Oceans of Change

Trace how exchanges across oceans reshaped lives and land.

SS24.8.11d "Describe the Columbian Exchange and its contributions to cultural, demographic, economic, and environmental changes around the globe."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three things that crossed oceans, circle their starting and ending places when named, and label one effect of each kind in the margin: culture, population, economy, and environment.

What Crossed the Ocean?

1. Picture a cup of chocolate in a European port and a field of sugarcane on a Caribbean island. Neither scene looked the same before 1492. As voyages connected the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia, plants, animals, people, and germs crossed oceans in what historians call the Columbian Exchange. Cacao from the Americas reached Europe, where some people mixed it with sugar to make a sweet drink. Sugarcane, grown for centuries in Asia, traveled with European colonizers to the Caribbean. These movements changed tastes and daily customs across the Atlantic.

2. The exchange also moved dangers and workers, often by force. Diseases from Afro-Eurasia, including smallpox, spread among Indigenous Americans, who had little prior exposure. Epidemics killed many people and disrupted communities. European colonizers established sugar plantations in the Caribbean and demanded large amounts of labor. They forced enslaved Africans across the Atlantic to work on those plantations. Planters sold sugar in Atlantic markets and gained wealth, while enslaved workers endured brutal conditions. The forced migration also reshaped the Caribbean's population and carried African languages, foods, and traditions there.

3. Fields and forests changed too. To expand Caribbean sugar plantations, colonizers cleared forests and planted sugarcane over large areas. On some islands, exposed soil washed away more easily when heavy rain fell. Europeans also brought cattle to the Americas; grazing animals could trample plants and alter habitats. Meanwhile, American crops such as maize spread to Africa, where farmers added them to local food systems. The exchange was not one simple trade: it joined distant places, but its effects differed sharply for the people and environments involved.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did a crop crossing the Atlantic change a food or drink custom? Explain where it went and what changed.

2. Explain two ways the exchange changed the Caribbean's population.

3. How did sugarcane's movement create wealth for some people while harming others?

4. How did expanding sugar plantations cause an environmental change on Caribbean islands? Trace the steps.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence museum label about a Caribbean island after 1492. Describe three transfers from the passage, explain changes in at least two areas (culture, population, economy, environment), and name both a group that benefited and a group that suffered.

ANSWER KEY

Oceans of Change

GRADE 8 · SS24.8.11d

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three things that crossed oceans, circle their starting and ending places when named, and label one effect of each kind in the margin: culture, population, economy, and environment. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did a crop crossing the Atlantic change a food or drink custom? Explain where it went and what changed.	**Cacao traveled from the Americas to Europe, where some people mixed it with sugar to make a sweet drink. Alternatively, maize traveled from the Americas to Africa and became part of local food systems.**
2	Explain two ways the exchange changed the Caribbean's population.	**Diseases killed many Indigenous people and disrupted their communities. Colonizers also forced enslaved Africans across the Atlantic to work in the Caribbean.**
3	How did sugarcane's movement create wealth for some people while harming others?	**Colonizers grew sugarcane on Caribbean plantations, and planters gained wealth by selling sugar in Atlantic markets. Enslaved Africans were forced to work on the plantations in brutal conditions.**
4	How did expanding sugar plantations cause an environmental change on Caribbean islands? Trace the steps.	**Colonizers cleared forests to plant more sugarcane. Without the forest cover, exposed soil on some islands washed away more easily in heavy rain.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Sugarcane brought by European colonizers spread across this Caribbean island as forests were cleared for plantations. Planters sold sugar in Atlantic markets and gained wealth, but enslaved Africans forced across the ocean suffered brutal working conditions. Diseases from Afro-Eurasia spread among Indigenous people, causing many deaths and disrupting communities. Africans also carried languages, foods, and traditions that shaped island culture. Together, these movements changed the island's economy, population, culture, and land.

Accept other accurate examples from the passage when students explain a clear cause-and-effect link. For the museum label, check for five sentences, three distinct transfers, changes in at least two named areas, and both a beneficiary and a harmed group.