

Vikings & European Explorers Christopher Columbus

*In 1492,
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.*

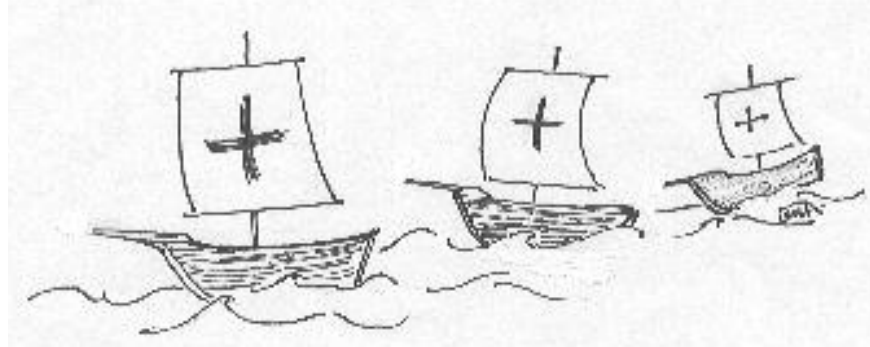


Illustration by Lynn M. Hanousek

Christopher Columbus was one of the greatest navigators of his day. His ability to explore the unknown and stick to his **vision**¹ changed Europe's view of the world. His discoveries brought Europe and the Americas into contact for the first time. But not everyone feels Columbus should be remembered as a hero.

Columbus became famous when he sailed west across the Atlantic Ocean in 1492. In the 1400's, Europeans were not aware that the Americas existed. They believed that if they headed west, they would run straight into Asia. Europe wanted to trade with Asia for silk, gold and spices. However, the trip to Asia around Africa was considered too long and dangerous. Columbus wanted to find an easier and quicker route. He believed that the Earth was made up of a little water and a lot of land. He thought he'd reach Asia in no time if he headed west.

Columbus convinced King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella from Spain to pay for an **expedition**.² They provided him with three ships and money to make the journey west. It took two months for the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria to reach San Salvador in the Caribbean. However, Columbus wrongly thought he was in India. He named the people he met there "Indians." During this visit, and his next three visits, Columbus and his men brutally mistreated the Indians. They stole

¹ **vision** – dream or plan

² **expedition** – a journey made for a special purpose

their land and claimed it for Spain. Their search for gold and a **passage**³ to Asia never came about.

Columbus' true impact on history will be debated for years to come. Some argue he was a man of courage and great skill. Although he never did reach North America, Columbus was the first to explore the West Indies and parts of Central and South America. These discoveries introduced new foods from the Americas to Europe. The way Native peoples shared their leadership also inspired Europeans to challenge their monarchies. Native ideas about personal liberty eventually helped influence the structure of government in the United States.

However, others argue Columbus treated the Native people he encountered cruelly. He took land and natural resources and began a long chapter of European abuse. Despite his remarkable achievements, Columbus didn't behave like a hero at all, **critics**⁴ argue. The **debate**⁵ about how Columbus should be remembered continues to this day.

³ **passage** – a route or way through

⁴ **critics** – people who find something wrong with people or things

⁵ **debate** – discussion for or against

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. The first paragraph of the passage tells you about
 - a. how Columbus was the first to reach America.
 - b. Columbus' record of achievements, both good and bad.
 - c. Columbus' travel plans to reach Asia.
 - d. how Columbus didn't like exploration.

2. According to the passage, the word *mistreated* means
 - a. to treat badly.
 - b. to treat well.
 - c. to treat carefully.
 - d. to treat wonderfully.

3. Columbus believed that Asia was _____ than it really is.
 - a. much smaller
 - b. much wider
 - c. much closer
 - d. much farther

4. What do you think was the author's purpose in writing this passage?
 - a. to educate the reader about Columbus
 - b. to get you to hate Columbus
 - c. to get you to love Columbus
 - d. to teach you about King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella

5. How was Columbus able to pay for his voyage to the Americas?
 - a. Columbus found the money
 - b. Columbus took the money from England
 - c. Columbus had enough money by himself
 - d. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain gave him money

6. What's your point of view? Do you think Columbus was a hero or not? Write your opinion and make sure to explain your answer.

7. Why did Columbus sail west across the Atlantic Ocean?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Columbus believed that he had reached India, _____ he had really reached Central and South America.

- a. because
- b. but
- c. so
- d. after

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

In 1492, Christopher Columbus began the journey west by sailing on the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria.

When? in 1492

Who? _____

(did) What? _____

How? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** expedition: a journey made for a special purpose.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 850

Featured Text Structure: Argumentative - the writer sets out both sides of the argument, altering how the reader perceives a topic or issue

Passage Summary: The passage describes the debate over how Christopher Columbus should be remembered. Some argue that he was a great navigator and brought Europe and America into contact for the first time. Others argue that he treated the Native people very cruelly and should not be remembered as a hero.

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6. What's your point of view? Do you think Columbus was a hero or not? Write your opinion and make sure to explain your answer.

Suggested answer: Answers will vary based on what side of the debate the reader chooses. The student could write that Columbus was a hero because he was brave to explore new lands. Alternatively, the student could write that Columbus was not a hero because he mistreated the native people.

7. Why did Columbus sail west across the Atlantic Ocean?

Suggested answer: Christopher Columbus sailed west across the Atlantic Ocean because he wanted to trade with Asia for silk, gold, and spices. The trip around Africa was too long and dangerous, so Columbus wanted to find an easier and faster route to Asia. He believed that if he sailed west he would run into Asia very quickly.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Columbus believed that he had reached India, _____ he had really reached Central and South America.

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- b. but**
- c. so
- d. after

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When? in 1492

Who? **Christopher Columbus**

(did) What? **began the journey west**

How? **by sailing on the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** expedition: a journey made for a special purpose.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.