



# 3 Early European Explorers

## TERMS & NAMES

navigator  
caravel  
Christopher Columbus

### MAIN IDEA

As Europeans searched for sea routes to Asia, Christopher Columbus reached the Americas.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Columbus's journey permanently linked the Americas to the rest of the world.

## ONE EUROPEAN'S STORY

Sailors seeking a route to Asia depended on the skill of their navigator. A **navigator** plans the course of a ship by using instruments to find its position. In the 1400s, Portugal had a famous prince called Henry the Navigator. Yet, Henry wasn't a navigator. He never sailed on any of the ships trying to find Asia. So how did he earn his name?

Henry lived at Sagres, on the southwestern tip of Portugal. It was a site that overlooked the Atlantic Ocean. He invited astronomers, mathematicians, mapmakers, and navigators to Sagres. There he began a school of navigation.

Henry decided to organize and pay for sailing expeditions to explore the Atlantic and the west coast of Africa. He was hoping to find African gold, to learn more about geography, and to spread Christianity. His ships traveled farther down the African coast than Europeans had ever gone. Because Henry sponsored the voyages, the English named him "the navigator." Those voyages began Europe's age of discovery. As you will read in this section, this age of discovery eventually led Europeans to the Americas.



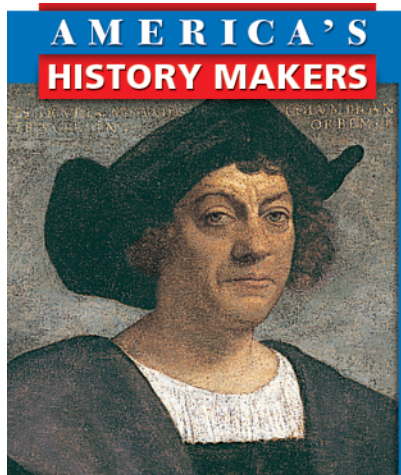
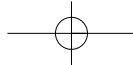
Henry the Navigator sponsored voyages that helped Portugal find a water route to Asia.

## A Water Route to Asia

Under Prince Henry, the Portuguese developed an improved ship called the **caravel**. The caravel had triangular sails as well as square sails. Square sails carried the ship forward when the wind was at its back. Triangular sails allowed the caravel to sail into the wind. The caravel was better than other European ships of the time at this type of sailing.

In January 1488, the Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias (DEE•uhs) reached the southern tip of Africa. After sailing around it, he returned to Portugal at the urging of his crew. Portugal's king named the tip the Cape of Good Hope because he hoped they had found a route to Asia.

Ten years later, another Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, followed Dias's route around the cape. He continued north along the eastern coast of Africa. Then he sailed east across the Indian Ocean to India. At last, someone had found an all-water route from Europe to Asia.



### CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS 1451–1506

Christopher Columbus's son Ferdinand wrote that his father "took to the sea at the age of 14 and followed it ever after."

Columbus's early voyages nearly cost him his life. When he was 25, pirates off the coast of Portugal sank his ship. Columbus survived by grabbing a floating oar and swimming to shore.

But he also learned a lot from sailing on Portuguese ships. The sailors taught Columbus about Atlantic wind patterns. This knowledge later helped him on his history-making voyage.

**What character traits, shown in Columbus's early life, might have made him a good leader?**

That route meant that the Portuguese could now trade with Asia without dealing with the Muslims or Italians. Portugal took control of the valuable spice trade. The merchants of Lisbon, Portugal's capital, grew rich. Spain and other European rivals wanted to take part in this profitable trade. They began to look for their own water routes to Asia.

## Columbus's Plan

By the time of da Gama's voyage, an Italian sailor named **Christopher Columbus** thought he knew a faster way to reach Asia. Europeans had known for centuries that the earth is round. Columbus decided that instead of sailing around Africa and then east, he would sail west across the Atlantic. He calculated that it would be a short journey.

But Columbus made several mistakes. First, he relied on the writings of two people—Marco Polo and a geographer named Paolo Toscanelli—who were wrong about the size of Asia. They claimed that Asia stretched farther from west to east than it really did.

Second, Columbus underestimated the distance around the globe. He thought the earth was only two thirds as large as it actually is! Because of Polo and Toscanelli, Columbus thought that Asia took up most of that distance. Therefore, he believed that the Atlantic Ocean must be small. And a voyage west to Asia would be short.

In 1483, Columbus asked the king of Portugal to finance a voyage across the Atlantic. The king's advisers opposed the plan. They argued that Columbus had miscalculated the distance to Asia. They also reminded the king of the progress that Portuguese explorers had made sailing down the coast of Africa looking for a route to Asia. The advisers persuaded the king not to finance the voyage. So in 1486, Columbus turned to Portugal's rival, Spain.

## Help from Spain's Rulers

Spain's rulers, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, liked Columbus's plan because they wanted a share of the rich Asian trade. As a strong Catholic, the Queen also welcomed a chance to spread Christianity. But there were also reasons not to support Columbus. First, a royal council had doubts about Columbus's calculations and advised Ferdinand and Isabella not to finance him. Second, the Spanish monarchs were in the middle of a costly war to drive the Muslims out of Spain. Third, Columbus was asking a high payment for his services.

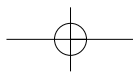
The years of waiting had made Columbus determined to profit from his explorations. As a reward for his efforts, he demanded the high title

### ReadingHistory

**A. Comparing**  
Compare what happened after Portugal began to control the spice trade to what happened when Italy controlled it.

### Vocabulary

**monarch:** a king or queen



Admiral of the Ocean Sea and a percentage of any wealth he brought from Asia. He also expected to be made the ruler of the lands he found.

Finally in January of 1492, the Spanish conquered the last Muslim stronghold in Spain. The Spanish monarchs could now afford to finance Columbus but still had doubts about doing so. Columbus left the palace to return home. But after listening to a trusted adviser, the king and queen changed their minds and sent a rider on horseback to bring Columbus back. He and the rulers finally reached an agreement.

**ReadingHistory**

**B. Drawing**

**Conclusions** Did this agreement give Columbus what he was asking for? Explain.

**A VOICE FROM THE PAST**

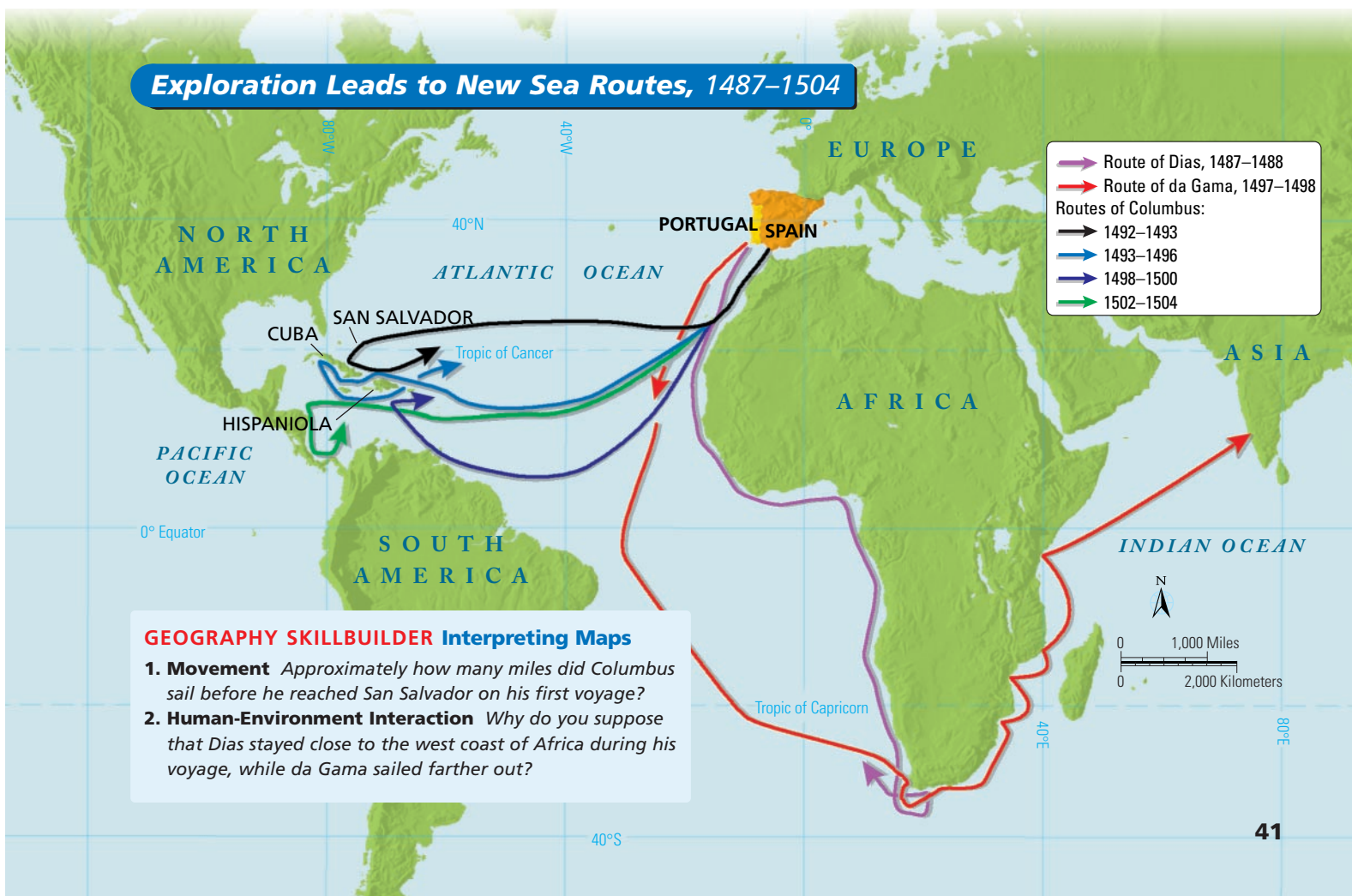
Your Highnesses . . . accorded me great rewards and ennobled me so that from that time henceforth I might . . . be high admiral of the Ocean Sea and perpetual Governor of the islands and continent which I should discover.

**Christopher Columbus**, letter to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella

Preparing to sail, Columbus assembled his ships—the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*—at the port of Palos de la Frontera in southern Spain.

**Setting Sail**

At first, Columbus had trouble finding a crew. Then a respected local shipowner agreed to sign on as captain of the *Pinta*. Other crew members soon followed. About 90 men loaded the ships with enough food for one year, casks of fresh water, firewood, and other necessities.

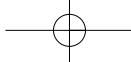


**Exploration Leads to New Sea Routes, 1487-1504**

— Route of Dias, 1487-1488  
 — Route of da Gama, 1497-1498  
 Routes of Columbus:  
 — 1492-1493  
 — 1493-1496  
 — 1498-1500  
 — 1502-1504

**GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Maps**

- 1. Movement** Approximately how many miles did Columbus sail before he reached San Salvador on his first voyage?
- 2. Human-Environment Interaction** Why do you suppose that Dias stayed close to the west coast of Africa during his voyage, while da Gama sailed farther out?



The tiny fleet of wooden ships glided out of the harbor on August 3, 1492. First they sailed southwest toward the Canary Islands off the northwest coast of Africa. From there, Columbus was relying on trade winds that blew toward the west to speed his ships across the ocean.

Once aboard ship, Columbus kept a log, or daily record of each day's sailing. In fact, he kept two logs. One he showed to his men and one he kept secret. Columbus's secret log recorded the truth about the journey.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

[We] made 15 leagues [this] day and . . . [I] decided to report less than those actually traveled so in case the voyage were long the men would not be frightened and lose courage.

**Christopher Columbus**, quoted in *Columbus and the Age of Discovery*

#### ReadingHistory

##### C. Analyzing

**Causes** What caused Columbus to decide to keep two logs?

By October 10, the men had lost both courage and confidence in their leader. They had been at sea for almost ten weeks and had not seen land for over a month. Afraid that they would starve if the trip went on longer, they talked of returning home. To avoid mutiny, Columbus and the crew struck a bargain. The men agreed to sail on for three more days, and Columbus promised to turn back if they had not sighted land by then. Two days later in the early morning hours of October 12, a sailor on the *Pinta* called out "Tierra, tierra" [Land, land].

## Reaching the Americas

By noon, the ships had landed on an island in the Caribbean Sea. Columbus believed that he had reached the Indies, islands in Southeast

Asia where spices grew. The islanders who greeted Columbus and his men were Taino (TY•noh) people, but Columbus mistakenly called them Indians.

Columbus named the island San Salvador. After unfurling the royal banner and flags, he ordered his crew to "bear witness that I was taking possession of this island for the King and Queen." Eager to reach the rich country of Japan, which he believed was nearby, he left San Salvador. He took six or seven Taino with him as guides. For the next three months, he visited several of the Caribbean islands.

Finally, he reached an island that he named Española, which we call Hispaniola today. (See map on page 41.) On that island, Columbus and his men found some gold and precious objects such as pearls. This convinced Columbus that he had reached Asia. He decided to return home, leaving 39 of his men on Hispaniola. Even before Columbus left, his men had angered the Taino people by stealing from them and committing violence. By the time Columbus returned ten months later, the Taino had killed the men.

#### Background

Today, the Indies are called the East Indies. The islands of the Caribbean are called the West Indies.

### Now and then

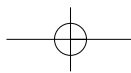
#### NATIVE AMERICAN VIEW OF COLUMBUS

In 1992, many Native Americans protested the 500th anniversary of Columbus's voyage. Suzan Shown Harjo, who is Cheyenne and Creek, explained why.

*As Native American peoples in this red quarter of Mother Earth, we have no reason to celebrate an invasion that caused the demise [death] of so many of our people and is still causing destruction today.*

The Spanish enslaved the Taino, who nearly all died from disease and bad treatment. This statue is one of the few Taino artifacts left from the 1500s.





In January 1493, he sailed back to Spain. Firmly believing that he had found a new water route to Asia, he wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella. The Spanish rulers called him to the royal court to report on his voyage. Neither Columbus nor the king and queen suspected that he had landed near continents entirely unknown to Europeans.

### An Expanding Horizon

Columbus made three more voyages to the Americas, but never brought back the treasures he had promised Spain's rulers. He also failed to meet Queen Isabella's other goal. She wanted Christianity brought to new people. When she learned that Columbus had mistreated and enslaved the people of Hispaniola, she became angry.

After the fourth voyage, Spain's rulers refused to give Columbus any more help. He died in 1506, still believing he had reached Asia and bitter that he had not received the fame or fortune that he deserved.

In time, the geographic knowledge Columbus brought back changed European views of the world. People soon realized that Columbus had reached continents that had been unknown to them previously. And Europeans were eager to see if these continents could make them rich.

For centuries, Europeans had seen the ocean as a barrier. With one voyage, Columbus changed that. Instead of a barrier, the Atlantic Ocean became a bridge that connected Europe, Africa, and the Americas. As you will learn in Chapter 2, Columbus's explorations began an era of great wealth and power for Spain. As Spain grew rich, England, France, and other European countries also began to send ships to the Americas.



A French map-maker uses an instrument to learn his exact position on the globe.

#### Reading History

**D. Making Inferences** How did the Atlantic become a bridge connecting Europe, Africa, and the Americas?

### Section 3 Assessment

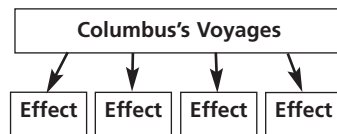
#### 1. Terms & Names

**Explain the significance of:**

- navigator
- caravel
- Christopher Columbus

#### 2. Taking Notes

On a diagram like the one shown, list the effects of Columbus's voyages.



Which effects were negative and which were positive?

#### 3. Main Ideas

- Why was Prince Henry eager to find an all-water route to Asia?
- Why did Spain's king and queen decide to support Columbus's first voyage?
- Why was Columbus disappointed by the outcome of his four voyages to the Americas?

#### 4. Critical Thinking

##### Analyzing Points of View

Explain how each of the following people might have viewed Columbus's first voyage. Give reasons for their points of view.

##### THINK ABOUT

- Columbus
- Queen Isabella
- a Taino chief

#### ACTIVITY OPTIONS

##### GEOGRAPHY

##### MATH

Use the map on page 41. Create an enlarged **map** of Columbus's first voyage, or measure the distance of each voyage to list on a **table**.