

Columbus Day

October 12

1992 marked the 500-year anniversary of Christopher Columbus' discovery of the New World. In the United States, October 12th is called Columbus Day. In Canada and Latin America it is called Dia de la Raza. Dia de la Raza means, literally, "day of the race." It is a day set aside to celebrate the ways in which the Spanish people (race) have influenced the world.

Many people are concerned that students do not know that other explorers came to North America before Columbus, and, of course, they should know this. However, these earlier explorations do nothing to diminish the fact that when Columbus landed in the Bahamas and went back to report his discoveries, he opened the North and South American continents to further exploration and eventual settlement.

Making It Work

Have students do research on these topics:

- What did most people believe about the shape of the earth in Columbus' time?
- What was the main purpose of Columbus' voyage? What did he hope to find?
- Who financed Columbus' first voyage? How?
- Where did Columbus think he had landed when he reached the Bahamas?
- Why did he name the native people "Indians"?

The Spanish people have had a great effect on the New World. (Note: While it is true that Columbus was Italian, it was Spain that supported and financed his explorations.) Have students find evidence of the great Spanish effect on the New World by observing modern North America, particularly in the United States. They can consider these areas:

- common expressions that have become part of the English language
- lifestyle of the Old West in America/the cowboy
- well-known people
- laws
- names of people, places, and things
- food
- clothing
- music
- art

