1. **Read the section on the Columbian Exchange.**
2. **After each paragraph, summarize the main idea of the paragraph. List any words you are unsure of and list questions you have for that paragraph. Complete this portion of the active reading activity on a separate sheet of notebook paper.**

The Columbian Exchange was the “exchange of plants, animals, foods, human populations (including slaves) communicable diseases, and ideas between the Eastern and Western hemispheres that occurred after 1492,” according to Wikipedia. The term “Columbian Exchange,” coined in 1972 by historian Alfred Crosby, took hold and became not only standard shorthand for the phenomenon which it exemplified, but also a perspective for witnessing societal and ecological events.

When Christopher Columbus made landfall with his crew in the Bahamas in October 1492, two worlds with separate evolutionary histories met. When Europeans began to settle America’s east coast, they brought with them and cultivated familiar crops – wheat and apples – as well as familiar weeds, such as dandelion and chickweed. In the 1600s, they introduced cattle and horses, which flourished in the New World climate.

Devastating diseases were introduced to the American population which had no resistance to them. John R. McNeill, professor of history at Georgetown University, points out that “when the first inhabitants of the Americas arrived across the Bering land bridge between 20,000 and 12,000 years ago, they brought few diseases with them … they had no domesticated animals, the original source of human diseases such as smallpox and measles. In addition, as they passed from Siberia to North America, the first Americans had spent many years in extreme cold, which eliminated many of the disease-causing agents that might have traveled with them.”

Consequently, between 1492 and 1650, over 90% of the Native American population died in epidemic after epidemic of smallpox, measles, mumps, whooping cough, influenza, chicken pox, and typhus. The loss of labor caused by pathogens indirectly led to the establishment of African slavery among European immigrants in the Americas, resulting in the importation of malaria and yellow fever from Africa, causing even more destruction of the Native American population.

The export of American flora and fauna did not revolutionize the Old World as the influx of European agriculture altered the New World ecosystem. According to Crosby, “the New World’s great contribution to the Old is in crop plants. … Maize, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, various squashes, chiles, and manioc” augmented and invigorated the European cuisine. Very few New World creatures traversed the ocean –– the muskrat, the gray squirrel, and a few others, but they did not precipitate large scale changes in Old World ecosystems.

Although some diseases made the ocean voyage from New World to Old, they did not have appreciable effects on the European population. Crosby stated that, although some deaths were attributed to ailments from America, “the total is insignificant compared to Native American losses to smallpox alone.”

In Crosby’s original work, he **eschewed** ideological statements. He reminded his readers that neither the Old nor New World was inferior or superior to the other; the encounter between two worlds was fundamentally an exchange. By 1988, he summarized his long view of the encounter in this way: “My point is … that the impact of the Encounter is so massive that we should consider it with the same sense of scale as we do events connected with the endings and beginnings of the geological periods and eras and their influence on the direction of evolution on the planet.”

1. Which of the following best describes the author’s view of the Columbian Exchange?

I) Neither the Old World nor the New World was superior to the other.

II) The New World experienced the brunt of the encounter between the Old and

New Worlds.

III) The encounter between the Old and New Worlds was fundamentally an even

exchange.

A) I only

B) II only

C) III only

D) I and II only

E) II and III only

2. It can be inferred from the passage that

A) Slaves brought to American from Africa had more resistance to European

diseases than Native Americans did.

B) New World creatures were unable to thrive in the climate of the Old World.

C) New World pathogens had no effect on the people of the Old World.

D) Most human diseases were introduced to humans by animal populations.

E) Europeans had more resistance to European diseases than Africans did.

3. In line 34, eschewed most closely means

A) espoused

B) avoided

C) employed

D) created

E) discovered

5. What were the positive and negative effects of the Columbian Exchange on the New

World?

6. What were the positive and negative effects of the Columbian Exchange on the Old

World?

7. How does the exchange of goods still impact the world in terms of agriculture,

animals, health, and economics?