Historical Empathy:
Columbus and the Indians

STUDENT WORKSHEET

Why did Columbus treat the Indians fairly when exchanging gifts?

These people practice no kind of idolatry; on the contrary they firmly believe that all strength and power, and in fact all good things are in heaven, and that I had come down from thence with these ships and sailors; and in this belief I was received there after they had put aside fear. Nor are they slow or unskilled, but of excellent and acute understanding; and the men who have navigated that sea give an account of everything in an admirable manner; but they never saw people clothed, nor these kind of ships.

Why would the Indians be good candidates for converting to Christianity?
Why does “seiz[ing] by force several Indians” not seem like a big deal to Columbus in this passage?

According to Columbus, how do the Indians feel about the Spaniards? How does that contribute to his overall justification for his actions?

These excerpts are from *The letter of Colombus on the discovery of America: a facsimile reprint of the pictorial edition of 1493, with a literal translation, and an introduction* (1892) at [https://archive.org/details/letterofcolombus00columb](https://archive.org/details/letterofcolombus00columb).