

Christopher Columbus was an Italian explorer who was famous for discovering the New World. This involved sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, from Europe to America and at the time, it was a journey into the unknown.

Columbus was born in 1451, in the busy port of Genoa (Italy). He had three brothers and a sister. His father worked as a wool merchant and weaver. Not much is known about how well-educated Columbus was, but it was common place for young boys in Genoa to be sent to sea, in order to earn money for the family.

Columbus wasn't much older than 10 when he first went to sea. He learnt how to navigate by using a compass, the Sun and the stars and how to plot a course using a traverse board. He also learnt about the importance of the wind and tides. Life at sea would have been exciting but dangerous. The sailors would have slept on deck no matter what the weather was like. The captain and officers were luckier; they slept in cabins. The men sang prayers often as they thought it would keep them safe. So the men could keep track of time, a boy would be in charge of rotating the ship's glass (like a modern day hour glass or egg timer) every thirty minutes. The wooden sailing boats were constantly letting in water so consequently, the sailors had to work hard to pump it back out again.

In 1476, Columbus arrived in Portugal. It is said he had to swim ashore because his boat had been attacked by pirates. Others say it was because he had been shipwrecked. Whilst in Portugal, he worked as a cartographer (map maker) with his brother, Bartholomew. He also met and married his wife, although their marriage did not last long. Tragically, she died shortly after the birth of their son.

The people of Europe wanted to improve trade links with Asia. They wanted to be able to send ships to countries like India and China, to trade goods such as spices and silk. The land route – known as the Silk Road – had been closed by the Ottoman Empire, forcing the Europeans to find a sea route. To sail east would have meant travelling around the continent of Africa but the route was taking too long to discover. Columbus, on the other hand, thought it was possible to reach China in just a few days by sailing west. Maps in those days made the oceans look smaller than they really were, leading Columbus to underestimate how far away Asia actually was.

Columbus needed money to make this journey happen. At first, he asked the King of Portugal to help pay for the voyage. The King said no. He didn't think the small, wooden sailing boats could travel that far. Many people laughed at Columbus. They said that the journey was impossible. Luckily, the King and Queen of Spain agreed to pay for the trip and in return, Columbus promised them spices, gold and new lands to rule.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1492, Columbus set sail. Three ships set off on the voyage: the Niña (Spanish for girl due to her small size), the Pinta and the Santa Maria. The ships were crewed by ninety sailors. They stopped briefly in the Canary Islands before setting off across the Atlantic Ocean.

Food was kept in the hold. This included things like salted fish, cheese, wine, water, biscuits, dried beans and lentils. The voyage took much longer than expected. There was no land to be seen and the food was beginning to run out. The men were worried that they would be attacked by sea monsters or starve to death. They wanted to turn the boats around and go home. To help keep the men calm and focused, Columbus offered a reward to the first crew member to spot land. The prize was claimed by a lookout on board the Pinta, who finally spotted the land we now know as the Bahamas.

On 12<sup>th</sup> October 1492, the men climbed ashore of the land Columbus named San Salvador. They needed to find fresh water and food. They sailed on to Cuba and Hispaniola (now called the Dominican Republic and Haiti). As this land was new to them, they called it the New World. They discovered that people were already inhabiting the islands. Columbus called them Indians as he thought he had landed in the West Indies. Columbus claimed the land for the King and Queen of Spain.

In 1493, Columbus arrived back in Spain. Only two ships returned; the Santa Maria had been wrecked on a reef on Christmas night the previous year. He had also left forty men behind in the hope that they would establish a camp. On his return, Columbus was hailed a hero. He had captured some of the indigenous people to bring home along with new foods.

Columbus returned to the New World again in 1493. This time he returned with seventeen ships. He discovered that the men he had left behind were all dead and the camp had been destroyed. People from Europe were beginning to travel over to America to start a new life. They treated the indigenous people badly; they thought they could convert them to Christianity and they were made to work as slaves. Many of the natives died from illnesses brought over by the Europeans.

On his third journey, Columbus discovered South America. However, in 1500, he was returned home in chains after it was believed he had governed Hispaniola to make himself rich. He was later pardoned and released by the King of Spain.

On his fourth and final trip in 1502, Columbus spent time exploring Central America. He never did make it to China. Sadly, Columbus needed to be rescued during his final trip as his ships were leaking badly. Columbus returned to Spain as a sick man. At that time he had been deemed a failure, due to his earlier arrest and inability to find a route to Asia. He later died in 1506.

Columbus was once thought to be the first person to discover these new lands. It has been estimated that 100 million people were already living there. It is now thought that Vikings made the journey hundreds of years before him, in 1000 A.D. It took a man named Amerigo Vespucci to understand that the New World was actually a continent. America was eventually named after Vespucci, rather than Columbus.

## Christopher Columbus

1. Who was Christopher Columbus?

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2. Where was he born?

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|  |
|--|

3. Put these events in the right order.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Columbus died in 1506.                                  |  |
| On 3 <sup>rd</sup> August 1492, Columbus set sail.      |  |
| Columbus called the land San Salvador.                  |  |
| The King and Queen of Spain agreed to pay for the trip. |  |
| On his third journey, he discovered South America.      |  |

4. Identify TWO things the sailors used to drink?

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|  |
|--|

5. Why wouldn't the King of Portugal pay for the trip?

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|  |
|--|

6. Which word is closest in meaning to 'underestimate'?

|             |  |          |  |          |  |         |  |
|-------------|--|----------|--|----------|--|---------|--|
| approximate |  | estimate |  | misjudge |  | correct |  |
|-------------|--|----------|--|----------|--|---------|--|

7. Write the meaning of these words.

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| explorer |  |
| port     |  |
| weaver   |  |
| compass  |  |
| native   |  |
| voyage   |  |

8. Identify whether these statements are true or false.

| <u>Statement</u>                                     | True | False |
|--|------|-------|
| Columbus had no brothers or sisters.                 |      |       |
| Columbus thought he could reach China in a few days. |      |       |
| Columbus completed six journeys to the New World.    |      |       |
| The indigenous people were treated like slaves.      |      |       |
| America was named after Columbus.                    |      |       |

9. Complete the information in this chart.

| <u>Date</u>                 | <u>Event</u>                    |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                             | Columbus was born.              |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> August 1492 |                                 |
|                             | He was returned home in chains. |
|                             | His fourth and final trip.      |

10. Identify THREE things a sailor could use to find his way at sea.

11. Would you like to have been a sailor in those times? Explain your answer with reference to the text.

12. What was unusual about the way Columbus arrived in Portugal in 1476?

13. Why did Columbus get sent home in chains in 1500?

14. FIND and COPY a word or phrase which tells us that Columbus's first trip had been a success.

15. How does this compare with how he was viewed at the time of his death?

16. What is the main purpose of this text?

|   | Tick one                 |
|---|--------------------------|
| to persuade you                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| to retell past events                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| to tell you how something is made or done | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| to describe how something works           | <input type="checkbox"/> |

17. Give TWO reasons why Columbus thought 'mutiny was imminent'.

18. How did Columbus keep the men calm and focused during this time of worry? Why do you think this helped?