

Should the New World Have Been Named After Columbus?

This debate topic may seem trivial but it gives teachers a chance to discuss the meaning in names and symbols and how they teach or draw emotion out of us. Make sure students understand that they are debating this as if the assigning of Columbus's name to the land should have been done long ago. Have the students read about Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Martin Waldseemuller in order to get ready for this debate.

Questions for the Yes Team

1. Many places in the world are not named after explorers—why should this be the case with the Americas?
2. How did Columbus treat the Native American population? Is this deserving of a land being named after you?
3. Columbus didn't know he'd found a new world. Why does he deserve to have it named after him?
4. Columbus came to the New World several times but really only explored a small area of it. Does this really justify having the New World named after him?
5. Shouldn't Columbus be happy with the many things that already have his name in them (Columbia, etc.)?

Questions for the No Team

1. Many places in the world are named after explorers—why can't this be the case with the Americas?
2. Amerigo Vespucci wasn't the first to realize it was a new world. Why should he get the honor of having it named after him? It seems like the naming was a mistake.
3. How much did Columbus risk in undertaking this voyage? Shouldn't he be honored because of risk and opposition?
4. Can you name places that were not named after the people who were there first or discovered them?
5. What is the best argument that the other side has made thus far?