Early American Notes

Christopher Columbus:

* Origin: Italian
* Sailed for: Spain
* Explored North America 500 years ago

Leif Erickson:

* Origin: Viking
* Sailed for: Scandinavia
* Explored North America 1,000 years ago

Beringia: Land bridge connecting Asia and North America

* Theory 1

During the ice age 12,000 years ago the first “American” nomads crossed over frozen Bering Strait while hunting food.

* Theory 2

During the ice age 12,000 years ago the Pacific and Arctic Oceans receded and exposed a land bridge that the first “American” nomads crossed over while hunting food.

Kennewick Man:

 Travelled down the Pacific coast in canoes 17,000 ago

Solutrians:

The first Europeans to come to North America

* 19,000 years ago
* During the ice age currents brought them across the Atlantic Ocean on the ice flow

**Nomads- People who move from place to place in search of food**

Draw the correct routes to North America for Christopher Columbus, the Vikings, the land-bridge of Beringia, Kennewick man, and the Solutrians.



The Maya

* The ancient Mayan civilization thrived throughout Mesoamerica. Mesoamerica included five countries; Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.
* The Maya had 3 main social classes.  There was royalty who lived in the palaces.  There was the wealthy class who lived in large houses near the palaces. There was the poor class who lived in the outskirts of town in huts.
* The Mayas were polytheistic which means they worshipped many gods. Worshiping their gods of nature was an important part of their daily life.  Some of their gods included the God of Rain, Lady Rainbow, the God of Maize (corn), and of course, the God of Sun.  The Maya believed that without the help of these important gods, there would be no crops and everyone would starve. The Mayas believed in an afterlife. Commoners buried their dead inside their homes, under the floor. That way, they could live with their ancestors and keep their ancestors easily posted on their daily life. The Mayas believed they would be compensated. If they had a rough time or a rough life, this would be made up to them in their afterlife.  Nobles were buried in tombs.
* The ancient Maya ate well. They hunted wild turkey, monkeys, deer, and ducks. They caught fish. Crops included sweet potatoes, beans, chilies, and squash.  Some say the Mayas made the first chocolate drink. The most important crop was corn (maize.) The Maya used corn for almost everything. They made corn flour, all kinds of food and drinks from corn. Some of the nobles even wove their hair to resemble tassels of corn.
* The Maya were Master Builders. They did not use metal. Their tools were made of stone, wood, and shell. Without metal tools, they built huge cities with strong buildings and pyramids that were 200 feet high. The Mayas built many cities.  Each city was built in a similar way. Each Maya city had a central marketplace. Every city had a large plaza where people could gather. Every city had huge pyramids, temples, at least one ball court, and a palace for the city ruler.
* Around 900 CE, the Maya cities were abandoned. A few people continued to live in the cities, but mostly, the cities were empty. The people had, for the most part, disappeared, gone somewhere else.  Those who remained were unable or unwilling to repair the magnificent roads and buildings. The great Maya cities fell into ruin. To this day, nobody knows where the Maya people came from before they arrived in the Yucatan Peninsula, and nobody knows why they left or where they went when most of the Maya people abandoned their cities and disappeared from the Yucatan Peninsula.

The Aztecs

* Around 1300 CE, a wandering tribe entered the Valley of Mexico. These people were called the Aztecs.  When the Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico, other tribes were already there, and had already taken the best land. The Aztecs were forced to settle in the swampy shores of Lake Texcoco.
* They adapted to their environment.  They built canoes, so they could fish and hunt birds that lived near the water. They created floating gardens call chinampas for growing food. They created more land for agriculture by filling in the marshes. They built dikes to hold back the water.
* As Tenochtitlan grew in size the Aztecs founded a strong central government to provide stability. At the top of this government was the royal family, headed by a king.
* The king appointed various authorities to rule different regions of his empire. These leaders swore allegiance to the emperor himself. The king maintained his control over the empire through the use of his powerful army.
* Through their army, the Aztec Empire began to expand. Neighboring tribes were conquered, enslaved, and sacrificed to appease the Aztec Gods.
* Several years before the Spaniards arrived in the Aztec Empire, Tenochtitlan had some unusual, natural disasters. Between 1517 and 1519, the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan had an earthquake. Lake Texcoco had flooded the capital city. The Aztecs believed the disasters warned of the fall of their empire.
* In 1519, the Spanish explorer, Hernando Cortes arrived on the east coast of Mexico. Cortes and his men marched across tropical jungles and snowy mountains into the Valley of Mexico. Cortes arrived in Tenochtitlan with more than 500 solders, 14 cannons, 16 horses, and a large number of the Aztec's Indian enemies gathered along the way.
* The Aztec people believed the light skinned god Quetzalcoatl would one day return. When the Spaniards approached the city, the Aztecs at first thought it was their god.
* The Aztec king, Montezuma soon realized that Cortes was not a god. He sent him gold and gifts to encourage him to turn back. But of course, Cortes would not. When Cortes entered the city, he was welcomed and offered housing and more gifts of gold. But, Cortes wasn't satisfied. He took Montezuma prisoner and had him killed.

By 1521, the Spaniards had conquered the Aztec army. Cortes captured the Aztec gold and silver and sent it to Spain. Within two years the Spanish weapons and European diseases had destroyed the Aztec civilization.

The Incas

* In the Andes Mountains around 1200 CE a new group developed separately from the Mesoamerican civilizations. This new civilization was the Incas.
* By the late 1200s CE, the Incas had settled in their capital city of Cuzco. In 1438 CE,King Pachacuti and his son Topa began a great period of expansion, creating one of the largest empires in the world.
* The Incas formed a powerful central government. Pachacuti allowed local leaders to continue governing the people so long as they remained loyal to him. If they did not, he relocated the people to distant parts of his kingdom where they would not pose a threat.
* He passed and recorded laws that were consistent throughout the empire, and founded courts, trade routes, and initiated many building projects that strengthened his empire.

In 1533 CE, the Spanish arrived in South America. Hungry for territory, gold, and for converts to Christianity, the Spanish, led by the conquistador, Francisco Pizzaro, overwhelmed the Incan Empire. Their armies were no match for the far superior Spanish technologies. While the Incan Empire disappeared completely, the Incan people remained in the region. To this day, many descendants of the Incas still inhabit the nations of Chile, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador. These people still speak Quechua, the official Incan language, and still practice Incan culture.