

# Contextualization



TEACHING  
with PRIMARY  
SOURCES



**Directions:** Use the background information, your knowledge of history, and the passage to answer the question below.

**Background information:** This is an excerpt from President Benjamin Harrison's proclamation of Columbus Day as a national holiday in 1892.

"I Benjamin Harrison, President of the United States of America . . . do hereby appoint Friday, Oct. 21, 1892, the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus, as a general holiday for the people of the United States. On that day let the people so far as possible cease from toil and devote themselves to such exercises as may best express honor to the discoverer and their appreciation of the great achievements of the four completed centuries of American life. . . . In the churches and in the other places of assembly of the people, let there be expressions of gratitude to Divine Providence for the devout faith of the discoverer, and for the Divine care and guidance which has directed our history and so abundantly blessed our people."

**Question:** Which one of the facts below might help explain why Benjamin Harrison declared a holiday to honor Christopher Columbus? (Columbus was an Italian Catholic.)

must pay attention to the question

1. Columbus enslaved people he encountered on his voyages but refused to baptize them because Catholic law prohibited the enslavement of Christians.
2. Benjamin Harrison was running for re-election in 1892 and millions of Catholic immigrants could vote.
3. Although Harrison's proclamation only called for a holiday in 1892, the United States has celebrated Columbus Day every year since 1934.
4. Columbus not only made four voyages to the Americas, but also served twice as governor as Hispaniola, which is now the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Fact # 2 might help explain why Harrison declared a holiday to honor Columbus because

Politicians need votes to get into office. Harrison may have promoted Columbus Day for a national holiday to impress Catholic and/or Italian voters. Columbus was an Italian Catholic & making him a national hero might impress Italian Catholics living & voting in the United States.