

Christopher Columbus



Christopher Columbus was born in Italy in the year 1451 but eventually settled in Spain. Columbus wanted to travel to the lands that Marco Polo visited, parts of Asia that were called the Indies, in search of wealth and glory, looking especially for gold. Remember that the fabled Marco Polo traveled east over land from Italy to Asia and wrote about his journeys in the late 1200s. Columbus was familiar with these writings and was eager to reach these lands by sea instead of on land.

While others traveled to the Indies by going east, Columbus knew that the earth is round and felt that he could sail on the Atlantic Ocean and travel west to Asia. Not knowing about the existence of the North American continent, he wanted to travel from Europe to Asia by boat instead of across the land and believed he was able to do so.

It took a lot of courage to think about sailing across the ocean. In those days ships were not sophisticated vessels like we have today and sailors stayed close to land and just sailed along the coastline. So Columbus was an explorer in two ways: 1) he wanted to find a new route to Asia and 2) he wanted to sail across the ocean.

Columbus had trouble convincing people of his new ideas. After eight years of waiting for approval, the King and Queen of Spain finally provided the money Columbus needed for his voyage and he sailed with three ships, the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria. The sailors on these ships were nervous at traveling out on the open sea far from land.

When Columbus reached land, based on his theories and calculations he thought he had reached Asia. But, of course, we know that he reached the islands in the Caribbean Sea near Florida. He spent about five weeks sailing around Cuba and interacting with the natives who lived there who gave him golden trinkets. Columbus thought that he had reached the edge of Asia and was anxious to return to Spain with the news of his discovery and the riches he had found. He called the islands he found West Indies.

Columbus made two more trips to the West Indies and returned to Spain permanently and in disgrace after he failed at being the Spanish governor of the islands. Columbus died in Spain in 1506.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Christopher Columbus Graphic Organizer

Who	What	When



Where	Why	How

Name: _____

Date: _____

Christopher Columbus Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. Where was Christopher Columbus born?
 - a. Italy
 - b. Spain
 - c. Cuba

2. Where did Columbus sail from on his famous journey?
 - a. Italy
 - b. Spain
 - c. China

3. What other famous explorer inspired Columbus?
 - a. Vasco Da Gama
 - b. Ferdinand Magellan
 - c. Marco Polo

4. What ocean did Columbus sail on?
 - a. Atlantic Ocean
 - b. Pacific Ocean
 - c. Indian Ocean

5. Columbus spent five weeks exploring what island?
 - a. Cuba
 - b. Pinta
 - c. Nina

6. What name did Columbus give to the islands he found?
 - a. East Indies
 - b. West Indies
 - c. Indies

7. How many trips did Columbus make to the islands he found?
 - a. one
 - b. two
 - c. three

Name: _____

Date: _____

Christopher Columbus Short Answer Questions

1. Why do you think it took so long for the King and Queen to approve Columbus' trip?
2. Look at a map of Spain. Why is traveling to the Indies by boat instead of by land a good idea?
3. Review the travels of Marco Polo. Why would his journeys have been interesting to Columbus?
4. Why do we consider Columbus a famous explorer?
5. The sailors on Columbus' ships were nervous at being out on the ocean out of sight of land. Would you have traveled with Columbus in those days? Answer why or why not.
6. Why did Columbus call the islands he found West Indies?
7. Since Columbus reached Cuba and other islands in the Caribbean, do you think he really discovered America? Answer why or why not.

Christopher Columbus Answer Key

Multiple Choice

1. a.
2. b.
3. c.
4. a.
5. a.
6. b.
7. c.

Short Answer Questions

1. No one had sailed across the Atlantic before and people traveled to Asia by going east, not west.
2. Spain is on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. In order to get to Asia by land people would have to cross all of Europe first or sail across the Mediterranean Sea.
3. Marco Polo already had traveled to Asia and back again from Italy.
4. He crossed the Atlantic Ocean and found North America. At the time of Columbus, European people didn't know that North America existed.
5. Individual response.
6. He was looking for the East Indies. He knew that he had been traveling west so he called the islands the West Indies.
7. Individual response.