

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus was an Italian explorer. He is famous for discovering the New World. This involved sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, from Europe to America. It was a journey into the unknown.

Columbus was born in 1451. He had three brothers and a sister. His father was a weaver. Columbus lived in the busy port of Genoa. This is in Italy. Boys in his town were often sent to sea to make money for the family.

Columbus wasn't much older than 10 when he first went to sea. He had to learn how to find his way by using a compass, the Sun and the stars. He also learnt about the wind and tides. Life at sea would have been exciting but dangerous. The sailors would have slept on deck. The men sang prayers often. They thought it would keep them safe. The wooden sailing boats were always letting in water. The sailors had to work hard to pump the water back out again.

In 1476, Columbus arrived in Portugal. It is said that he had to swim ashore because his boat had been attacked by pirates. Others say it was because he had been shipwrecked. Whilst he was in Portugal, he met and married his wife. Their marriage did not last long. She died shortly after the birth of their son.

The people of Europe wanted to buy and sell things with Asia. They wanted to be able to send ships to countries like India and China. Columbus thought that it was possible to reach China in just a few days. He wanted to sail west. Maps in those days made the oceans look smaller than they really were.

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. In return, Columbus promised them spices, gold and new lands to rule.

On 3rd August 1492, Columbus set sail. Three ships set off on the voyage: the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa Maria. The ships were crewed by ninety sailors.

Food was kept in the hold. This included things like salted fish, cheese, wine, water and biscuits. The voyage took much longer than expected. There was no land to be seen. The food was beginning to run out. The men were worried. They wanted to turn the boats around and go home.

Finally, land was spotted. On 12th October 1492, the men went ashore. They needed to find fresh water and food. Columbus called the land San Salvador. 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. People were already living there. Columbus called them Indians. He thought he had landed in the West Indies. Columbus claimed the land for Spain.

In 1493, Columbus arrived back in Spain. He had left forty men behind. He had wanted them to set up a base. Columbus was treated like a hero. He had brought back new food and some of the Indians.

Columbus returned to the New World three more times. On his third journey, he discovered South America. After his discoveries, many people from Europe travelled over to America to start a new life. They treated the native people very badly. They wanted them to become Christians. These native people were made to work as slaves. Many died from illnesses brought over by the Europeans.

On his fourth and final trip in 1502, Columbus still hoped to find China. Instead, he spent time exploring Central America. During this journey, he needed to be rescued as his ships were leaking. Columbus returned to Spain as a sick man. He died in 1506.

Columbus was once thought to be the first person to discover these new lands. It is now thought that Vikings made the journey hundreds of years before him in 1000 A.D.

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1. Who was Christopher Columbus?

- an actor
- an artist
- an explorer

2. Where was he born?

- in England
- in Italy
- in Spain

3. Put these events in the right order.

Columbus died in 1506.	
On 3 rd 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. What did the sailors take to drink?

- tea
- squash
- wine

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

- He didn't think the small, wooden sailing boats could travel that far.
- He didn't have enough money to pay for it.
- He wasn't interested in discovering new lands.

6. Match the words below to their meaning.

word

meaning

1. explorer

a. a person who weaves fabric

2. port

b. a long journey by sea

3. weaver

c. an instrument that shows the direction of north

4. compass

d. a person who visits new places

5. native

e. a town or city with a harbour

6. voyage

f. a person born in a particular place

7. Identify whether these statements are true or false.

Statement	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 native people were treated like slaves.		