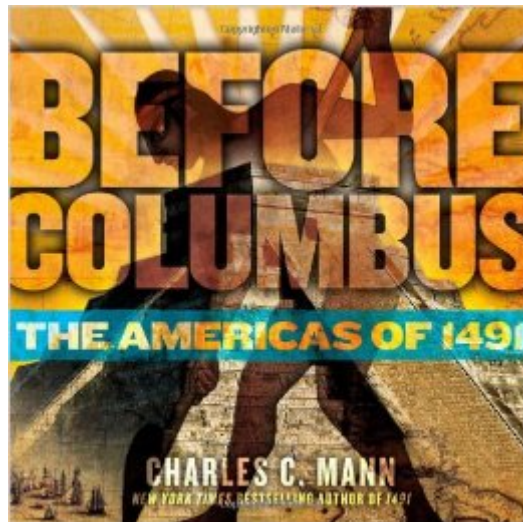


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# Before Columbus: The Americas Of 1491



## Synopsis

A companion book for young readers based on *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, the groundbreaking bestseller by Charles C. Mann.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 1080L (What's this?)

Series: AWARDS: Young Hoosier Middle Grades Awards 2011-2012

Hardcover: 128 pages

Publisher: HOLT MCDUGAL; 1 edition (August 18, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1416949003

ISBN-13: 978-1416949008

Product Dimensions: 10 x 0.7 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (43 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #43,836 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Prehistoric](#) #16 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Exploration & Discovery](#) #40 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > Native North & South Americans](#)

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

This beautiful book was written and is marketed as a short and sweet "student's version" of the book *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, by the same author, Charles C. Mann. The original book was a New York Times bestseller and won several national book prizes. This more colorful but more approachable book aimed at younger readers takes the high points and delivers them in a direct and colorful package. Part One looks at "How Old was the New World?" with four chapters on "Cities in the Desert" (the Peruvian desert's Caral and other sites of the Norte Chico, including Huaricanga, the oldest known American city at 3500 B.C.-- second oldest after Mesopotamia and building big pyramids before the Egyptians), "Genetic Engineering" (development of maize and the milpa field system in Central America), "From Olmec to Maya" (civilizations and sites of Central America: Tres Zapotes, La Venta, Olmec, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Maya), and "To the Land of Four Quarters" (Tawantinsuyu, the Inca empire). Part Two asks "Why Did Europe

Succeed?" with four chapters on "The Great Meeting" (Cortez and the Aztecs at Tenochtitlan), "Long, Long Ago" (the first Americans, the PaleoIndians, and Monte Verde in Chile), "Extinction" (the demise of the megafauna, including mammoths), and "Disease-Free Paradise? (the impact of European disease on the Native Americans)."Part Three examines "Were the Americas really a Wilderness?

Before Columbus / 978-1-4169-4900-8I am a huge fan of Mann's "1491", and I thought for the longest time that "1491" really needed a companion text - with pictures - to distill a lot of the wonderful material in his superb history book to a more reachable format. I was therefore delighted when this book became available on Vine, but I am a little disappointed that this feels more like a child's history text than a straight-up companion to "1491".Not that a child's history book isn't phenomenally welcome - as Mann pointed out in "1491", a good deal of incorrect information is still being taught to school children, and it is distressing to realize that inertia will probably ensure that misinformation will continue to be taught for years to come, without pioneers like Mann leading the way. So in that regard, "Before Columbus" is welcome and necessary.As a child's textbook, then, "Before Columbus" is superb - the full page color pictures are beautiful, the text is informative and engaging, and all the little side-bar informative sections that you may remember fondly from your childhood textbooks are here. Mann has done a wonderful job of teaching at a child's level - the information here is carefully laid out, with all the necessary details, but not so many as to be distracting or confusing. I would definitely recommend this book as instructional material to any child or young adult.However, as a caveat, I would say that teenagers and adults will probably benefit more from the original "1491" rather than from this book.

This book is a wealth of information about Native American civilizations and history which I'd bet the majority of adults are largely unaware. If you ask most adults what is the "cradle of civilization?", they will probably name either somewhere around Mesopotamia or Egypt. If asked about Native American civilization, most will either say that the Indians didn't achieve civilization until much later (and perhaps name the Mayas, Incas or Aztecs), or they might believe that Native Americans were always rather primitive hunter-gatherers who never achieved "civilization". The state of knowledge about pre-Columbian cultures has simply exploded in the last few decades. If you have school aged kids (or even if you don't), I recommend reading this book for yourself and see how it compares not only with what you learned in school, but with what your kids are learning. I am betting you will find it quite eye-opening.The title is rather misleading, however. The book covers civilizations and cultures

of the Americas starting way before 1491 and continuing well after the first contacts with the Europeans. For instance, the book opens with the Norte Chico civilization which consisted of a clustering of small cities, complete with pyramids, in the Peruvian desert which pre-dated the Egyptian pyramids. Moreover, scientists were always convinced that agriculture must be the basis of civilization. However, it appears that the Norte Chico civilization was based on trade between the fishermen on the coast and the cotton growers further inland. The book then explores the Olmec society, their relation to the Mayan peoples and their role in developing genetic engineering. It appears that the Olmec people developed maize (corn) by cross-breeding a small maize crop with wild grasses.

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