

Geography and History Activity

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Exploring the Americas

Lesson 4 *Competing for Colonies*

Understanding Place: Europeans in the Americas

European explorers set sail with dreams of reaching Asia and returning in glory, beginning in the late 1400s. The vast wilderness of the Americas was not the spice-laden East Indies. Still, the explorers recognized the riches of the wilderness they found. What form these riches took—gold, fur, farmland—depended on the adventurer himself. How did the explorers' views reflect the goals of the countries for which they sailed?



Goals of the Early Explorers

Spanish explorers searched for lands that resembled the lands they knew back home. The people of Spain had learned to mine mineral ores from Spain's mountainous terrain. Well-acquainted with the economic importance of mineral ores, Spain's earliest explorers were drawn to mountainous areas of Mexico and what is today the southwestern United States.

The French, too, were eager to profit from North America's abundant natural resources. French explorers traveled the St. Lawrence River and the northern Appalachian Mountain range and claimed these lands for France. Finding a region teeming with beavers, muskrats, and deer, the French turned to trading with Native Americans for animal furs. The French built a fur-trading monopoly that brought them great wealth.

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English explorers, who settled in Virginia, found a land and climate that was better suited than their homeland for growing food. English colonies that grew up in the 1600s were heavily dependent on farming, and they traded crops for manufactured English goods.

Different Views

The different approaches of the Spanish, French, and English who explored and colonized reflected different perceptions of the regions in which they settled. Early Spanish explorers were enchanted by the idea of searching for fabled cities of gold. French explorers looked at North America as a place where fortunes could be made from the natural resources that were around them. English settlers quickly understood the value of the farmland they found here.

The English View

"There are valleys and plains streaming with the sweet Springs. . . . The land is full of minerals, plenty of woods [which we lack in England]. There are growing goodly oaks and elms, beech and birch . . . and fir trees, in great [abundance. The] soil is strong and lusty of its own nature."

– Anonymous English writer, early 1600s

The French View

"There is a great number of stags, deer, bears, and other beasts."

– Jacques Cartier, 1530s

The Spanish View

"The discovery of the South Sea would lead to the discovery of many islands rich in gold, pearls, precious stones . . . and other unknown and wonderful things."

– Hernán Cortés, 1533

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Directions: Use the essay, the quotes, and the map to answer the following questions.

Understanding the Concept

1. Stating What North American resources were important to the Spanish, the French, and the English?

2. Analyzing What makes people perceive regions differently?

3. Explaining What did the English find in North America that they did not have in Europe? How did they use it?

Applying the Concept

4. Summarizing State in your own words how Europeans interacted with the lands they colonized in the Americas.

5. Synthesizing Find the region on the map where the majority of French settlement was. What can you infer about the resources found in this region? Explain your answer.
