Performance Task – Contextualization in Latin American Development

Goal of task

Target concept: The goal of this performance task is to be able to evaluate the long-term effects of the exchange of biological material and the context of how this change affected the natural environment of the planet.

For this task you will be evaluated on your ability to:

• Analyze primary sources that illustrate how the historical context of the environment, such as geography, agriculture, and/or exchange of pathogens, shaped the demographic shifts and the development of nations/empires in Latin America after 1492, addressing any of these elements: audience, purpose, historical context, and/or point of view.
• Analyze how the historical context of the environment, such as geography, agriculture and/or exchange of pathogens, shaped the demographic shifts and the development of Latin America after 1492.

Task summary

This task involves the examination and analysis of a series of excerpts from one of the most significant scholarly books in the field of world history, Alfred Crosby’s *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. So important is this book that many textbooks use the term “Columbian Exchange” widely, some even using the term as the title of whole sections of their books.

The first two excerpts come from the introduction and are meant to set the larger context for using Theme 1 Interactions Between Humans and the Environment for both earlier historical periods and the period of 1450 to 1750. The next set of excerpts is more specifically targeted to the context of plants, animals and microbes both in the time before and after the biological exchanges. Finally, you will write a sample thesis statement for an AP World History question asked on the 2012 examination.

Task 1: Considering Crosby’s *The Columbian Exchange* (Individual or group)

1. Respond to the following quotation from the introduction of the book *The Columbian Exchange* by Alfred Crosby.

   “The first step to understanding man is to consider him as a biological entity which has existed on this globe, affecting, and in turn affected by, his fellow organisms, for many thousands of years.”


   Using your knowledge of world history before 1450, identify and explain 3 examples that support Crosby’s assertion.
2. Respond to the following quotation from the introduction of the book *The Columbian Exchange* by Alfred Crosby.

   “The most important changes brought on by the Columbian voyages were biological in nature.”


   Identify and explain 3 specific changes that would support Crosby’s assertion.

3. Which biological organisms that travelled from the Americas to Afro-Eurasia had the largest long-term effect? Explain why.

4. Which biological organisms that travelled from the Afro-Eurasia to the Americas had the largest long-term effect? Explain why.

### Check your understanding

- Can you identify biological organisms that travelled from Afro-Eurasia to the Americas?
- Can you identify biological organisms that travelled from the Americas to Afro-Eurasia?
- Can you evaluate the significance and impact of various biological organisms on the Americas and Afro-Eurasia?

### Task 2: Biological Exchanges (Individual or group)

**The way it was before biological connectivity**

Respond to each of these three quotations in three ways:

1) Identify whether the quotation is from a primary or secondary source.

2) Describe how what is said in the document might reflect the audience, the purpose of the document, the historical context, or the author’s point of view.

3) Describe how the document demonstrates an aspect of the biological context before the Columbian Exchange.

1. From Christopher Columbus’s journal, which he expected to share with his benefactors in Spain:

   “I saw neither sheep nor goats nor any other beast, but I have been here but a short time, half a day; yet if there were any I couldn’t have failed to see them…. All the trees were as different from ours as day from night, and so the fruits, the herbage, the rocks, and all things.”

2. From **Joseph de Acosta, a member of the Roman Catholic clergy**, writing about his early experience in the Americas.

   “There are in America a thousand different kinds of birds and beasts of the forest, which have never been known, neither in shape nor name; and whereof there is no mention made, neither among the Latins nor Greeks, nor any other nations of the world. It may be God hath made a new creation of beasts.”


3. From an **Amerindian from the Yucatan** writing about the time before the arrival of the Europeans.

   “There was then no sickness; they had no aching bones; they had then no high fever; they had then no smallpox; they had then no burning chest; they had then no abdominal pain; they had then no consumption; they had then no headache. At that time the course of humanity was orderly. The foreigners made it otherwise when they arrived here.”


The way it was **after** biological connectivity

Respond to each of these four quotations in three ways:

1) Identify whether the quotation is from a primary or secondary source.

2) Describe the type of evidence used to make the argument.

3) Describe how the document demonstrates an aspect of the biological context after the Columbian Exchange.

4. From the historian Alfred Crosby’s book *The Columbian Exchange*.

   “Migration of man and his maladies is the chief cause of epidemics. And when migration takes place, those creatures who have been longest in isolation suffer most, for their genetic material has been least tempered by the variety of world diseases. Among the major divisions of the species homo sapiens, with the possible exception of the Australian aborigine, the American Indian probably had the dangerous privilege of longest isolation from the rest of mankind. Medical historians guess that few of the first rank killers among the diseases are native to the Americas. These killers came to the New World with the explorers and the conquistadors. The fatal diseases of the Old World killed more effectively in the New, and the comparatively benign diseases of the Old World turned killer in the New.”


5. From **Thomas Hariot, an English colonist of Roanoke Island**, which was a very early attempt at a colony.

   “There was no Indian village where hostility had been shown, but that within a few days after our departure from every such town, that people began to die very fast, and many in short space; in some towns about twenty, in some forty, in some sixty and in one six score, which in true was very many in respect to their numbers. The disease also was so strange that they neither knew what it was, nor how to cure it; the like by report of the oldest men in the country never happened before, time out of mind.”


6. From the historian Alfred Crosby’s book *The Columbian Exchange*.

   “As the number of humans plummeted, the population of imported domesticated animals shot upward. The first contingent of horses, dogs, pigs, cattle, chickens, sheep and goats arrived with Columbus on the second
voyage in 1493. The animals, preyed upon by few or no American predators, troubled by few or no American diseases, and left to feed freely upon the rich grasses and roots and wild fruits, reproduced rapidly. Their numbers burgeoned so rapidly, in fact, that doubtlessly they had much to do with the extinction of certain plants, animals, and even the Indians themselves, whose gardens they encroached upon.”


7. From the historian Alfred Crosby’s book *The Columbian Exchange*.

“The history of European horticulture in the Americas really begins with the second voyage of Columbus, when he returned to Espanola with seventeen ships, 1200 men, and seeds and cuttings for the planting of wheat, chickpeas, melons, onions, radishes, salad greens, grape vines, sugar cane, and fruit stones for the founding of orchards.”


8. Explain why historians do not consider the Columbian Exchange as a trade system like the Silk Road or the Indian Ocean Trade System.

9. Using specific examples, explain how the Americas and Eurasia were biologically different before 1492.

10. Explain the long-term consequences on humans and the environment that resulted from the Columbian Exchange.

**Check your understanding**

- Can you identify an author’s intended audience and describe an author’s main point?
- Can you describe demographic and environmental characteristics of the Americas before the arrival of Europeans?
- Can you describe demographic and environmental characteristics of the Americas after the arrival of Europeans?

**Task 3: Apply your understanding**

You should spend five to ten minutes writing a thesis statement for the comparative question for the 2012 AP World History exam.

Compare demographic and environmental effects of the Columbian Exchange on the Americas with the Columbian Exchange’s demographic and environmental effects on one of the following regions between 1492 and 1750.

1. Africa
2. Asia
3. Europe