

★ The Columbian Exchange

Explorers carried plants, animals, and diseases to the “New World” of the Americas. They also brought back plants and animals to the “Old World”—Asia, Africa, and Europe. This transfer became known as the **Columbian Exchange** because it resulted from Columbus’s explorations. The Columbian Exchange dramatically changed the world.

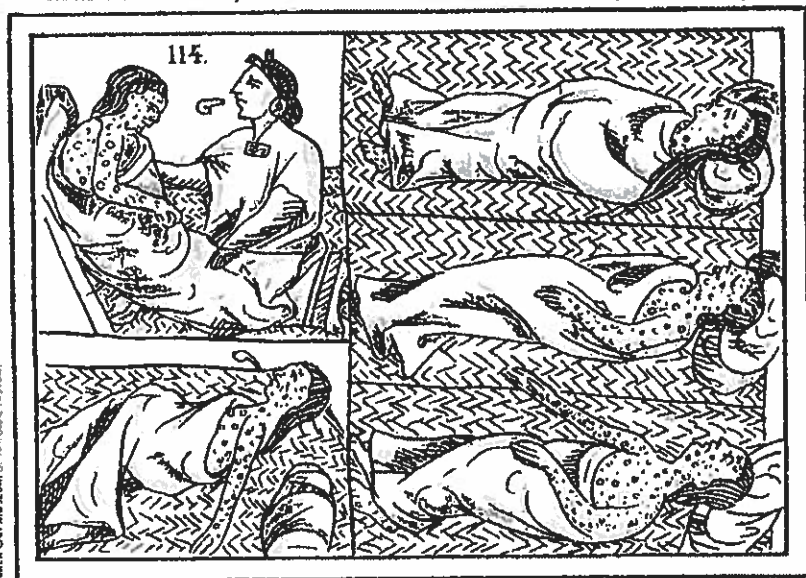
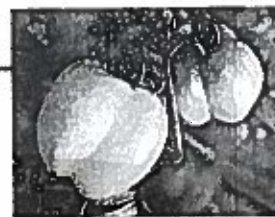
European explorers in the Americas found many plants and animals that were unlike any seen back home. “All the trees were as different from ours as day from night,” Columbus noted in his journal. These American plants proved valuable and useful. Explorers introduced corn to Europe for use as animal food. Many Europeans began to cook with tomatoes, particularly in Mediterranean countries. In the late 1600s some Europeans began to grow potatoes, which were from South America. Later, European settlers brought potatoes to North America. Europeans also saw American Indians using tobacco and cocoa, which became luxury items in Europe.

Settlers and explorers also brought plants and animals to the American continents. European horses, cattle, and pigs soon ran wild there. American Indians came to use these animals for transportation and to improve their diet. They also started to farm European grains, such as wheat and barley. These grains grew well in cool climates. Rice and bananas grew well in warmer parts of the Americas.

The explorers also unintentionally introduced deadly diseases. Measles, smallpox, and typhus were common in Europe. As a result, most adult Europeans had developed some degree of immunity, or natural resistance, to them. American Indians, however, had never been

That's Interesting!

“Golden Apples” Did you know that for many years some Europeans thought tomatoes were poisonous? It’s true! Tomatoes originated in South America and later spread to Mesoamerica. The word *tomato* comes from the Aztec word *tomatl*. Tomatoes were first brought back to Europe by Spanish explorers. Northern Europeans grew tomato plants for decoration but were not sure that eating them was safe. In Italy and Spain, however, people soon began cooking with the new fruits. The Italians called tomatoes “golden apples,” perhaps because some of the early varieties were yellow. Many years later European settlers brought tomatoes back across the Atlantic Ocean to North America.



AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Interpreting the Visual Record

Deadly diseases This illustration from a history of Spanish settlement in the Americas written in the 1500s shows the effects of smallpox on the Aztec of Mexico. **What happened to many of the American Indians who came into contact with European explorers?**

“there are not now believed to be at the present time . . . five hundred persons [left].”

✓ **Reading Check: Drawing Inferences and Conclusions** What were some of the long-term benefits and drawbacks of the Columbian Exchange?

exposed to such diseases. They had no immunity to them. As a result, many American Indians became terribly sick after the first encounters with Europeans took place. Hundreds of thousands of American Indians died.

No one knows how many American Indians died from European diseases, but the loss of life was staggering. Spanish author Fernández de Oviedo reported in 1548 about the destruction of the American Indians of Hispaniola. He reported that of the estimated 1 million American Indians who had lived on the island in 1492,