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Louisiana and the French Colonial Period



Teacher's guide: grade levels 6–8

Number of class periods: 4

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Metadata

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Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.SL.8.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

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Cover: *Le Commerce que les Indiens du Mexique font avec les Français au port de Missisipi* (detail); between 1719 and 1721; by François-Gérard Jollain, publisher; *The Historic New Orleans Collection*, 1952.3

Overview

Over the course of four lessons, the students will analyze both secondary- and primary-source documents. Students will study the geography, economics, and key figures and events of the French colonial period. Students will closely analyze these primary and secondary sources with the purpose of not only understanding the literal but also inferring the more subtle messages. Students' understanding will be determined using graphic organizers, class discussion, and critical-thinking questions.

Essential Question

To what extent is modern Louisiana influenced by the events of the French colonial period?



Ships gathered at the mouth of the Mississippi; between 1731 and 1758; watercolor, ink, and pencil from *Relation du Voyage de la Louisiane . . .*; by Marc-Antoine Caillot; *The Historic New Orleans Collection*, 2005.0011

Lesson One**Mapping Louisiana****Objective**

Students will analyze a series of maps of Louisiana and the Mississippi Valley region during different times, starting with the early French colonial period. Students will compare and contrast the different maps and draw conclusions based on that comparison.

Materials

Map 1: *Nouvelle decouverte de plusieurs nations dans la Nouvelle France en l'année 1673 et 1674*

Map 2: *Carte de la Louisiane ou des voyages du Sr. de la Salle*

Map 3: *Carte de la Louisiane et du Cours du Mississipi*

Map 4: *Carte de la Louisiane et du Cours du Mississipi*

Map 5: *Map of the Alluvial Region of the Mississippi*

Worksheet: "Mapping Louisiana"

Procedures

Have the students do the lesson as partners or in small groups of no more than three or four students.

1. Distribute the five maps and the "Mapping Louisiana" worksheet.
2. Answer question 1 as a whole-class activity. Make sure that the students use and cite evidence from the maps to answer the question.
3. Have students answer the rest of the questions with their partners or groups.
4. Discuss different interpretations developed by the students.

[illegible]

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Louisiana and the French Colonial Period

Map 2



Carte de la Louisiane ou des voyages du Sr. de la Salle; 1684; by Jean Baptiste Louis Franquelin; courtesy of the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division

Map 3



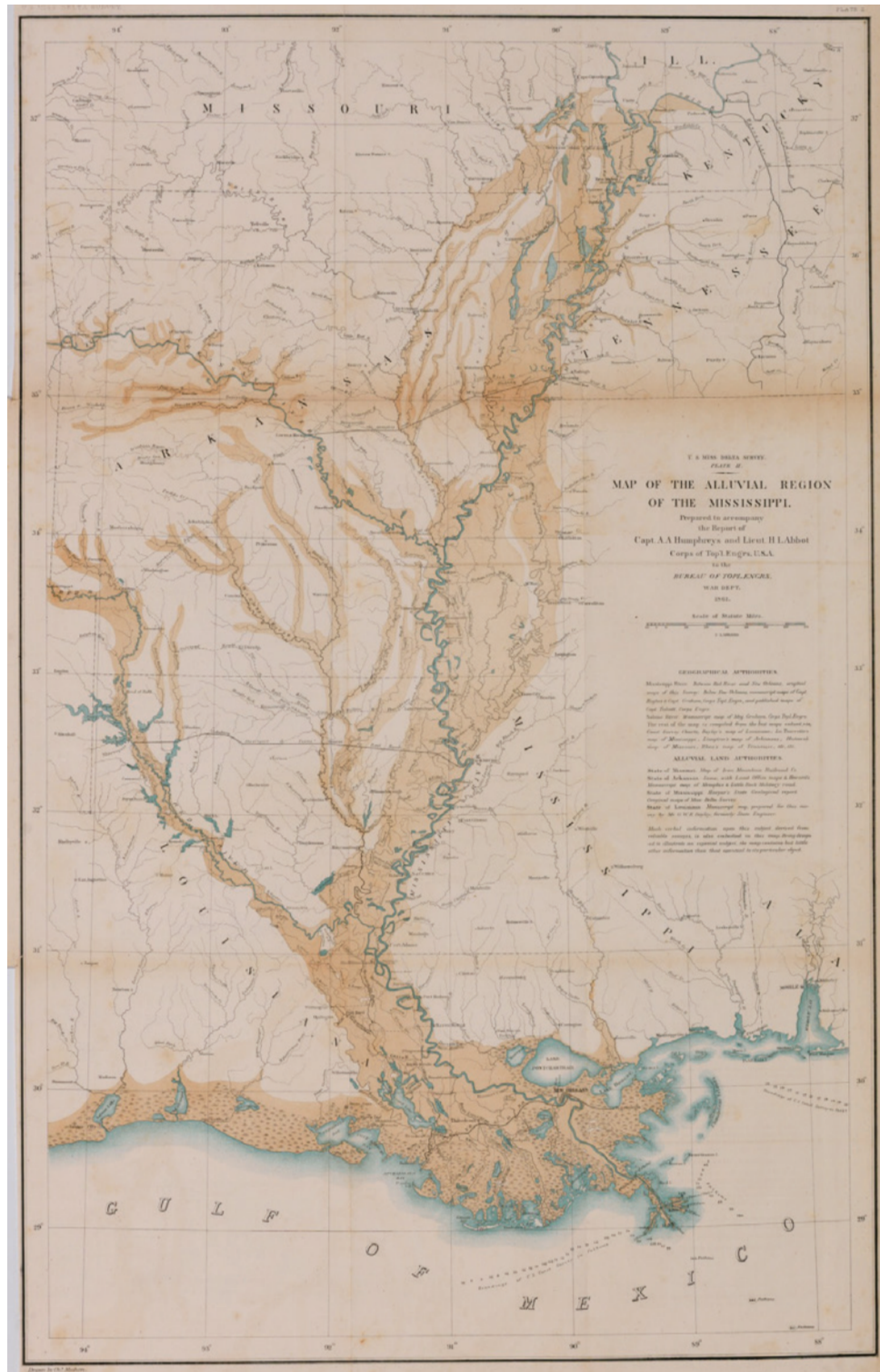
Carte de la Louisiane et du Cours du Mississipi; 1718; by Guillaume de L'Isle; *The Historic New Orleans Collection*, 1998.56.1

Map 4



Carte de la Louisiane et du Cours du Mississipi; 1764; derived from the original map by Guillaume de L'Isle; *The Historic New Orleans Collection*, gift of Susan Kierr Dyer in memory of T. Windle Dyer, 2007.0237.8

Map 5



Map of the Alluvial Region of the Mississippi; 1861; by Charles Mahon;
The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1988.144

Handout **Worksheet****Mapping Louisiana**

Name: _____ Date: _____

French explorers who came to America made maps of what they discovered as well as maps of what they *thought* might be beyond what they had explored. The making of maps (cartography) was very important for the spreading of information about explorers' discoveries to people back in France and helped to guide future explorers.

When answering the questions, remember to cite the map you are referring to and include specific details in your answer.

Question 1: What are the differences in the way rivers are shown on the maps?

Question 2: What are the differences in the way the coastline is shown on the maps?

Question 3: What are the differences in the way that mountains are shown on the maps?

Question 4: If you were an explorer coming to America, which of these maps would be the most useful? Explain why?

Question 5: Using what you have learned from studying these maps, draw a conclusion as to why these maps are in some ways different and in some ways the same.

Lesson Two**Exploring and Colonizing Louisiana, 1671–1717****Objective**

Students will read a secondary source analyzing the early exploration and settlement of Louisiana. Students will use the information gleaned from the source to answer questions in a role-play exercise.

Materials

Handout: “Exploring and Colonizing Louisiana, 1671–1717”

Worksheet: “Royal Inquest of the French Department of the Marine”

Procedures

Have the students do the lesson as partners or in small groups of no more than three or four students.

1. Distribute “Exploring and Colonizing Louisiana, 1671–1717.” Share-read the text.
2. Distribute “Royal Inquest of the French Department of the Marine.” Students will role play the part of colonial administrators working for the Department of the Marine, which oversaw colonial operations. The Crown has ordered an inquest into the situation in the Louisiana colony, and the colonial administrators must answer his questions. Discuss question 1 as a whole-class activity.
3. Have students answer the rest of the questions with their partners or groups.
4. Discuss different interpretations developed by the students.

[Handout](#) [Share Read](#)

Exploring and Colonizing Louisiana, 1671–1717

adapted from “Louisiana: European Explorations and the Louisiana Purchase,” A Special Presentation from the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/about-this-collection/>)

In 1682, the famous French explorer Rene Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, descended the Mississippi to its mouth and promptly claimed the entire region for Louis XIV calling it *Louisiana*, the Land of Louis, to honor the king. La Salle had goals of building a French commercial and military empire stretching from the St. Lawrence Seaway to the Gulf of Mexico, and he had the endorsement of the French Crown for erecting forts in western New France and profiting from a monopoly in furs. In order to sustain what tenuous hold La Salle and France had on the lower Mississippi Valley, a fort and colony needed to be established at the river’s mouth to guard against English or Spanish intrusion. La Salle returned to France to seek the necessary royal patronage for the colony but realized he needed to make his plan sound economically viable. He therefore falsified the geography of the river’s course to place it roughly 500 miles to the west, where it would be ideally situated for staging raids into Spanish settlements and attacks on the Spanish silver mines of northern Mexico.

Having gained French support for his project, La Salle attempted to return to the Mississippi by way of the Gulf Coast in 1684–85, but his ships missed the mouth of the river and the expedition landed at present-day Matagorda Bay, Texas. Two years of starvation and disease followed and subsequently a mutiny took his life. La Salle failed to establish a permanent colony in the lower Mississippi Valley but he did strengthen French claims over a vast region.

Despite La Salle’s failure France pursued its goal of establishing a colony and gaining control of the Mississippi Valley. Their competitors for control of the region, England and Spain, saw France’s claims as threatening to their own interests in North America. From its inception, Louisiana faced an inauspicious existence. Its fate was bound to the French economy during the last years of the reign of Louis XIV. Already a vast empire, the French government and its highly centralized bureaucracy disfavored policies that would have nurtured the economic independence of its colonies. Further, the French treasury, depleted by wars in Europe, was unable to adequately finance the colonies. This led to Louisiana’s settlers being neglected by the government and left entirely to their own resources. Lured by promises of mines and gold, most of the early settlers made little effort to hunt or plant crops. Few farms developed along the banks of the Mississippi or along the sandy coast. Since the earliest settlers were never furnished with adequate food supplies, they frequently resorted to scavenging for crabs, crayfish, and seeds of wild grasses. Whenever possible they traded blankets and utensils for corn and game with the surrounding Native American tribes. Diseases, floods, storms, humidity, mosquitoes, and poisonous snakes added to the misery.

Having maintained direct control over its Mississippi colony for thirteen unprofitable years, the French court sought to revitalize the crown’s investment in Louisiana. King Louis XIV granted a proprietary charter on September 14, 1712, to the merchant and nobleman Antoine Crozat. The royal charter gave Crozat exclusive control over all trading and commercial privileges within the colony for a fifteen-year period. Crozat gained a monopoly over all foreign and domestic trade, the right to appoint all local officials, permission to work all mines, title to all unoccupied lands, control over agricultural production and manufacture, and sole authority over the African slave trade. In return he was obligated to send two ships of supplies and settlers annually to Louisiana and to govern the colony in accordance with French laws and customs. In less than five years, Crozat petitioned the king and his ministers for release from his charter as he was unable to sustain the colony any longer. Estimates placed Crozat’s losses in Louisiana at just under 1 million French livres (about \$1 billion).

Handout **Worksheet**

Royal Inquest of the French Department of the Marine

Name: _____ Date: _____

As administrators in the Department of the Marine, which was responsible for overseeing colonial operations, you have been called before a Royal inquest to answer questions regarding the Louisiana colony. Use textual evidence from “Exploring and Colonizing Louisiana, 1671–1717” to answer the questions.

Question 1: Why do you believe that La Salle wanted to establish a colony at the mouth of the Mississippi River?

Question 2: Why do you believe that La Salle misled us about the location of the mouth of the Mississippi River?

Question 3: How were colonists persuaded to travel to the Louisiana colony?

Question 4: Why has this colony struggled to prosper?

Question 5: We have heard that the colonists have struggled. Can you describe the hardships they have suffered and how they have survived?

Question 6: Antoine Crozat has recently asked to be released from his commitment to the Crown. Can you review for us exactly what he was committed to doing for the colony?

Lesson Three**Colonizing Louisiana, 1717–1731****Objective**

Students will participate as members of a critical-thinking group and “read like a detective” in order to analyze a secondary-source document describing the colonial period in Louisiana during the stewardship of Company of the West and its successor, the French Company of the Indies. Through reading and analyzing the excerpts from the text, the students will know what is explicitly stated and draw logical inferences. They will demonstrate their mastery of these tasks by writing a succinct summary and then restating that summary in their own words.

Materials

Graphic Organizer: “Analyzing the Text (Passages 1, 2, 3, and 4)”

Procedure

First, a caution: do not reveal too much to the students about the passages. The point is to have the students carefully read the text, discuss it with their classmates, and construct meaning.

1. Divide the class into small critical-thinking groups of three or four students.
2. Distribute the “Analyzing the Text (Passages 1, 2, 3, and 4)” graphic organizer. The graphic organizer presents four passages from the exhibition catalog *Pipe Dreams: Louisiana under the French Company of the Indies, 1717–1731* by Erin M. Greenwald (The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2013). Share-read the passages.
3. Explain that the objective is to select eight to ten key words from each passage and then use those words to create a summary sentence that demonstrates an understanding of what the text is describing.
4. Key words are very important to understanding the text. They are usually nouns or verbs and can be two-word phrases, such as an adverb with a verb or an adjective with a noun, or multiple-word terms. Students should not pick linking words (are, is, the, and, so, etc.) or words for which they don’t know the meaning. However, they should be encouraged to use context clues and word analysis to discover word meanings.
5. Once students have written their eight to ten key words, survey the class for the most popular choices. Either tally the choices or survey by a show of hands. After surveying and discussing, the class should, with guidance from the teacher, decide on eight to ten key words. For example, the class decides on the following words: France, financial crisis, radical decision, financial system, established, Company of the West, trade, revenue, Louisiana colony, tobacco. The students then write those words in the key-words section of their organizers.
6. Through a whole-class discussion-and-negotiation process, have the students use the class-chosen key words to write a sentence or two summarizing the first passage. For example, “France was in a financial crisis so they made a radical decision to overhaul their financial system and established the Company of the West to increase trade and revenue from the Louisiana colony by growing tobacco.” As part of the negotiation process, the students may decide to streamline the sentence by eliminating some of the words. Have students copy the final negotiated sentence into the organizer under “Summary in author’s words.”
7. Through another whole-class discussion-and-negotiation process, have the students restate the summary sentence in their own words. For example, “France was broke and wanted to grow tobacco in Louisiana to make money.”
8. Have students complete the summary exercises for the next three passages in their small groups. These summaries can also be assigned as homework if class time does not allow them to be completed in class.
9. After finishing the summaries, have the class compare and contrast the different interpretations reached by the various student groups. Also, discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. You may have the students use the back of their organizers to make a note of these words and their meanings.

Graphic Organizer

Analyzing the Text (Passage 1)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Louis XIV's death in 1715 left France in the hands of his five-year-old great-grandson, whose reign would be overseen by the regent, Philippe, duc d'Orléans, until the young heir reached the age of majority at thirteen. The regent inherited a financial crisis of epic proportions. . . . The entire country was on the verge of collapse when the regent made the radical decision to entrust the reformation of the French financial system to Scottish financier John Law.

. . . He created France's first national bank, the Banque Général, in 1716. Two years later the Banque Général became the Banque Royale de France, a royal entity that became the world's first financial institution to print and circulate paper money. . . . Law also established a global trade conglomerate known first as the Company of the West (also the Mississippi Company) and later as the Company of the Indies. In August 1717, as part of Law's attempts to increase trade and raise revenue, the company took control of the struggling Louisiana colony. There he hoped to establish a French version of the Chesapeake, a tobacco-growing empire that would increase the colony's profitability and allow France to cease purchase of English-grown leaf.

Key words:

Summary in the author's words:

Summary in your own words:

Graphic Organizer

Analyzing the Text (Passage 2)

Name: _____ Date: _____

To fund the development of Louisiana and the company of the Indies, Law issued a series of shares. As demand for shares soared over the course of 1719 and early 1720, the Banque Royale issued additional banknotes to ensure that there was enough cash in circulation to cover new shares purchased. What happened next may sound familiar: stock speculation reached dizzying heights, big investors cashed in their shares, there was a run on the bank, millions of investors were left holding worthless paper shares, and the whole system came crashing down. On November 27, 1720, the Banque Royale closed its doors. A month later, John Law fled to Venice, where he spent the next nine years before dying of pneumonia at age fifty-seven.

For Louisiana the ramifications of John Law's fall from favor were mixed. . . . The system's collapse, though spectacular in its speed and magnitude, did not destroy the Company of the Indies.

Unlike the Banque Royale, the company emerged from the three-year reorganization period, which ended in 1723, as a largely profitable entity. . . . In Louisiana . . . company investments resulted in the largest influx of capital, goods, settlers, and slaves since the colony's founding and renewed interest in creating a colonial economy based on tobacco production.

Key words:

Summary in the author's words:

Summary in your own words:

Graphic Organizer

Analyzing the Text (Passage 3)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Louisiana experienced tremendous growth during the company's tenure. In 1712 the colony was home to no more than four hundred nonnative individuals. Less than twenty years later, this figure—comprising colonists and enslaved Africans—had swelled to more than four thousand. Not surprisingly, as the population grew, French settlements expanded beyond the area immediately adjacent to the Gulf Coast. While a number of settlers and soldiers remained in Biloxi and Mobile and on Dauphin Island, newer outposts in Natchez, Natchitoches, Missouri, New Orleans (which replaced Biloxi as the colonial capital in December 1721), and the Illinois country attracted both new arrivals and fortune seekers.

Growth meant more than population increase. It meant company investment in infrastructure (forts, tobacco works, mills, processing facilities, et cetera) and in the military officers, administrators, and engineers responsible for overseeing it. Expansion also brought conflict. As colonists and their laborers migrated up the Mississippi River in search of prime agricultural lands, they came into regular contact with the colony's numerous Indian groups. Outnumbered by more than fourteen to one, company administrators and colonists struggled to balance their desire to increase trade and agricultural opportunities against their sometimes precarious position among the colony's native inhabitants.

Key words:

Summary in the author's words:

Summary in your own words:

Graphic Organizer

Analyzing the Text (Passage 4)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Between 1723 and 1729 the Company of the Indies invested millions in the dream of turning Louisiana into a tobacco powerhouse. . . . Its efforts made tobacco cultivation more attractive to prospective growers, yet by the end of the 1728 growing season, the company had amassed only 150,000 pounds of tobacco for export to France. To put Louisiana's output in perspective, the Chesapeake exported nearly 30 million pounds per annum in the 1720s. Still, production had more than doubled over a three-year period, and company directors in France were encouraged by such dramatic year-over-year increases in the harvest.

The events of late November 1729 shattered company dreams. On November 28, tensions between the Natchez [Indians] and the French came to a head after a local French commandant made a land grab for a Natchez village. Rather than accept the commandant's demands, the Natchez attacked the French, killing the commandant and soldiers garrisoned at Fort Rosalie. Natchez warriors pre-positioned throughout the French settlement then entered colonists' homes, killing nearly every white man—and some women and children—in their path. . . . Over the course of 1730, as a retaliatory war against the Natchez raged in Louisiana, debates over the colony's future raged in the halls of Versailles. . . . On January 23, 1731, Louis XV signed an official edict transferring control of the colony from company to Crown.

Key words:

Summary in the author's words:

Summary in your own words:

Lesson Four**Selling Louisiana****Objective**

Students will combine their understanding of the important concepts and information that they have learned through the previous lessons with the knowledge gained by analyzing another passage from the secondary-source document from lesson three and a propagandist image from the French colonial period. Students will then role play the part of agents working for John Law who are recruiting new Louisiana colonists and investors for the company.

Materials

Handout: “Exploring and Colonizing Louisiana, 1671–1717”

Pipe Dreams: Louisiana under the French Company of the Indies, 1717–1731 (passages 1–4)

Handout: “Atlantic Crossings”

Image: *Le Commerce que les Indiens du Mexique font avec les Français au port de Missisipi*

Worksheet: “Analyzing the Image”

Graphic organizer: “Selling Louisiana”

Procedures

Have the students do the lesson as individuals, partners, or in small groups of no more than three or four students.

1. Distribute “Atlantic Crossings.” Share-read the passage.
2. Distribute *Le Commerce que les Indiens du Mexique font avec les Français au port de Missisipi* and the “Analyzing the Image” worksheet.
3. Have students answer the critical-thinking questions individually or with their partners or small groups.
4. Distribute the “Selling Louisiana” graphic organizer.
5. As agents for John Law, the students must answer questions from prospective colonists and investors. In addition to using the materials in this lesson, students should draw on information they have learned in previous lessons to make a convincing argument. In addition, they should identify any negative factors that they are not telling the prospective colonists.
6. Discuss different strategies developed by the students for recruiting prospective investors and colonists.

[Handout](#) [Share Read](#)

Atlantic Crossings

from Erin M. Greenwald, *Pipe Dreams, Louisiana under the French Company of the Indies, 1717–1731*,
exhibition catalogue (The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2013)

From 1717 to 1731, nearly six thousand would-be settlers joined soldiers, indentured servants, craftsmen, and administrators on a transatlantic journey that began in French ports and ended along the Louisiana coast. Ships departing from the company's home port in Lorient, France, took an average of three to six months to reach Louisiana, depending on sailing conditions and the length of time spent during stopovers in the Atlantic (Canary, Cape Verde, and Madeira) or Caribbean (Martinique and Saint Domingue) Islands.

Under John Law, company propagandists developed a range of promotional materials aimed at encouraging both the sale of shares in the Company of the West / Company of the Indies and emigration to Louisiana. To German speakers from the Rhineland, Law promised tracts of land rich in wildfowl, fruit-bearing plants, and agricultural opportunities. To the French he promised "mountains full of gold, silver, copper, lead, and quicksilver," as well as a new capital at New Orleans, which, according to promoters, was "already home to more than 600 well-built houses" in 1720. (In reality, New Orleans in 1720 was little more than a partially cleared swamp dotted with temporary shelters.)

Not all who arrived during the company period did so willingly. A 1719 royal declaration authorized the involuntary exportation to the colony of criminals, the long-term unemployed, and poorhouse residents, many of whom were young women. The underlying intent was to rid France of undesirable subjects while providing free labor and, in the case of female exiles, potential marriage partners to colonists and soldiers. The company period also saw the arrival of more transatlantic slave ships than at any other time in the eighteenth century. In the 1720s, more than six thousand African captives boarded company-owned slavers bound for Louisiana.



Le Commerce que les Indiens du Mexique font avec les François au port de Missisipi; between 1719 and 1721; by François-Gérard Jollain, publisher; *The Historic New Orleans Collection*, 1952.3

Graphic Organizer**Analyzing the Image**

Name: _____ Date: _____

This depiction of the harbor of New Orleans was used as propaganda to entice people to invest in the Company of the West or volunteer to colonize Louisiana. Analyze this image by answering the following critical-thinking questions.

Critical-thinking question 1: How is the land around the harbor depicted? What about it would make people more interested in investing in or moving to Louisiana?

Critical-thinking question 2: Describe the buildings in the image. Why would they be shown in this way to entice people to move to or invest in Louisiana?

Critical-thinking question 3: Describe the colonists shown in the image. How does their depiction help sell Louisiana to investors and colonists?

Critical-thinking question 4: How are the Native Americans in the image depicted? What do their body language and facial expressions tell us about the individual who created this image and what he wanted investors and colonists to believe?

Graphic Organizer**Selling Louisiana**

Name: _____ Date: _____

You work for John Law and the Company of the West in 1720. Your job is to convince people to invest in the Louisiana colony as well as persuade people to become colonists in Louisiana. Answer the prospective investors and colonists—but also provide information about the real situation that you have not included in your answer because it might discourage them. Use what you have learned in all four lessons to write your answers, and remember to cite the source of the evidence for your answer.

Investor Question: What is the plan for making money from the Louisiana colony?

Your answer: _____

What you don't want them to know: _____

Colonist Question: What kinds of things will I see in New Orleans and the Louisiana colony?

Your answer: _____

What you don't want them to know: _____

Investor Question: How will you convince colonists to move to New Orleans?

Your answer: _____

What you don't want them to know: _____

Colonist Question: What kinds of people will I encounter in New Orleans?

Your answer: _____

What you don't want them to know: _____