

Extract 1: Early days

Childhood

Cristoforo Colombo, or Christopher Columbus as we call him, was born in Genoa in Italy. Genoa was a busy port. His father was a wool merchant and weaver.

Going to sea

The Columbus family hoped to get rich by trade. Columbus went to sea at the age of 13. He hoped to come a rich man.

Columbus learned how to sail a wooden ship with sails. He learned about the winds and tides. He learned to navigate (find the way), by looking at the sun and stars.

In Portugal

Columbus went to live in Portugal. One story says he swam ashore after his ship was attacked by pirates! He and his brother Bartholomew made and sold maps.



Map made by Columbus.

Columbus's dream

People in Europe wanted to find a new sea route east, to trade with Asia. They wanted to send ships to India, China and the East Indies.

The Portuguese tried sailing South, around Africa. It was a long way.

Columbus wanted to sail west. Because maps of the time made the oceans look smaller than they are, Columbus hoped to reach China in a few days. He needed money to make his dream come true

Extract 2: Columbus sets sail

Help from a Queen

Columbus tried to persuade rich people to help him. Most laughed at him. At last, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain gave him money for ships. In return he promised them new lands, spices, gold and new people to rule.

Columbus sails

Columbus set sail on 3 August 1492. He had three ships: the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa Maria. They were wooden ships with sails. There were about 90 men in the ships. Food for the voyage was kept in the ship's hold. The men took salted fish in barrels, cheese, wine, water, live pigs and chickens.

Finding the way

Columbus used a compass to help him navigate. He used a traverse board to plot (mark) the direction they wanted to sail in. The voyage took longer than Columbus expected. There was no land, just ocean. The men got scared. They were running out of food and water. After 36 days, a sailor on the Pinta spotted an island. On 12 October 1492 the explorers went ashore. Columbus called the island San Salvador. It was in the Bahamas.

A New World

Columbus sailed on to Cuba and Hispaniola. He explored a world new to Europeans. People later called it the New World.



Columbus may have used a compass like this one.

Extract 3: What Columbus discovered

Native Americans

Native American people lived on the islands. Columbus called them 'Indians', because he thought he'd landed in 'the Indies' (Asia). At first the Native Americans were pleased to see the visitors. Columbus gave them cheap presents and bells. But he also claimed their islands for Spain!



A painting of Columbus' ships - The Santa Maria, the Pinta and the Niña.

Shipwreck

On Christmas night 1492 the Santa Maria was wrecked. It hit a reef. The other two ships sailed home. Columbus left 40 men behind. He took some captive Native Americans with him. He landed in Spain in March 1493.

Columbus soon went back to rescue his men. This time, he took 17 ships. But all the men left behind were dead. On his third voyage, Columbus saw South America for the first time

Native Americans made slaves

People from Europe sailed to America to start colonies. Some wanted to make the Native Americans become Christians. The Europeans began treating the Native Americans badly. They made many of them work as slaves.

Columbus dies

Columbus sailed to America for a fourth time in 1502. He was still hoping to land in China. This time he explored Central America. His ships were too leaky to sail home, so he had to wait a year before being rescued. When Columbus got back to Spain, he was a sick man. He died in 1506.

Extract 4: Why is Columbus famous?

Who was Columbus?

Columbus was an explorer. In 1492, he sailed from Europe to America. He and his sailors crossed the Atlantic Ocean, not knowing where they would land. It was a voyage into the unknown. After Columbus, other Europeans began to explore and settle in America.

When did he live?

Christopher Columbus was born in 1451. It was a time of new ideas and discoveries in Europe. We call this time the Renaissance - a word that means 'rebirth'. People were making maps of new lands. They were building ships to explore places they had never visited before.

How Columbus changed history

Columbus and his sailors sailed bravely into the unknown. Columbus did not give up, even when people laughed at his ideas. Explorers brought home gold, new foods and new knowledge. However, they brought misery to many Native Americans. The Europeans took their land. Many Native Americans were killed in wars with the Europeans, or died from European diseases.

