



Day 17 Age of Exploration Unit  
60-80 Minutes

French Exploration in the New World

## **FRENCH EXPLORATION – LESSON PLAN (60-80 MINUTES)**

*Adaptable for Grades 3–9*

### **TITLE:**

French Exploration in the New World: Cartier, Champlain, the Fur Trade, the Voyageurs, and La Salle

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### **OBJECTIVE:**

Students will learn why France explored the New World, describe major French explorers and their contributions, understand the importance of the fur trade, and analyze how French exploration affected Indigenous peoples. Students will engage with the article, the PowerPoint presentation, and optional literacy activities.

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### **GRADE LEVEL:**

Grades 3–9 (Differentiation included)

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### **MATERIALS:**

- French Exploration in the New World article
  - French Exploration PowerPoint presentation
  - Robert La Salle Interactive Journey Map
  - Literacy and reading comprehension activities (multiple levels)
  - Student notebooks or writing sheets
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### **INTRODUCTION (15 MINUTES)**

Teacher says: “Today we are learning about French exploration in North America—why France explored, who the major explorers were, and how they worked with Indigenous nations.”

Present the first two slides:.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/explorers/plans/french.pptx>

Ask students:

“Why do you think France wanted to explore the New World when Spain and England were already doing so?”

Grades 3–5: Accept simple responses about wealth, trade, or curiosity. Grades 6–9: Encourage connection to competition with other European powers.

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### **ARTICLE READING (10 MINUTES)**

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/unit-and-curriculum/french-exploration-in-the-new-world>

Students read the French Exploration article.

Differentiation:

- Grades 3–5: Teacher reads selected sections aloud. Students highlight explorers' names and circle unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Grades 6–9: Students read independently and annotate. They mark:
  - motives for French exploration
  - important explorations
  - effects on Indigenous peoples

Quick Check Questions (from article discussion section):

1. Why did France want to explore the New World?
  2. How did Cartier and Champlain shape early French exploration?
  3. Why was the fur trade important to New France?
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### **POWERPOINT PRESENTATION (10 MINUTES)**

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/explorers/plans/french.pptx>

Teacher presents slides covering:

- Reasons for French exploration
- Jacques Cartier and the St. Lawrence River
- Samuel de Champlain and the founding of Quebec
- Fur trade, coureurs de bois, and voyageurs
- Expansion into the interior
- La Salle's Mississippi River exploration and claim of Louisiana

Grades 3–5: Students write or draw three facts they learned.

Grades 6–9: Students take structured notes using a teacher-provided organizer.

Partner Discussion:

“What made French exploration different from Spanish or English exploration?”

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## HISTO GEOGRAPHY - ROBERT LA SALLE INTERACTIVE JOURNEY MAP (10–20 MINUTES)

Students view and explore the La Salle Interactive Journey Map.

Scroll to the middle of the article and project the La Salle interactive journey map. Show students that they can animate the map, or, click on the individual points of interest to learn more about the journey.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/unit-and-curriculum/french-exploration-in-the-new-world>

Grades 3–5:

- Identify where La Salle traveled
- Point out major rivers and regions he explored
- Explain in one sentence why La Salle was important

Grades 6–9:

- Describe why the Mississippi River was strategically valuable
- Analyze why La Salle claimed the entire Mississippi Valley for France
- Discuss how French control of this region affected later European rivalries

**Optional:** Have older students complete the online scavenger hunt associated with the above map.

Teacher prompt:

“How did this journey help expand French influence across North America?”

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## DIFFERENTIATED LITERACY & COMPREHENSION ACTIVITY (15 MINUTES)

Students choose or are assigned reading comprehension tasks based on grade and skill level. Use your discretion to choose the best literacy activity for your students or class.

- [Samuel de Champlain/Jacques Cartier Compare and Contrast Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 850
  - [The First French Settlement at Quebec Printable/Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 750 and 950
  - [The Search for the Northwest Passage Printable/Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 750 and 950
  - [Jacques Cartier Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1200
  - [Jacques Cartier Printable Fact or Fiction](#) - Lexile 1200
  - [Robert Sieur de la Salle Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1100
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## CLOSING (2–3 MINUTES)

Teacher reviews main points:

- France explored to find trade routes and resources
- Cartier and Champlain laid the foundation for New France
- Fur trade and alliances with Indigenous nations became central to French success
- Explorers like La Salle expanded French territory into the Mississippi Valley
- French exploration left lasting cultural impacts on North America

**Exit Ticket:**

- One thing I learned today was...
- One question I still have is...
- One explorer I found interesting was...

