Borikén and Spanish Colonization

Religion, Indigenous Resistance, and Taíno Survival

First Name _____ Last Name _____ Date _____

Grades 6 through 12 Interdisciplinary Research Simulation Task

Essential Question

How did Spanish colonial power connect labor and religion, and how did Indigenous people resist and sustain cultural life?

NJSLS Social Studies

6.2.12.HistoryCC.1.f examines interactions between Indigenous peoples and colonizers, including forced labor and cultural effects. This high school content expectation is scaffolded here for grades 6 through 8. Historical inquiry practices include chronology, sourcing, and comparing perspectives.

NJSLS English Language Arts

RI.CR.6.1 and W.AW.6.1 support evidence and argument. Grades 9 through 10 extend to RI.CR.9–10.1 and W.AW.9–10.1. Grades 11 through 12 use RI.CR.11–12.1 and W.AW.11–12.1 with greater source evaluation.

CCLS Literacy Connections

RH.6–8.1, RH.6–8.2, RH.6–8.7 and WHST.6–8.1. Upper grades extend to RH.9–10.1, RH.11–12.1 and corresponding WHST argument standards. CCLS connections complement New Jersey standards.

Interdisciplinary and Amistad Alignment

History and civics examine coercion, agency, and authority. Geography examines movement and region. Math uses elapsed time, mean, and range. Science distinguishes observation from inference. Amistad connections examine African and Indigenous experiences under colonial forced labor while preserving their distinct histories.

Day 1 Borikén Before Spanish Colonization

Do Now

What can a community’s ceremonies and farming practices reveal about its values?

Source A Indigenous Society and Spiritual Life

Puerto Rico was already inhabited when Christopher Columbus arrived in 1493. Permanent Spanish settlement began at Caparra in 1508. The island’s Indigenous name appears in several spellings, including Borikén and Boriquén. Calling 1493 a European arrival recognizes that the island had a history before Europeans reached it. [1, 7]

Taíno communities belonged to an Arawakan speaking Caribbean world. Here, Taíno refers to related Indigenous communities and cultural traditions, while Arawakan identifies a language family. These terms should not erase local differences or the names living communities choose. [8]

Caciques exercised leadership, and ceremonial gatherings connected political, spiritual, and community life. Areytos brought together music, dance, and oral traditions. Sacred powers associated with cemís were expressed through objects and relationships with the natural world. A carved object is evidence of skilled work and spiritual meaning, not evidence that a people lacked religion. Spanish observers often judged these practices through Christian categories. Their records therefore require attention to purpose and perspective. [2, 3]

Quick Write

Use two details to explain why Indigenous people did not need Europeans to introduce community organization or spiritual life.