

This Country of Ours Teacher's Notes



About These Teacher's Notes

These notes are here to help you teach with confidence while preserving the living quality of the original book. They identify places where historical context, newer scholarship, or uncertainty in the sources may be helpful to the parent. They are also a living resource. Our understanding is never static: we continue to research, follow new scholarship, revisit questions, and listen carefully to the families using these lessons. When better information becomes available, these notes may be updated so that we can continue to serve your family with the most accurate and useful information we can provide.



Keep Your Notes Current

Research continues, and these Teacher's Notes may be updated as new information or questions arise.

Visit the book page for the latest Teacher's Notes, chapter research, sources, and lesson links:

kindredthicket.com/history/this-country-of-ours/

This is a Revised Edition. Information about the revisions made directly to the text can be found through the web link. The web edition is always the most current version.

Chapter 1 · How the Vikings of Old Sought and Found New Lands

“went to Bjarni and bought his ship”

- The story here follows the Saga of the Greenlanders. In Erik the Red's Saga, Leif chances upon the land on his voyage home from Norway.

“and was indeed his foster father”

- The story calls Tyrker Leif's foster father. That comes from one saga tradition, and the sagas do not fully agree on his place in the household.

“set to work to build a house”

- The L'Anse Aux Meadows site features eight longhouses. They were constructed with wooden frames, sod and peat.

“they who go to explore must not go so far away”

- Leif used the house as a central base camp that the Norsemen departed from and returned to each day. Experts say the L'Anse Aux Meadows site operated as a base camp and “transshipment station” for resources gathered from the surrounding area.

“he called the land Vineland because of them”

- Vinland could mean “land of wine” or “land of grass”. Butternuts were found at L'Anse aux Meadows, where they do not grow. This may indicate trade with or travel to southern areas where butternuts, and even grapes, may have grown.

“Until this time the Norsemen had seen no inhabitants of the land.”

- Philip Hayward, in Island Studies Journal, writes: “Of course the issue here is that for the indigenous inhabitants of the area the brief Viking stay was unconnected with significant discoveries about the universe. It was more akin to a brief visitation by unwelcome foreigners, who landed, proved hostile, were engaged in combat and departed soon after.”

“taking with him his wife Gudrid”

- A spindle whorl, a needle hone and a bone pin were excavated from L'Anse Aux Meadows archaeology site. Archaeologists say that the presence of these tools used for making and mending clothes suggest that women lived at the site.

“Thorfinn therefore gathered about sixty men”

- The sagas disagree on the exact number of Norsemen that were on each expedition, but the L'Anse Aux Meadow site lends credibility to the range of numbers for this type of venture. Experts say around 70-90 occupied the site.

“they saw a great troop of natives come out of the wood”

- “Skraelings” is the Norsemen's word for the native people they met. It is not a name those people used for themselves. Scholars believe they were ancestors of the Mi'kmaq, the Beothuk, or the Innu, most likely the Beothuk.

“he was the first white child to be born on the Continent”

- In the sagas, Thorvald was the first Norse man buried and Snorri was the first Norse child born in Vineland. Sources cannot verify that either was actually the first.

“Such are some of the old Norse stories of the first finding of America.”

- These voyages reach us through the Norse sagas, spoken aloud for generations before anyone wrote them down. The ruins at L'Anse aux Meadows show the sagas kept something true.

“But now wise men have read these tales with care”

- We now have more than just the written tales. In the 1960s, George Decker led Norwegian explorer Helge Ingstad to a cluster of overgrown ridges and humps in the local landscape. These features were the remains of the Viking longhouses at the L'Anse Aux Meadows site.

Chapter 2 · The Sea of Darkness and the Great Faith of Columbus

“King John listened kindly enough”

- The book says King John of Portugal secretly sent ships west of his own. Modern historians say that this story lacks evidence.

“I will pawn my jewels to do it.”

- Bartolomé de Las Casas recorded that Queen Isabella offered to pawn her jewels. Financing for the voyage was managed without their sale, however.

Chapter 3 · How Columbus Fared Forth Upon the Sea of Darkness and Came to Pleasant Lands Beyond

“In awed wonder these native people”

- Historians now believe the people Columbus met on these islands were the Taíno.

“once called Watlings Island”

- There are still reasonable questions about which island Columbus first reached. In 1926, Watlings Island was renamed San Salvador. Some historians favor Samana Cay instead.

“island of Cipango”

- Europeans at the time of Columbus called Japan by the name "Cipango." Columbus thought that Cuba was Japan.

“used for food a root which they dug out of the earth”

- The white potato comes from the Andes and reached Europe decades later. The root the islanders dug was most likely the sweet potato.

Chapter 4 · How Columbus Returned in Triumph

“he asked for an egg to be brought to him”

- Benzoni first told the egg story about Columbus in 1565 after Columbus's death. An older version of the tale is tied to the architect Brunelleschi.

“At first no natives would come near the white men”

- Historians now believe the people Columbus met on these islands were the Taíno.

Chapter 5 · How America Was Named

“Others think that he went at least four voyages and probably six.”

- Vespucci's voyages are still argued over. This telling gives four and perhaps six. Most historians today accept two as certain.

“that broad America must wear the name of a thief”

- The scornful names thrown at Vespucci are quotations from his critics, not the author's own view. The sharpest comes from the American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Chapter 6 · How the Flag of England Was Planted on the Shores of the New World

“a frail little vessel called the Matthew, with a crew of but eighteen men”

- The Matthew is given a crew of eighteen in the text. This is a number that is supported by some primary sources. There is also a primary source that states twenty men, by a merchant named John Day. The true number is not known.

“He called the land Prima Tierra Vista or First Land Seen”

- Sebastian Cabot's map of 1544 says Prima Tierra Vista. The Latin form, Prima Terra Vista is what histories usually carry.

“at Newfoundland, Labrador or Cape Breton”

- Historians have argued that Cabot first landed on Newfoundland, in Cape Breton, and on the coast of Labrador. It is unsettled.

“he set out again across the broad Atlantic, taking his sons with him”

- Cabot's sons are named in the patent of 1496 but not in the one of 1498. Whether they sailed on the second voyage is still debated.

“the first to plant the flag of England upon the Continent of North America”

- Cabot was the first to plant England's flag on North America. He was not the first European to reach it. Norse sailors had come and gone five hundred years before.

Chapter 7 · How the Flag of France Was Planted in Florida

“I would fain see Father Adam's will”

- The retort about Father Adam's will is usually credited to an earlier French king, Francis I, rather than the boy king reigning in this story.

Chapter 8 · How the French Founded a Colony in Florida

“As they saw his ship come the Indians ran down to the beach”

- The people of this chapter were the Timucua, who lived across northern Florida.

“as the native Chief Satouriona watched the fort grow”

- Satouriona is the spelling used in the French accounts of the time and was adopted by Marshall. Modern histories may write his name as Saturiwa.

“his great enemies the Thimagoes were near”

- "Thimagoes" is Marshall's form of "Thimagoa," the name Satouriona's people used for their upriver rivals. Modern historians sometimes refer to them by the name of their chief, "Utina".

“bringing with them twenty-four prisoners and many scalps”

- The warriors return with twenty-four prisoners. The French eyewitness Laudonnière, as retold by the historian Parkman, counted thirteen. Both numbers are on the record.

Chapter 9 · How the Spaniards Drove the French Out of Florida

“I am Admiral of the fleet of the King of Spain.”

- Menendez is called Admiral and Viceroy. His actual title was Adelantado de la Florida, a Spanish rank with no English equal, joining military, civil and financial power in one man.

“he sent them home to end their lives as galley slaves”

- The last Frenchmen who were spared were taken to St. Augustine and Havana. It is not confirmed whether or not they ended their lives as galley slaves.

Chapter 10 · How a Frenchman Avenged the Death of His Countrymen

“Even the boy King, Charles IX, Catholic though he was, demanded redress.”

- Charles IX is called a boy King. He had been declared of age at thirteen and was eighteen by this time, though his mother Catherine de' Medici held the real power.

“repaired the fort and now called it Fort Mateo”

- After the Spanish captured the fort, they renamed it "San Mateo". Fort Mateo is the English form of that name.

“the whole beach was crowded with natives armed with bows and arrows”

- The people of this chapter were the Timucua, who lived across northern Florida.

“who was no other than Satouriona”

- Satouriona is the spelling used in the French accounts of the time and was adopted by Marshall. Modern histories may write his name as Saturiwa.

Chapter 11 · The Adventures of Sir Humphrey Gilbert

“Thus began the long two hundred years' struggle between the French and English”

- The two hundred years' struggle is a round figure. Different starting points give different totals; from the first French colonies to the fall of New France is nearer a hundred and fifty.

“The French had already planted a colony on the St. Lawrence”

- Cartier and Roberval established a settlement on the St. Lawrence forty years earlier, at Cap-Rouge. By the time Gilbert sailed, it had been abandoned.

“he landed and solemnly took possession of the country for two hundred leagues north, south, east and west”

- Newfoundland is claimed here as though no one lived there. The Beothuk and the Mi'kmaq were already living on that coast, and had been for a very long time.

“it is the oldest colony of the British Empire”

- Gilbert left no settlement behind in Newfoundland. Continuous English colonization began in 1610 in Canada at Cupers Cove (now Cupids).

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