of this text have a positive or negative view of Columbus? How does the author define him? (If the student needs more support, they may be asked to highlight in red the words or sentences where the author speaks negatively of Columbus and highlight in green the words or sentences where the author praises Columbus).
- Does the author view Columbus' role in history as generally positive or negative?

- Does the text value the monument for any other reason besides honouring Columbus?
- Is the author in favour of erecting/keeping the monument to Columbus in Barcelona? Why?
- How does the author think this monument reflects on the city, or changes the image of the city? Is the author emotionally attached to the monument or the landscape it creates?
- Does this text seem to have been published before or after the monument was built? If it was published after, does it speak of the monument as if it were new, or as a historical element?
- Out of the options in the timeline, what year do you think this text could have been published? What values does this text express that make you consider this year?

Excerpt 1:

Columbus's glory is undeniable, and his figure occupies and will continue to occupy one of the most brilliant pages in the history of humankind. [...] Columbus, with his striking presence, tall, well-built, muscular, and of majestic and noble bearing, [...] dressed with utmost simplicity and was eloquent without affectation, kind in his dealings with others, and affectionate and gentle in his domestic life. [...]

History succinctly recounts the struggles he was forced to wage against the prejudices, errors, and even malevolence of that assembly [...] and the delays and ups and downs that this great man had to endure until he saw his noble aims achieved. [...]

Accused of forcing the community to work excessively during times of weakness and illness, and of withholding rations from individuals under trivial pretexts to the detriment of their health —actions considered abuses by an arrogant and ignoble foreigner— the monarchs appointed a commissioner to remedy the reported ills and abuses. [...]

Columbus, believing it an affront to his dignity to appear as a defendant in a land over which he had been granted command, immediately appointed his brother Bartholomew as his lieutenant and returned to Spain on April 20, 1496, with 225 Spaniards and 30 natives. His mere presence, more than any treasure he brought with him, dispelled the odious accusations of his enemies; [...]

Barcelona, in erecting to the memory of such an illustrious man the magnificent monument that is admired today by locals and foreigners alike at the foot of the port's waters, has done nothing but act in gratitude, as it is to be expected to act with other men worthy of eternal fame to whom it has contracted a sacred debt.

Excerpt 2:

[The Municipal Group Candidature of Popular Unity proposes to the Plenary of the City Council]: 1. The removal of Spanish flags and other monarchic symbols from public buildings and spaces. 2. The removal of the sculpture of Christopher Columbus from the column in Peace Square, as well as all the ornaments at the base of the column that glorify the conquest of America, its musealisation for its historical interpretation, and its replacement by a symbol of American resistance against imperialism, oppression, and indigenous (and African-American) segregation. 3. The removal of the sculpture of Antonio López y López, slaver, at the intersection of Via Laietana and Passeig de Colom, and its musealisation for its historical interpretation; and its replacement by a monument of homage and reparation to all the victims of the slave trade. 4. Declaring October 12 a working day for all purposes. 5. Urging the Department of Interior of the Government of Catalonia not to authorise demonstrations or acts of a fascist nature in the city.

[...] She points out that the glorification of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, and genocide perpetrated in America for five centuries is not a settled issue. Along these lines, she expresses her group's wish to question the presence of the statue of Columbus and understands that, without a doubt, they have achieved their objective and have taken an important step so that, sooner or later, the allegory of genocide will cease to be an icon of the city. [...] She says that they are aware that their proposal will not go ahead, that some groups will vote against it out of coherence with their ideology, since they cannot do otherwise if they defend genocides and cover up state terrorism; others will vote against it out of cowardice or because they are ashamed of their past, or out of pure tacticalism. She says that they are well aware that history is written by the victors, but that memory is the antidote [...]

Excerpt 3:

Barcelona City Council has earmarked fifty million pesetas to pay for the work to strengthen the structure of the Columbus Monument, which has begun in recent days. [...]

The monument is considered very important technically and artistically, because it is located within the works of Art Nouveau iron architecture. In addition, the special character given by its location in front of the sea has made it a symbol of the city, at the end of Les Rambles. The councillor for Citizen Relations, Raimon Martínez Fraile, told EL PAÍS that, regardless of its historical-artistic value, the Columbus monument constitutes "a sign of identity for the city, which must be safeguarded at any cost".

Excerpt 4:

In 1888, the statue of Christopher Columbus was built as a tribute to the 'discoverer' of America. Barcelona is a progressive and diverse city that should not celebrate, commemorate, nor honour Spanish colonialism since it caused the genocide of 8 million indigenous people.

Both in Barcelona and in Spain, racism and the crimes committed by it are ignored in the educational system, giving rise to ignorance and the adoration of historical figures who in reality were authentic tyrants and murderers. Christopher Columbus started the

colonisation of the Americas, leading large operations where they raped women, children, and looted entire villages, almost completely eradicating the identity of the Native Americans in those lands.

For these reasons, it is necessary that the statue that has represented Barcelona for so many years no longer forms part of this city.

Excerpt 5:

The Commission asked Spanish artists to respond to its call by submitting projects, ideas, and suggestions for a monument to the illustrious Genoese navigator [...] Have the applicants for the prize taken advantage of the freedom the Commission granted them? Has anyone conceived a grand idea that shows novelty or daring, a thought worthy of a figure like Christopher Columbus, of the famous event being commemorated, and even of the importance of the site where the monument is to be located? [...]

We might overlook the column's vulgarity and accept it if the planned monument were to be placed in a location where it wouldn't obstruct any view, any of those picturesque effects that cities are keen to preserve, because their impression is vividly etched in the memory of visitors and because their sight is always a new source of delight for the locals. [...] But what might be acceptable for a location such as the one we have suggested, is in no way acceptable for construction in Peace Square, at the foot of the port, next to its docks and at the end of the Rambla, from where one enjoys a beautiful view that it would be a colossal folly to ruin with a monument, however grand, however great, or however superior its artistic merit might be.

[...] Is it not true that the sight of the port teeming with ships, with the varied scenes its waters continually offer and the changing skies, is one of those magnificent spectacles that always fascinate, and that no person with artistic sensibilities ever regards with indifference? [...] And wouldn't this perspective, this beautiful panorama, this incredibly varied spectacle be destroyed, or at least altered, if in the middle of Peace Square a monstrosity like any of those submitted to the competition were erected, or if even a column were built that would divide the scene, ruining it completely?

[...The monuments all seem deliberately designed to spoil the viewpoint we have discussed, undoubtedly one of the best and most interesting in Barcelona. Rather than erecting a heavy column in the Peace Square to commemorate the illustrious name of Christopher Columbus and the Catholic Queen who supported him on his voyage, rather than blocking the view of the port with such a construction, the sea itself and the ships anchored in the harbour should evoke in onlookers the memory of the sublime enterprise that culminated in the most auspicious discovery of the New World.

Excerpt 6:

Wishing to join in the general enthusiasm surrounding the commemoration of one of the most glorious dates in our history and one of the most momentous in the history of humankind, and to contribute to the best of our ability to the commemoration of the fourth centenary of the discovery of America, we publish this special issue of LA ILUSTRACIÓN ARTÍSTICA, dedicated exclusively to celebrating this momentous event and honoring the memory of the immortal navigator who found in our country the necessary

protection to undertake that daring enterprise which, brought to a successful conclusion, allowed him to repay the favors received by giving Spain a new world.

[...] It is beautiful to see how the nations with the most glorious past rival those that are most powerful today, in the noble desire to exalt the memory of the inspired and intrepid navigator who gave Castile and Aragon a new world, countless conquests to the Catholic faith, and a happy future to America, asleep in the darkness of idolatry, by bringing to it the light of Christian civilisation.

Timeline: When do you think the excerpts were published? What are the values expressed in each text?

- ★ 1882
- ★ 1888
- ★ 1892
- ★ 1983
- ★ 2016
- ★ 2020

Solution:

- Excerpt 1: year 1888 (year of the monument's inauguration). [Text by Luis Calvo published in *La Ilustración*, issue from 23rd September 1888](#). It shows admiration for Columbus and his deed, portraying it as something to be proud of.
- Excerpt 2: year 2016 (first contestation). Text from [the City Council's meeting minutes, 21st October 2016, proposal 5 \(page 62\)](#). It demands that the statue be removed because it praises the Spanish Empire and its colonial values, relating it to the monarchy, fascism, and Spanish nationalism.
- Excerpt 3: year 1983. From [the article "Salvar el monumento a Colón de la oxidación metálica costará 50 millones" by Marius Carol published in the newspaper *El País* on the 3rd of January 1983](#). It praises the monument for its importance in the city's art history and values it as an icon of Barcelona. Its value is no longer focused on the conquests of the Spanish empire.
- Excerpt 4: year 2020. [Petition to remove the Columbus Monument](#). It criticises Columbus and the Spanish empire's actions, demands to remove the statue because of its praise of colonialism, and demands that the Columbus Monument stop being a symbol of Barcelona.
- Excerpt 5: year 1882 (during the selection process to design the monument, before it was built). Fragment of a text by Miquel i Badia, an influential art critic, published in [Diario de Barcelona, issue 14th January 1882, page 6](#). Values the location as a highlight of Barcelona and criticises the proposals for the not-yet-built Columbus Monument for ruining the beautiful view, making Barcelona lose one of its icons (the same criticism often given

nowadays by those in favour of maintaining the Columbus Monument as it is). Praises Columbus and is not opposed to a monument on an ideological basis.

- Excerpt 6: year 1892 (400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in America). Text published in [La Ilustración Artística, issue from the 3rd October 1892, pages 2 and 17](#). Praises Columbus, his actions, and the actions of the Spanish empire, portraying them as positive for the indigenous people and as something to be proud of. It highlights the importance of this event for the Christianisation of the Americas.

Step 4

Now that students have a critical understanding of how the perceptions of Columbus and his legacy might have evolved through time, they will read sources that delve deeper into the contestation over the monument today. This way, students can connect past and present and develop a critical understanding of the contestation.

In the same groups of three, each student will be assigned one of the excerpts below, in a way that each group will have all three excerpts in total. Let students read their excerpts and reflect on what voices and perspectives they highlight. Students can write down notes if it helps them remember the main arguments present in this perspective. Then, the group members will role-play as City Council members debating what should be done with the monument, each student defending the view expressed in the excerpt they have been assigned. This part of the activity should last around **20 minutes**.

Before starting the role-play, students should be reminded that the debates must be kept respectful at all times, and that they or their group-mates might be defending views that they personally do not agree with. Students should use evidence from the sources to support their arguments; respect their classmates, even when disagreeing; critique ideas rather than individuals; avoid offensive or inflammatory language; and remember that role-play does not represent their personal opinions.

After the debate, students can discuss whether their assigned viewpoint differed from their personal viewpoint and which arguments they found more convincing.

Excerpt 1:

Mrs Reguant comments that societies have constructed, construct and transform their own explanations of themselves and the world. She indicates that it is a fact that history is constructed by each society and that each society interprets it. She says that this construction of representations through which humans manifest the ways in which they locate themselves in the world translates into all kinds of symbolisations, many of them often contradictory in a class- and unequal society. She points out that a statue, whatever it may be, is part of this historical process: what is remembered, what is valued, how things are explained and what historical references are offered for acting in society. She indicates that in Barcelona the thread of the city's history could be followed through the life and death of its monuments, but also often through monuments that have never been erected. She indicates that to understand a symbolic representation, such as a statue, one must not look at the symbol directly, but also look at how it manifests itself socially, what it channels, and where it conveys social thoughts and actions. In this sense, she understands that the Columbus Monument is not a symbol of an encounter between equals, but of imposition. She recognises that it is clear that Christopher Columbus cannot be attributed the sole responsibility for a bloody colonisation. However, she says that what

motivates the proposal is the rejection of the contents historically associated with this monument. She notes that over time the Columbus statue has been the object of a dominant representation according to which a colonial and, ultimately, slave-owning process is exalted. She indicates that the statues at the base of the Columbus monument synthesize the reasons for the historiographical and state link between the figure of Columbus and the successive holidays of Race Day, Hispanic Day and the National Day [of Spain], which have been built around the Columbus statue. She considers that the figure of an American man kneeling at the feet of a European priest speaks for itself.

She understands that this space must be a space of dignification of what happened and, therefore, also of historical reparation. For this reason, she proposes something that, at some point, in a much broader framework, the CUP had already put on the table, and that is the removal of the Columbus Monument and the work of the Barcelona City Council with the groups that work for the memory of the genocide committed during the colonisation of America to give that space a completely different symbol that also shows which Barcelona is that they want to explain, that they want to remember, and that they want to dignify with a monument.

Fragment of [the minutes of the meeting of the Commission of Presidency, Rights of Citizenship, Participation and Security and Prevention of the Barcelona City Council, session of December 12th, 2018.](#)

Excerpt 2:

Sweeping the past under the rug is a mistake, or worse: hypocrisy. As the Antillean poet and Nobel Prize winner in literature Derek Walcott said, it would be appropriate to "freeze" the negative moments of history so that they are clearly present in each generation and prevent them from happening again. And also to avoid the "optimistic correction" of a certain fateful past, an often self-justifying correction that usually goes much more unnoticed. From this perspective, the monument to López y López could have been kept in place with a re-museumisation that informed of the entire history related to the character but also to the monument itself. Thus, a properly re-museumised "monument" becomes a sculpture which does not glorify but rather explains a past that, whether we like it or not, must be read in its entirety. Removal hides history. Non-spontaneous vandalism is a deception, a theatrical piece. We are not in the USA, and we do not have its understandable urgency: we can think and debate. Let's take advantage of it.

Therefore, a policy of re-museumisation is what we think should be applied to the Columbus Monument in Barcelona and to so many others: instead of hiding or vandalising, let's do pedagogy. It has already been done recently (e.g. memorial plaques on Via Laietana, Camp de la Bota, the headquarters of *El Paps*, etc.) and it can continue to be done. Let's be brave. Let's look at our past. Let's make sure we build better futures. Let's re-museumise!

Fragment of an [article by Salvador Avià, Joan-Marc Passada i Jordi Avià in the cultural magazine *Núvol*, 2020.](#)

Excerpt 3:

I believe we are celebrating the most important milestone in human history. In my opinion, it is probably only comparable to Romanisation. The Hispanity is probably the most brilliant period, not just for Spain, but for mankind. Along with, I insist, the Roman Empire. Why? Because man had never before taken culture, history, religion, the nation's history to so many places at once. [...]

We are not aware that this is a millennia-old people who have done so much for all of Humanity. What other country, if you think about it, can say that a new world was discovered by them? That three ships that set sail precisely from Huelva, with capital not only from Castile but also private from these lands, managed to change the history of the world forever? And, above all, what other nation, like Spain, can still maintain these linguistic, historical, and cultural ties with practically a third of another world?

Excerpt from [a speech by Pablo Casado, president of the Partido Popular, on October 14th, 2018.](#)

Step 5

Lastly, the groups should reflect on the different views they have seen and express their own view on the monument's meaning, values, and its place in the current society.

To guide this reflection, the teacher can ask the students the following questions.

- ★ Which argument was the most convincing and why?
- ★ In the debate, did your assigned viewpoint differ from your personal opinion?
- ★ What evidence influenced your own conclusion?
- ★ How have views on Columbus and the monument changed over time? What does it tell us about the values shared by the society of each time period?
- ★ What surprised you about Christopher Columbus, the Columbus Monument or its contestation?
- ★ Has your thinking changed during this lesson?
- ★ What do you personally think should be done with the Columbus Monument?

This part of the activity should last around **20 minutes**.

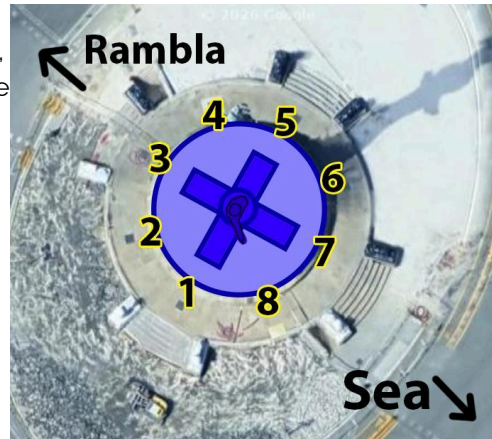
Worksheet for the students

What story is the Columbus Monument telling us?

We are about to explore the Columbus Monument to investigate how the Columbus Monument tells a particular story about the past. Observe each element carefully, analyse the monument as historical evidence, and think critically about whose perspectives are represented and whose may be missing. Follow the steps to investigate the monument; remember to support your answers with evidence you can actually see in the monument, to look carefully before assuming a meaning, and remember that not all questions have a correct or incorrect answer.

1. Starting from the lower part of the monument, the lowest elements are the lions, symbols of Spain. Next, there are different metal reliefs at the lower part of the monument. Each relief represents one of the scenes in Columbus' life listed below. Write the number of its location next to each title.

- ★ Columbus and his son arrive at La Rábida convent.
- ★ Columbus disembarks on American land.
- ★ Columbus is interviewed by the Catholic Monarchs in Santa Fe, where they show him support and make the last agreements before departing.
- ★ Columbus is received by the Catholic Monarchs in Barcelona upon his return from his first journey to America.
- ★ Columbus explains his plans to sail West to the Indies to the assembly of experts gathered in the convent, while the priests feed his son.
- ★ Columbus' ships leave the port of Palos de Moguer (Huelva, Andalusia) to sail to the Indies.
- ★ Columbus is introduced to the Catholic Monarchs in their court in Córdoba.
- ★ Columbus defends his plans to the experts consulted by the monarchs.



2. In what light is this historical moment being represented? What parts of the history of the European arrival to the Americas are missing? Whose perspectives are represented, and whose perspectives are missing?
3. Above the reliefs, at a lower height than the enthroned figures, there are four statues that represent different historical people who had something to do with Christopher Columbus. Can you guess which of these men is represented in each statue?

- ★ **Jaume Ferrer de Blanes:** Catalan astronomer, cartographer, navigator and merchant. Given his work and age, he could be figuratively considered a kind of teacher of Columbus. It seems that they knew each other, since Columbus wrote him a letter announcing that he had reached the Indies. He was responsible for making the map of the new lands and oceans that was used to divide the territories

between those belonging to Spain and Portugal in the Treaty of Tordesillas.

- ★ **Lluís de Santàngel:** Valencian merchant and member of the court of King Ferdinand the Catholic. His family had been bankers for generations to the kings of the Crown of Aragon and were responsible for collecting taxes in València. In 1486, he convinced the Catholic Monarchs to finance Columbus's proposed expedition and contributed a large sum from his own pocket to make it possible.



- ★ **Pere Margarit:** Catalan knight and captain. He participated in the conquest of the Kingdom of Granada and accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to America as the military leader of the expedition.
- ★ **Fra Bernat Boïl:** monk from the Aragonese Strip. He accompanied Columbus on his second voyage to America and was appointed by Pope Alexander VI as the first Christian missionary to the West Indies and was the first to officiate a Christian mass in the American continent.

4. What do these four men have in common? Why is Barcelona's monument highlighting them?
5. There are four allegorical statues sitting on thrones. They represent the four territories that formed the Hispanic Crown after the marriage of Ferdinand of Catalonia-Aragon and Isabella of Castile-León.
 - ★ Can you find Catalonia? What element helped you identify it?
 - ★ Are these four figures represented as equals, or is any shown as superior or more of a protagonist than the others?
6. At the top of the column, we find the monument's protagonist. How is Christopher Columbus depicted in the statue?

Now that you have observed all the monument...

7. How does the monument make you feel? Which elements of the monument contribute to that feeling?
8. Put yourself in the shoes of the people who decided to build the monument. Use examples from the monument to explain your ideas.
 - ★ What did this history make them feel? Why did they relate to this history?
 - ★ How do you think the monument was designed to make passers-by feel?
9. The City Council decided to partially cover some of the statues. Why do you think they made this decision?

Optional extension task for faster groups

- ★ How are the indigenous people of the Americas depicted? Does it differ from how Europeans are depicted?
- ★ If this monument were designed today, what would you change and why? Use historical evidence to justify your proposal.

Solutions

1. The reliefs are in the following order: 1) Columbus and his son arrive at the Rábida convent. 2) Columbus explains his plans to sail West to the Indies to the assembly of experts gathered in the convent, while the priests feed his son. 3) Columbus is introduced to the Catholic Monarchs in their court in Córdoba. 4) Columbus defends his plans to the experts consulted by the monarchs. 5) Columbus is interviewed by the Catholic Monarchs in Santa Fe, where they show him support and make the final agreements before departing. 6) Columbus' ships leave the port of Palos de Moguer (Andalusia) to sail to the Indies. 7) Columbus disembarks on American land. 8) Columbus is received by the Catholic Monarchs in Barcelona upon his return from his first journey to America. All the reliefs are located in chronological order in the monument.
 2. Columbus' arrival in the Americas is represented as a long journey where he had to be determined to convince different people until he managed to convince the Catholic Monarchs, who are portrayed as essential in this story. The monument avoids showing Columbus' controversial behaviours, such as his tyranny in the islands and mistreatment of the indigenous people he encountered, as well as the European sailors who came with him, his arrest, his trial... It does not show what this historical moment meant for the indigenous population he encountered in the Americas.
 3. The statues correspond to the following historical figures: A) Bernat Boïl (can be identified by his monk clothing and his carrying a cross that is being kissed by the indigenous man), B) Pere Margarit (he is wearing a knight's armour), C) Lluís de Santàngel (carrying a box), and D) Jaume Ferrer de Blanes (he is instructing a young boy on geography matters using a globe).
 4. These four men were of Catalan origin and contributed significantly to making Christopher Columbus' journey possible, whether it be by providing him with the necessary knowledge and money, or by accompanying him to provide him with the rules of force and religion used to control the newly conquered territories. The monument highlights these men as a way to make clear the Catalan participation in this historical moment, which is usually explained as only a matter of Castile.
- 5.1. Catalonia can be identified because it is the statue holding the Catalan shield (senyera).
- 5.2 The four figures are represented as equals. They are located at the same height, in the same size, and are all sitting on thrones showing equal hierarchy. This contributes to the monument's portrayal of Columbus' journey and conquest as the result of a joint effort by all four entities of the monarchy, and not only Castile.
6. The answer to how Columbus is portrayed in the top statue relies on interpretation, so the answers can vary. An example of an answer can be: Christopher Columbus is depicted in a more prominent location in the monument, clearly setting him as the protagonist. He is

shown pointing towards the sea, determined to lead the way.

7. The question of how the monument makes the student feel will change for each individual student. Whether it be shame, pride, sadness, admiration, or any other feeling, the student should try to identify what elements of the monument make them feel this way and why.
8. The questions of how the monument made its sponsors and designers feel and what they wanted to transmit with it are also partially up for interpretation. When the results are shared among the class, the strongest idea should be that the creators of the monument felt pride and admiration for this moment in history and being related to it, and as the capitalist class in an industrialised city they saw themselves reflected in the story of someone changing the course of history and bringing what was considered progress and innovation through science and technology.

Again, this question can be answered in different ways. The main idea is that the monument was designed to make observers feel that Columbus' arrival in the Americas was a glorious moment worthy of celebration and in which Catalan people had a prominent role.

9. Most of the statues which are covered are those that most visibly depict indigenous people from the Americas in subordination to Europeans. Images like the indigenous men kneeling in front of the Christian missionary and the European general showcase the most widespread mentality in Europe at the time of making the monument, which was based on white supremacy and Christian supremacy. These are the images that are most offensive to a modern audience. Their covering shows how sensibilities, values and the way we view history change over time.

Optional extension task 1: Europeans are portrayed much more frequently and in more prominent roles than indigenous Americans. Europeans are also portrayed in an individualised way (we can differentiate different types of people by their clothes and situations -such as priests, monarchs, sailors...- and we can even name many of the historical figures represented) and as active subjects making choices and leading the way, while indigenous Americans are anonymous and represent a stereotype rather than an individual person, and they are shown in submissive positions in relation to the Europeans. Additionally, the clothing worn by the statues of European men highlights their role as leaders (military, religious) or matches the European view of respectability, while indigenous Americans are mostly naked. Even though nakedness is one of the ways in which many cultures have (and still do) dress on many occasions, especially in hotter climates, it was viewed as immoral and primitive by Europeans; so, even though there is nothing that makes it necessarily more primitive or less fit than European-style clothes, the people who designed this monument and most Barcelonians who see it will likely subconsciously interpret it that way.

Optional extension task 2 is completely subjective. Students should be able to explain why they would make the choices they decide, based on historical facts as well as empathy, and how their choices relate to consideration of their own personal sensibilities and other existing modern-day sensibilities.

Assessment Rubric

Criteria	3 - Excellent	2 - Satisfactory	1 – Needs improvement
Participating in Class Discussion (step 1)	Actively contributes to discussions, offering insightful comments and encouraging peers.	Participates in discussions, providing some relevant input.	Rarely participates or contributes little to discussions.
Analysis of the monument (step 2)	Successfully identifies most of the monument's figurative and allegorical figures, recognises the intention behind the monument, and reflects on the feelings it causes them.	Identifies some of the figurative and allegorical figures, understands a superficial view of the monument's intention.	Fails to identify the monument's figures, does not recognise the intention behind the monument, and does not recognise how the monument might make them feel.
Understanding how views have changed over time (step 3)	Ordered the excerpts correctly, understands the views expressed in each excerpt, can explain how the view of Columbus' legacy has changed over time.	Mostly ordered the excerpts correctly, understands the views expressed in each excerpt and can explain them individually and see which ones are similar.	Could not order the excerpts in the timeline; does not understand how the view of Columbus' legacy has changed over time.
Language & Clarity (steps 4 and 5)	Has understood the point of view assigned to them as well as their classmate's, and has discussed them in depth. Presentation is clear, well-organised, and uses appropriate language effectively to convey arguments; asks thought-provoking questions that deepen understanding and stimulate discussion. Engages in debate while remaining respectful.	Has understood the point of view assigned to them and their classmates. Presentation is mostly clear and organised, but may have minor language issues impacting clarity. Asks relevant questions, though they may not provoke further thought. Engages in debate while remaining respectful.	Has not understood the different points of view. Presentation lacks clarity, organisation, or appropriate language, making arguments difficult to follow; struggles to ask questions or asks questions that do not relate to the topic, does not debate in a respectful manner.

Monument information background

Monument Name: Columbus Monument

Representation: Monument

Type: Monument

Date of Inauguration: 1888

Sponsor: Barcelona City Council and businessmen.

Person: Christopher Columbus

Historical Legacies: Colonialism

Authority: Barcelona City Council

Date of Initial Contestation: 2016

Intensity: Protests, vandalism, and public debate.

Initial Actor: Political party CUP

Remedies used to deal with the contestations: Status quo, partially covering the most offensive figures.

Fictional Representation? No.

Christopher Columbus is one of the most famous historical characters in the world, though not many people know about the more negative aspects, and many facts about his life are still unknown or uncertain to historians.

He was most likely born in 1451 in Genoa (modern-day Italy), one of the main commercial cities in the Mediterranean and an important port for Europe's trade with the East. However, due to the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the Turks' control over the trading routes that connected Europe and Asia, it was becoming increasingly difficult for European merchants to continue using the traditional route through the Eastern Mediterranean. Christopher Columbus, who worked as a sailor, came to the conclusion that the best alternative route was to circle around the Earth, travelling West.

Contrary to what many people believe, at the time it was not common in Europe to believe the Earth was flat: almost all educated people knew that the Earth was round and roughly the size it is, since it was calculated by the Ancient Greek astronomer Eratosthenes of Cyrene. But Columbus' plan depended on an erroneous fact: he believed in another calculation which claimed that the Earth is smaller in size. Thus, he believed Asia was less than 5,000 km west of Europe, when in reality it's about 16,000 km away.

After various attempts to convince the Portuguese and the Spanish monarchs to fund his expedition, Columbus managed to convince the Catholic Monarchs of Spain. In 1492, he sailed West and reached the Bahamas and Hispaniola, where he came into contact with the indigenous Lucayan, Taino, and Arawak peoples. He returned to Europe with the news that he had reached Asia, bringing with him a group of kidnapped Taino people, local plants, and the knowledge that there was gold to be found there. In the following years, Columbus led three more voyages to the Americas and established himself as the governor of the islands.

His rule on the islands was characterised by terror. He enslaved the indigenous population and imposed Castilian law and a cultural understanding of property on them, punishing them with mutilation or the death sentence without a legal process, even for small crimes. He also ordered torturing and executing the Spaniards who did not obey him or whom he considered rebellious.

Columbus' excessive violence reached the Catholic Monarchs, who sent a new governor to investigate him by the year 1500. Columbus also had trouble with the Castilian authorities because he refused to declare all the gold and other resources taken from the natives and because he physically attacked, publicly humiliated, and executed royal officers. The new governor arrested Columbus, and he was taken to a trial in Spain. Had it not been for Queen Isabella's intervention, he could have been sentenced to death.

The arrival of Columbus' expedition to the American continent is a turning point in history, starting the period of European colonization of the Americas, which resulted in the arrival of new products to both sides of the ocean; the European colonial powers' enrichment at the cost of indigenous American populations; the death of tens of millions of indigenous Americans due to diseases brought by the Europeans and forced labour; the extermination of languages, cultures, and religions; and the arrival of European settlers who are the ancestors of modern populations in American countries, among other consequences so relevant that later historians chose Columbus' arrival to the «New World» as the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Early Modern period. Christopher Columbus became a symbol of discovery, exploration, adventure, modernisation, individual liberty against the perceived Medieval prejudices, bravery, and a national hero in various European and American countries.

The idea of building a monument to Columbus in Barcelona's port was proposed by three conservative politicians in 1874, quickly accepted «with unanimity and enthusiasm» by the City Council. That same year, the short-lived First Spanish Republic had ended, giving way to the restoration of the monarchy. The conservative political and economic elites were eager to show their loyalty to the monarchy's programme and relief at the end of the revolutionary experiment. At the same time, Catalonia was immersed in industrialisation, and the Catalan bourgeoisie wanted to prove itself as the «locomotive of Spain», leading Spain's modernisation. Thus, the Columbus Monument in Barcelona would accomplish both goals of praising Spanish conservative values and inserting Catalonia in one of the most heroicized moments of Spanish history, showing Catalonia as a vital part of Spain's accomplishments and highlighting its role in pushing Spain towards modernity, especially in matters of economy and technology. The upcoming 1888 Universal Exposition held in Barcelona also motivated the monument to become a touristic symbol of the city. It was quickly adopted as the city's first icon and remains one of its famous landmarks today.

The monument was inaugurated in 1888, paid for in part by the City Council and in part by an international fundraising effort led by the city's economic elites -many of whom had made their wealth in the colonies- who saw it as a way to show their industry's superiority. Measuring over 50 metres high, it was the tallest column in the world at the time of its construction all made of metal, and included one of the city's first elevators inside it. It prioritised the technical aspects before the aesthetics, associating Columbus' groundbreaking «discovery» with the idea of industrial Catalonia's modernity and value for scientific and technological progress.

Around 1892, the anniversary of Columbus' arrival in America, many more monuments dedicated to him were inaugurated throughout Spain, highlighting his role in the Christianization of the Americas and portraying him as representing only the Kingdom of Castile, often paired with heroising the figure of Queen Isabella. But, in this moment of popularity, Barcelona's monument slowly lost relevance in the city's commemorations as a significant part of the ruling class joined the ranks of Catalan nationalism and Columbus became a symbol of Castilian centralism. However, there were no attacks against the monument, which still represented a man and a moment in history seen generally in a positive light.

Today, in Catalonia, Columbus is still associated with Spain's imperialism (as evidenced by Catalan independentists' movement against the celebration of October 12th, or Terra Lliure's attack against the replica of Columbus' *Santa María* ship set in Barcelona's port ahead of the 1992 anniversary commemorations). The first demand to take it down was proposed by the anticapitalist pro-independence party CUP, and in recent years it has also been criticised by the anticolonial and antiracist movements. At the same time, to many people, it is still a symbol of Barcelona tied to their emotional connection with their home city.

For more information on the monument, please see:

<https://contestedhistories.org/resources/case-studies/columbus-statue-in-barcelona/>

Monument Pictures



Columbus Monument.
Photo courtesy of the author.



The statue at the top of the monument, representing Christopher Columbus. Photo by Selbymay. CC BY-SA 3.0.



Current state of the lower part of the monument, with some of the statues covered in a semi-transparent net. Own photo. Public domain.



Statue of the priest Bernat Boïl and an indigenous man kneeling and kissing a crucifix. Bernat Boïl accompanied Christopher Columbus in his second journey to America and became the first to conduct a mass in the American continent. Photo by XpoferenS. Public domain.



Statue of an indigenous man and Pere Bertran Margarit, military commander in Christopher Columbus' second journey to America. Photo by C1 Superstar. Public domain.