

# Cultural Encounters and the Exchanges that Occurred

## Objectives

- To help students understand the types of exchanges, both good and bad, that occurred when the European and Native cultures encountered one another in America
- To expose students to primary sources and their interpretation

## Background

Prior to European exploration, numerous Native American tribes inhabited the eastern seaboard of America. Twenty-eight tribes were listed by the European explorers as living in what would become North Carolina. The larger tribes were the Cherokee, the Tuscarora, and the Catawba. There were three main language groups: Algonquian (primarily coastal tribes), Iroquoian (Cherokee and Tuscarora), and Siouan (Catawba and other Piedmont and southern Coastal Plains tribes). Even though tribes may be from the same language group, they did not necessarily understand one another. The native cultures are still evident in North Carolina's place names.

European exploration of the state began when Giovannie da Verrazano observed the coast in 1524 for the French. The Spanish also had an interest in the area, and Hernando De Soto explored the western portion of the state in 1540. The English sent the Roanoke Voyages in 1584-1587. Though none of the colonies survived, they set the stage for the first permanent English colony at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607.

This lesson plan looks at the descriptions of three explorers to North Carolina. Arthur Barlowe, along with Philip Amadas, headed the first English expedition in 1584. The group stayed for six weeks, during which time Barlowe recorded his observations of the people and the land. Following the establishment of an English colony in Carolina, John Lawson was made surveyor general of the colony. He traveled extensively and wrote his observations of the natives until he was killed by the Tuscaroras in 1711. William Bartram was a naturalist and artist who travelled throughout the southeastern United States, describing the landscape and the native populations in each colony. In 1791 he published an account of his travels.

What we know about native cultures we have learned from two major sources. Archaeologists provide information through the discovery of artifacts and sites once used by the Indians. The other main source is the description provided by the European explorers. When reading the European accounts, it is important to remember that they saw the natives as strange, and they considered their own culture to be superior to that of these inhabitants they encountered here. Having students identify bias in the writings is a useful exercise.

The meeting of the European and native cultures resulted in exchanges of many things, including goods, languages, cultural and scientific practices, information, religion, and diseases. While some of these things were beneficial for both cultures, in the end the introduction of diseases and alcohol, along with the encroachment of European immigrants onto native lands, proved disastrous for the Indian cultures.

Source: Bell, John L., Jr, and Jeffrey J. Crow, *North Carolina, The History of an American State*, Clairmont Press, 1998

Whenever people of different cultures meet, exchanges occur. These can be exchanges of actual goods or they can involve cultural practices or ideas. Read the passages below and list for each one the types of things that have been or are proposed to be exchanged between the Native Americans and the Europeans.

1. They [Native Americans] deal in the way of barter, carrying with them deer skins, furs, dry fish, bees-wax, honey, bear's oil and some other articles. They say the Spaniards receive them very friendly, and treat them with the best spiritous liquors. The Spaniards of Cuba likewise trade here or at St. Marks, and other sea ports on the West coast of the isthmus in small sloops; particularly at the bay of Calos, where are excellent fishing banks and grounds; not far from which is a considerable town of the Siminoles, where they take great quantities of fish, which they salt and cure on shore, and barter with the Indians and traders for skins, furs, &c. and return with their cargoes to Cuba.

Bartram p. 227

What do the Native Americans trade? \_\_\_\_\_

What do the Europeans trade? \_\_\_\_\_

2. [Native Americans] having a band of music with them, consisting of a drum, flutes and a rattle gourd, they entertained us during the night with their music, vocal and instrumental.

Bartram p. 245

What did the Native Americans share? \_\_\_\_\_

3. A day or two after this, we fell to trading with them, exchanging some things that we had, for Chamoys, Buffe, and Deere skinnes: when we shewed him all our packet of merchandize, of all things that he sawe, a bright tinne dish most pleased him, which hee presently tooke up and clapt it before his breast, and after made a hole in the brimme thereof and hung it about his necke, making signes that it would defende him against his enemies arrowes:

...

We exchanged our tinne dish for twentie skinnes, woorth twentie Crownes, or twentie Nobles: and a copper kettle for fiftie skins woorth fifty Crownes. They offered us good exchange for our hatchets, and axes, and for knives, and would have given any thing for swordes: but wee would not depart with any.

Barlowe p. 5

What one item is the Native American particularly interested in and what does he plan to do with it?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What items did the Europeans refuse to trade? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Thus we should be let into a better Understanding of the Indian Tongue, by our new Converts; and the whole Body of these People would arrive to the Knowledge of our Religion and Customs, and become as one People with us. By this Method also, we should have a true Knowledge of all the Indians Skill in Medicine and Surgery;  
Lawson p. 237

What things does Lawson feel the Europeans should try to learn from the Native Americans?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What would the Native Americans get in return? \_\_\_\_\_

5. The Small-Pox has been fatal to them; they do not often escape, when they are seiz'd with that Distemper, which is a contrary Fever to what they ever knew. Most certain, it had never visited America, before the Discovery thereof by the Christians. ...formerly it destroy'd whole Towns, without leaving one Indian alive in the Village. The Plague was never known amongst them, that I could learn by what Enquiry I have made: ... The Small-Pox and Rum have made such a Destruction amongst them, that, on good grounds, I do believe, there is not the sixth Savage living within two hundred Miles of all our Settlements, as there were fifty Years ago.  
Lawson, pp. 223-224

What two things did the Native Americans get from the Europeans? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the result of having received these things? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Sources

Bartram, William. *Travels Through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges, or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws; Containing An Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of Those Regions, Together with Observations on the Manners of the Indians. Embellished with Copper-Plates.* Philadelphia: Printed by James & Johnson, 1791. Available online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/bartram/menu.html>

Barlowe, Arthur. *The First Voyage to Roanoke. 1584.* The First Voyage [Boston, Mass.]: [Directors of the Old South Work], [1898]. Available online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/barlowe/menu.html>

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