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# TWEETS FROM THE "NEW" WORLD

What would Columbus, the Arawak, Queen Isabella, and Bartolomé de las Casas TWEET?

## Background

It's October 1492, and Columbus has encountered the Arawak. "They... brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the

glass beads and hawks' bells. They willingly traded everything they owned... They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features... They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane... They would make fine servants... With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want" (Zinn, 2003, p. 3).

Thus began a decades long exploitation — through war, slavery and mining — of the natives on the islands near and on Hispaniola (known today as the Dominican Republic and Haiti). Pre-Columbian native population estimates range from several hundred thousand to several million. By 1516, it is believed that only 12,000 natives remained. According to Spanish priest Bartolomé de las Casas, who lived and traveled extensively in the region during this time, by 1542 there were fewer than 200 "Indians" alive; by 1555, none remained (Loewen, 2007).

## About Assignment

Working in groups of four, seventh grade students at Bosque School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, were asked to prepare a poster presentation called "Columbus: Hero, Villain, or Something Else?" In addition to addressing



Streams full of gold, ain't nobody old, islands full of people, theys going to the steeple!!!

1492 via Tweetdeck

@admiraloftheoceanssea

Christopher Columbus



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the assignment question, students had to answer: 1) What should middle school students learn about Columbus? 2) Is it fair to judge Columbus 500 years after his death? Students were also tasked with choosing a song to represent their feelings toward this chapter in history. Finally, in an effort to get students to think historically using a modern communication tool, they were asked to imagine Tweets that four of the main players — Columbus, Queen Isabella, the Arawak, and Bartolomé de las Casas — would have sent during this time.

## About Twitter

Twitter is an online communication tool developed by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams and Biz Stone in 2006. It permits users to send short electronic messages — known as “tweets” and limited to 140 characters — to “followers” or subscribers. Twitter forces users to concisely convey information. Initially, however, there was no limit to message length. Once the company went public, the current limit was adopted. The reason? This was the Short Message Service (SMS) limit allowed by wireless carriers. What about the extra 20 characters? Twitter founders wanted to save room for username (*Picard, 2011*).

## How to Create Faux Tweets

Not all schools or parents are going to want students to have their own Twitter accounts. ClassTools.net permits users to create faux Tweets complete with an image.

Go to <http://www.classtools.net/twister/>

### EXAMPLE

Username: admiraloftheoceansea

Real Name: Columbus

Tweet: Streams full of gold, aint nobody old,  
islands full of people, theys going to the steeple!

Date: October 1492

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## NCSS Social Studies Thematic Strands

#3 People, Places, and Environment  
#8 Science, Technology, and Society  
#9 Global Connections

## Contact Info

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## Literature Cited

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