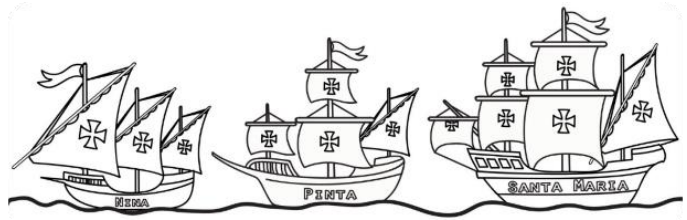


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## **Columbus Day**

Monday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, is Columbus Day. Columbus Day commemorates (causes us to remember) the day in 1492 when Columbus and his crew first landed in the New World. (The landing actually took place on *October 12*, but the holiday is always celebrated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of October.) Columbus's voyage was the start of European exploration and settlement of America, and eventually led to the creation of the United States.

### **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 that they had never visited before.

### **What did Columbus do?**

People sometimes say that Columbus 'discovered' America. That is not really correct. Today we know that Vikings from Europe had landed in America 500 years before Columbus, but they left and never returned. Columbus (and the other Europeans of his day) knew nothing about the Viking landing. It was Columbus's voyage that began regular contact between America (and the native peoples living there) and the rest of the world.

### **Childhood**

Cristoforo Colombo, or Christopher Columbus as we call him, was born in Genoa in Italy. Genoa was a busy seaport. His father was a wool merchant and weaver. We don't know if Columbus went to school much. He may have had lessons from monks.

The Columbus family hoped to get rich by trade. Columbus went to sea at the age of 13. Life at sea was exciting, but dangerous. He hoped to come home 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 the stars. He also learned to use a compass.

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## **In Portugal**

Columbus went to live in Portugal. One story says he swam ashore after his ship was attacked by pirates!

After settling in Portugal, Christopher and his brother Bartholomew made and sold maps for a living.

## **Columbus's dream**

People in Europe wanted to find a new sea route east, to trade with Asia. Traveling overland by the Silk Road was dangerous, so 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 thought he could reach China by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. Because maps of the time made the oceans look smaller than they really are, Columbus hoped to reach China in about two weeks. All he needed was money to make his dream come true.

## **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 small wooden ships with sails. There were about 90 men in the ships.

Food for the voyage was kept below deck, in the ship's hold. The men took salted fish in barrels, cheese, wine, water, live pigs and chickens.

## **Life on the ships**

The sailors worked shifts. The time for each shift was measured using a halfhour glass. (This is a glass container half-filled with sand. It takes half an hour for the sand to run from the top of the glass to the bottom.)

The men had no cabins but slept on deck. Every morning, they said prayers.

The ships let in water all the time. The men had to work pumps, to keep the ships afloat.

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## **Finding the way**

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.

As the days wore on, the men began to turn against Columbus. They forced him to agree to turn back if they did not find land within three days.

On the night of the second day, just before they would have to turn around, 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 group of islands very close to the American continents).

## **A New World**

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

## **Native Americans**

Native American people lived on the islands. Columbus called them 'Indians', because he thought he'd landed in 'the Indies' (a group of islands near China).

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 the Spanish king!

## **Shipwreck**

On Christmas night 1492, the Santa Maria was wrecked. It hit a reef (rocks just beneath the water's surface).

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.

## **Second voyage**

Columbus soon went back to rescue his men. This time, he took 17 ships. But all the men left behind from the first voyage were dead.

## **Columbus in disgrace**

Spain ruled the lands Columbus had found. On his third voyage, Columbus saw South America for the first time. But he came home in disgrace. His enemies said he was a cruel leader who only wanted to make himself rich. He was sent back to Spain in chains. But the king and queen set him free.

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## **Native Americans made slaves**

People from Europe sailed to America to start colonies. The Europeans did not understand the Native American traditions and customs. They hoped the Native Americans would become Christians and adopt European culture.

Many of the Europeans—including Columbus and his men—treated the Native Americans badly and forced them to 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. . Unfortunately, Columbus died without ever knowing that what he had discovered was not a new sea route to China, but a whole New World.

## **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. Other European explorers followed Columbus. But Columbus was first.

In 1497-98, John Cabot sailed from England to North America. In 1507 *Amerigo Vespucci* from Italy sailed to South America. Vespucci was the first to realize that Columbus had landed nowhere near China or India, but on a different continent entirely. *America* was named after him.

## **Cultural exchange**

Explorers brought home gold, new foods—no one in Europe had ever eaten a tomato or a potato before—and new knowledge. However, they brought misery to many Native Americans. The Europeans took their land. And many Native Americans were killed in wars with the Europeans or died from European diseases.

