

# Literature discussion topics 2:



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

1) There were many explorers which traveled west of Europe and found the Americas, including Christopher Columbus, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and Samuel de Champlain. These three explorers had different experiences with the Native Americans.

The first of which, Christopher Columbus, who is traditionally but falsely known as the discoverer of America, went on several voyages to the uncharted territories of the world. In his four voyages, the first of which started on 1492, he landed in the Americas, as well as nearby locations such as the Caribbean islands. His first impression of the native Indians, as he called them, was very good. He thought they were kind, hospitable and benevolent. However, his approach towards them completely changed later on. After finding out some of his crew, whom he had left in America, was killed and eaten by them- he began to see the natives in a different light (DSouza, 1995). Also, because his expedition was financed by the Spanish king, he was desperate to repay his debt. These reasons led him to pass from island to island, stealing whatever he can find. But after failing to contact and trade goods with China, India and Japan, he decided to use a resource that was everywhere to be found- human lives. He captured 1, 200 Indians and crammed as many as he could on boats which sailed to Spain, where they would later on be paraded naked in the streets and then sold as slaves. By doing so, Columbus tore children from parents and husbands from wives. Many died on the boats from disease, and were thrown to the ocean by the sailors. Furthermore, since Columbus captured more Indians than he could transport to Spain, he forced the remaining ones to work for him in mines and plantations. The Indians were subject to awful treatment by Columbus's band- " they hunted them for sport and profit- beating, raping,

<https://assignbuster.com/literature-discussion-topics-2/>

torturing, killing, and then using the Indian bodies as food for their hunting dogs" (Weatherford, n. d).

Contrary to Columbus, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, who was a treasurer from Spain that traveled to North America and Mexico, suffered greatly as a slave of the Native Americans. Due to hurricanes and disease, most of his crew died (" Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca: Explorer", n. d), and he was left with a handful of people, passing from one native tribe to another. He was treated as a slave among some of the tribes, and was miserable by hunger and mistreatment. He attempted to escape three times, all of which ended in his being recaptured and threatened to be killed. Astonishingly, during that time he developed sympathies towards the natives. Later on, he established himself as a merchant and a healer, and was welcomed and loved by other native tribes (" Cabeza de Vaca", n. d). He eventually reached a Spanish colony in America, from which he returned to Spain.

Unlike the first two, Samuel de Champlain did not primarily inflict violence on the natives or suffer from it by the natives, but rather he played an important part in the war between Europeans and Native Americans. He was responsible for the escalation of the French alliance with the native tribe of the Hurons into war against the Iroquois, another native tribe. He also introduced the natives with firearms and by so changing the balance of power and bringing forth much violence and killings (Bruce-Novoa & Mulford, n. d). Later on, he also led military expeditions against enemy Indians (Armstrong, 1987).

2)

Im extremely surprised by what Ive read. My preconceived notions about the explorers do not correspond with what I now know.

<https://assignbuster.com/literature-discussion-topics-2/>

I was shocked to find out that Columbus, who is greatly praised and is a well-known and even celebrated person, committed such atrocities, and was responsible for the murder and enslavement of so many Indians. I was astounded to find out that " within four years of Columbus arrival on Hispaniola, his men had killed or exported one-third of the original Indian population of 300, 000" (Weatherford, n. d), and that within another 50 years, the Taino Indians were made extinct, partly because of him. I was also surprised to find out some comments and remarks about him, such as: " Columbus makes Hitler look like a juvenile delinquent", said by American Indian activist Russell Means, his being " a murderer, a rapist, the architect of a policy of genocide that continues today", stated by historian Glenn Morris, and being responsible for a continuing history of " oppression, degradation, and genocide", claimed by The National Council of Churches (DSouza, 1995).

I was also stunned to find out that Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca was held prisoner and in such a bad condition for so long by the Native Americans. I didnt know much about him, but was surprised to learn that about him. As for Samuel de Champlain, I knew before that his name was linked with violence somehow, but had no idea that he actually played a major role in the wars and conflicts both between the natives in America and between Europeans and Native Americans. I didnt know he was a catalyst to these conflicts, let alone dealt weapons to natives and lead military expeditions against his native enemies.

3) Sarah Kemble Knight was a preacher and traveler born in the 17th century. She opened a famous school in Boston, where she lived, which among his students was Benjamin Franklin. Prior to opening the school, she

made a journey Boston to New York City in 1704, which was an astounding and unprecedented thing for a woman to do at that time. She also kept a journal, in which she wrote of her experiences while traveling.

Sarah Knight is undoubtedly well known, but there are contrasting opinions about her. While some view her as a heroine, others think of her as a picaresque. Those who think she is a heroine mention that " Knight voluntarily undertakes her journey and overcomes the natural obstacles in her way (bad weather, swamps, high rivers, and so on) despite unconvincing protestations that she is only a feeble woman" (" The Heath Anthology of American Literature", n. d).

In that time, it was uncommon, or rather undone, for a woman to do things so independently, especially something like traveling all across the country. On the other hand, others say that a mere scan of her journal reveals negative traits in her, such as drastic racism and " classism". She was claimed to be a snob.

There are proofs in the journal (" The Journal of Sarah Kemble Knight") for each opinion about her.

There are parts in the journal which support the former opinion about her. One of them is " I now rallied all the courage I was mistress of, knowing that I must either venture my fate of drowning, or be left like children in the wood"(p. 6), in which she describes how she conquered her fear of drowning, when crossing a fierce river.

However, there is also evidence of the latter opinion of her. For instance, while telling one of her stories, she mentions a native Indian's name that she doesn't write because he was " of so barbarous a name for his other" (p. 8), that she couldn't write it. This perception she has on Indians can also be seen

when she describes one of them who came to her door as " an Indian-like animal... on a creature much like himself" (p. 12). Here she compares the Indian to an animal, dehumanizing him! Also, she says " there are every where in the towns as I passed, a number of Indians, the natives of the country, and are the most savage of all the savages of that kind that I had ever seen" (p. 17). She describes the Indians as savages, though immediately later she says that they have lands of their own and are governed by laws of their making. This means that they are civilized and independent, but she sees this as a negative thing that should probably not exist.

In summation, Sarah Kemble Knight, though being heroic and being untraditionally impassive and independent, she is also a racist who treats people from other races as inferior to her, and even as inhuman.

Nevertheless, she may still be called a heroine of her time since doing what no other woman has done before her, yet can also be called a picara, since behaving immorally sometimes and treating people from other races badly.

#### References

Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca: Explorer (n. d). Retrieved December 15, 2006.

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/explorers/page/d/devaca.shtml>

Armstrong, Joe C. W (1987). Retrieved December 16, 2006.

[http://www.mta.ca/faculty/arts/canadian\\_studies/english/about/multimedia/de\\_champlain.html](http://www.mta.ca/faculty/arts/canadian_studies/english/about/multimedia/de_champlain.html)

Bruce-Novoa, Juan & Mulford, Carla (n. d). Retrieved December 17, 2006.

[http://college.hmco.com/english/lauter/heath/4e/students/author\\_pages/colonial/dechamplain\\_sa.html](http://college.hmco.com/english/lauter/heath/4e/students/author_pages/colonial/dechamplain_sa.html)

<https://assignbuster.com/literature-discussion-topics-2/>

<https://assignbuster.com/literature-discussion-topics-2/>

<https://assignbuster.com/literature-discussion-topics-2/>

Cabeza de Vaca (n. d). Academic Kids Online Encyclopedia. Retrieved December 14, 2006. [http://academickids.com/encyclopedia/index.](http://academickids.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Cabeza_de_Vaca)

[php/Cabeza\\_de\\_Vaca](http://academickids.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Cabeza_de_Vaca)

DSouza, Dinesh (1995). Retrieved December 13, 2006.

<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9511/dsouza.html>

The Journal of Sarah Kemble Knight (n. d).

Weatherford, Jack (n. d). Retrieved December 14, 2006.

<http://www.hartfordhwp.com/Taino/docs/columbus.html>