

The Golden Age of Exploration



Teacher's Resource Guide

A VIDEO FROM KNOWLEDGE UNLIMITED®, INC.

TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE
FOR
The Golden Age of Exploration

A video
from
Knowledge Unlimited®, Inc.

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Teacher's Resource Guide
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The Golden Age of Exploration

INTRODUCTION

When Christopher Columbus set sail west across the Atlantic, he was convinced that he would find a shortcut to Asia. Columbus calculated that Japan was only about 3,000 miles from Europe. His miscalculations landed him instead in the West Indies, in the New World of North and South America. Columbus's navigational blunder ushered in one of the most important periods in western history, an age of exploration marked by stunning discoveries, great conquests, and stirring feats of bravery. The European voyages of exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries forever changed the face of commerce, industry, culture, and society. But the European explorers who sought to claim the New World and its riches as their own also wrought tremendous destruction. Many of the native peoples of the Americas were exploited and killed by wars and disease, direct results of the European conquest.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF EXPLORATION provides an overview of the many facets of this fascinating and complicated period in history. The video includes a large amount of information. But the topics it covers can be divided into three major areas: the events and circumstances in Europe that led to the fervor for trade and exploration; some of the major Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English explorers who led these voyages; and the consequences of this exploration on the native peoples of North and South America. You may wish to delve into any or all of these areas in more depth. It may even be helpful to view the video in several showings, to give your class a chance to absorb the information presented and discuss it further.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF EXPLORATION looks at the horror and the glory of the early European voyages of discovery. It almost goes without saying that a 30 minute video can only begin to explore a subject as vast as this one. But it is our hope and our intention that this video will give your students a jumping-off point into the world of the great explorers, their lives, and their history-making voyages.

Liza DiPrima and Paul Synnes
Knowledge Unlimited

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The Teacher's Resource Guide

The guide consists of the following:

- 1) A brief introduction, describing the video and stating goals and objectives.
- 2) A Readiness Activity to be completed before viewing the video.
- 3) Four follow-up lessons to be completed after viewing the video. A reproducible activity sheet accompanies each lesson.
- 4) The complete script of the video **THE GOLDEN AGE OF EXPLORATION**.
- 5) A brief bibliography.

Learning Objectives

After viewing the video and completing the activities in this guide, students should:

- 1) Have a firmer grasp of the world situation on the eve of Columbus's journey, specifically as it relates to economic interaction among the people of Europe.
- 2) Have a better understanding of how this economic interaction played a key role in spurring the uniquely *European* exploration quest.
- 3) Be acquainted with some of the major European explorers of the 15th and 16th centuries, as well as the lands they discovered or explored.
- 4) Be more familiar with the ways native populations in the New World were affected by the European explorers.
- 5) Have a better understanding of how the Age of Exploration has helped shape our society up to the present day.

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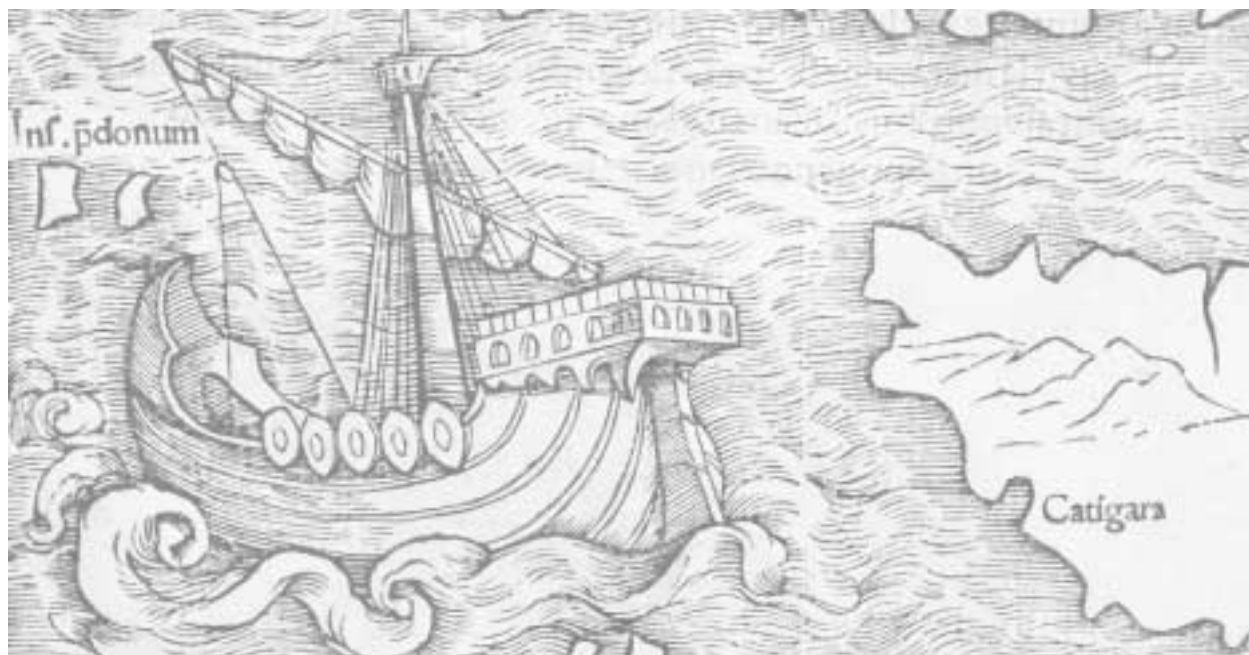
A Readiness Activity

(Do this activity before viewing the video)

Objective: Students will be better able to appreciate the video after identifying key personalities, terms, and events described in it.

Use the **Readiness Activity Sheet** (opposite page).

1. Split your class into four or five smaller groups.
2. Reproduce copies of the **Readiness Activity Sheet** and hand them out. This sheet contains a list of names and vocabulary terms found in the video **THE GOLDEN AGE OF EXPLORATION**.
3. Tell the class that they will be viewing a video on the subject of exploration. Ask the students for their thoughts and opinions about why it is important to learn about this subject.
4. Assign each group three of the names, terms, or events on the sheet. Give each group about ten minutes to discuss their three names and agree on definitions for them. Ask one person in each group to record the group's definitions for each term in one or two sentences.
5. Have each group read its definitions to the whole class. Discuss the names and other terms, and try to supply more complete information where necessary.



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Readiness Activity Sheet

In a small group, discuss the three names, terms, or events you have been assigned from the list below. Have one member of the group record an agreed-upon definition or description of each name or term.

Aztecs

Ferdinand Magellan

West Indies

compass

Hernando Cortés

the Northwest Passage

Middle Ages

Marco Polo

the Renaissance

Vasco da Gama

Incas

Christopher Columbus

Juan Ponce de Leon

the Crusades

genocide



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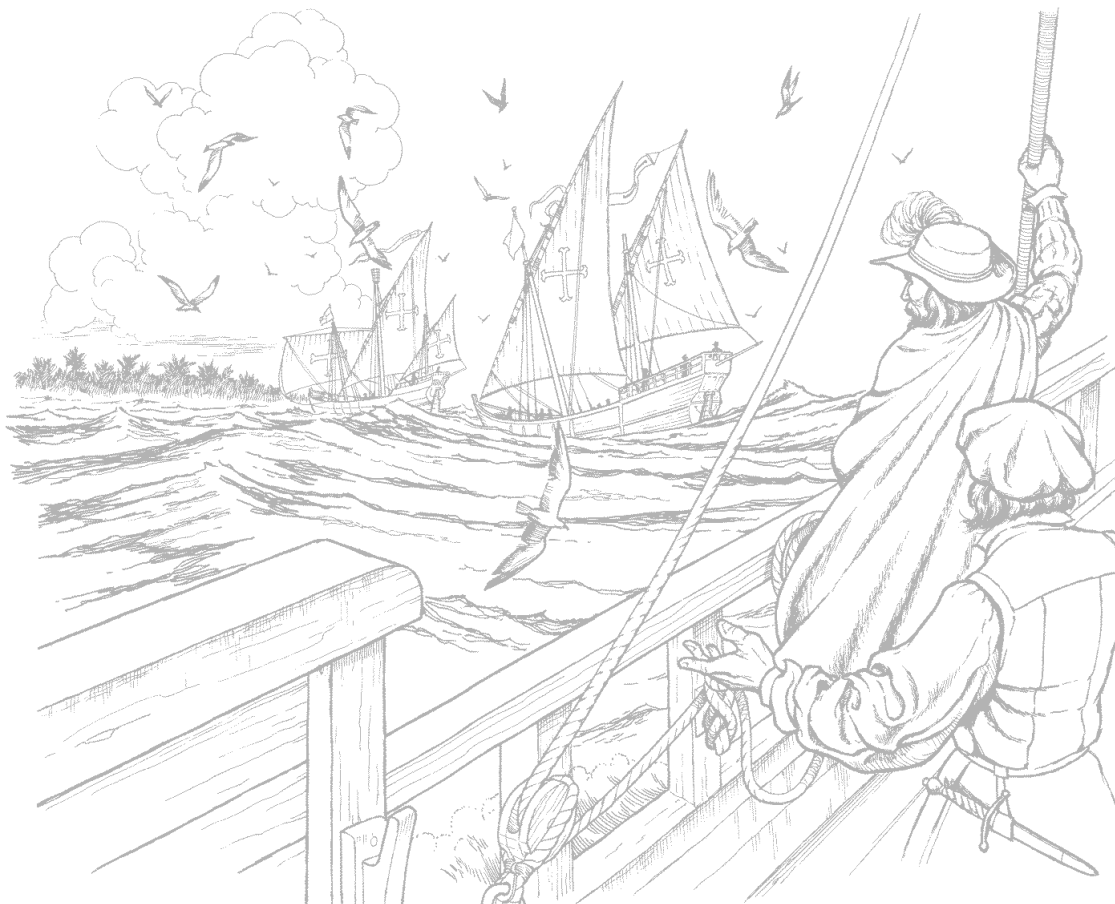
LESSON 1

The European Explorers

Objective: Students will learn more about a figure who played a key role during the Golden Age of Exploration. As they do, they will develop a better appreciation of the impact an individual can have on history and the limits of that impact.

Use **Activity Sheet for Lesson 1** (opposite page).

1. Reproduce copies of **Activity Sheet for Lesson 1** and hand them out. Have students read the instructions on the activity sheet carefully. Answer any questions they have.
2. Briefly discuss the figures listed on the activity sheet.
3. Have students choose one of these figures to research. Using a variety of sources for their research, students should answer the questions on **Activity Sheet for Lesson 1**.
4. Once students have completed the activity sheets, they should use them in giving the oral reports called for at the bottom of the activity sheet.



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Activity Sheet for Lesson 1

The European Explorers

Listed below are 15 individuals who played an important role in world exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries. All are mentioned in the video **THE GOLDEN AGE OF EXPLORATION**. Use encyclopedias, books, and other sources to learn more about one of these figures. Your teacher or librarian should be able to help you locate these sources. Then answer the questions below. As a group, share the answers to these questions.

Christopher Columbus

Hernando Cortés

Jacques Cartier

Francisco Pizarro

Juan Ponce de Leon

Samuel de Champlain

Francisco Coronado

John Cabot

Henry Hudson

Vasco de Balboa

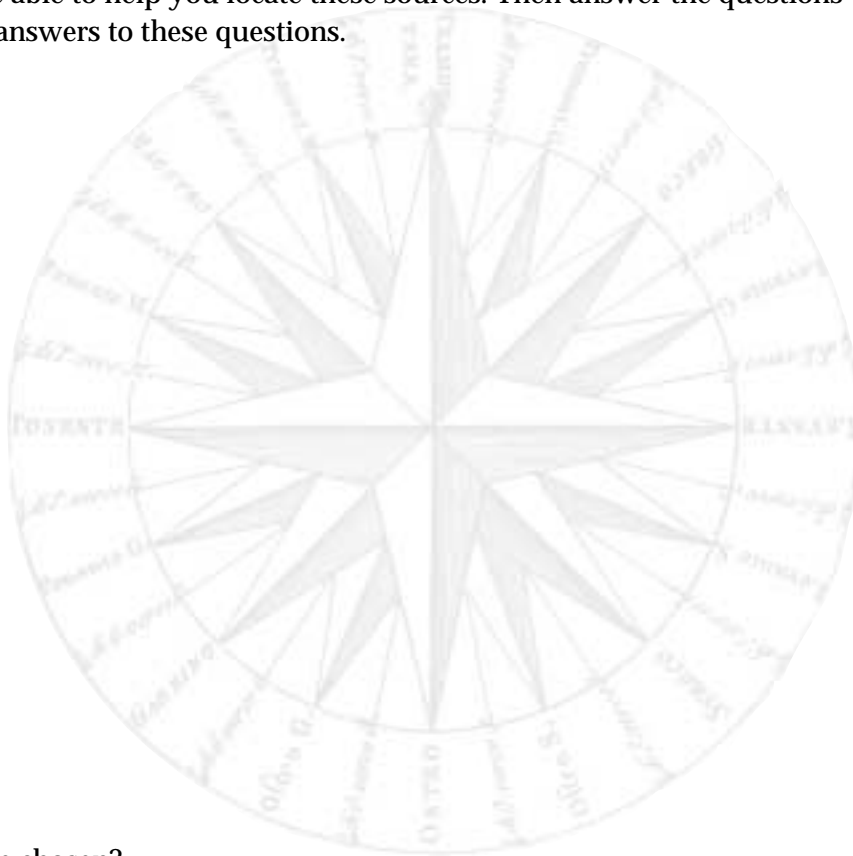
Pedro Cabral

Vasco da Gama

Ferdinand Magellan

Martin Frobisher

Henry the Navigator



1. Who is the person you have chosen?
2. What exactly did he accomplish — that is, why is this person important in history?
3. From your research, what interesting events happened in his life? Did these events contribute in any way to the role he played in history?
4. Judge the person's contribution to history. Were the things he did mainly good, mainly harmful, or a mixture? Explain your answer.

Use your answers to these questions to prepare a three- or four-minute oral report on this person.

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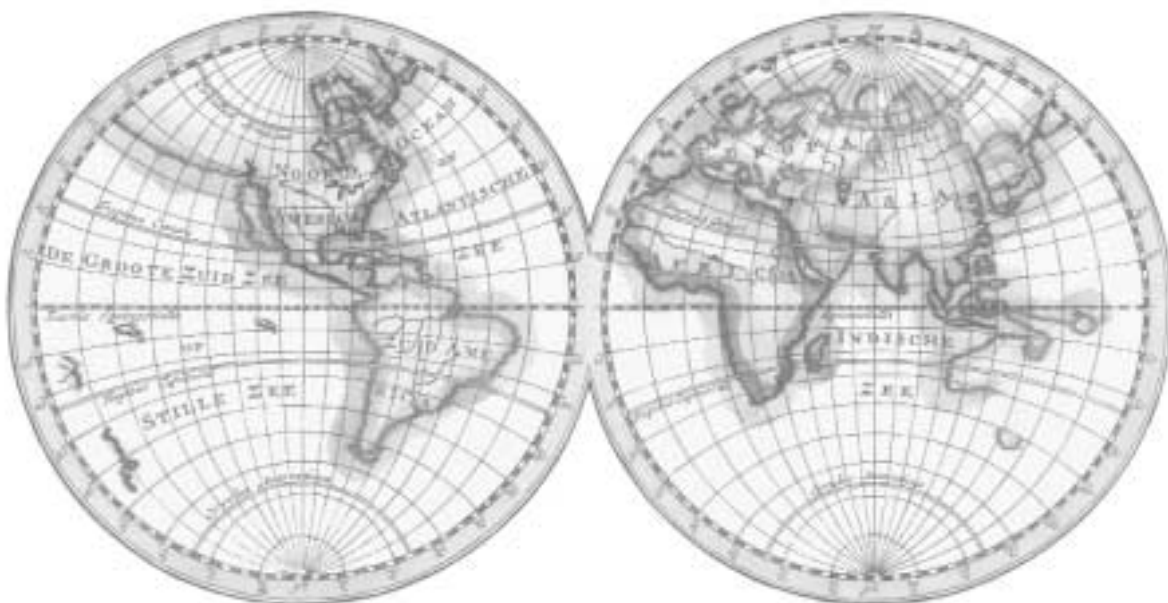
LESSON 2

The New World's Indian Heritage

Objective: Students will learn more about the ancient Indian civilizations that the explorers encountered in the New World. Students can choose to research Indian cultures mentioned in the video or others that interest them. By answering several predetermined questions, they will develop a greater appreciation of the difficulties involved in such cross-cultural research.

Use **Activity Sheet for Lesson 2** (opposite page).

1. Reproduce copies of **Activity Sheet for Lesson 2** and hand them out. Have students read the instructions on the sheet carefully. Then answer any questions they have.
2. Discuss some of the ancient civilizations that the European explorers encountered in the New World and give students suggestions on how to learn more about them.
3. Have students choose a civilization to research and give them a deadline for answering the questions on **Activity Sheet for Lesson 2**.
4. Then, divide the class into several smaller groups and have each student share his or her answers to the questions on the activity sheet with other students in the group.
5. Tell students to discuss each other's responses in their small groups and use that feedback to write reports on the civilizations they have chosen to study.



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Activity Sheet for Lesson 2

The New World's Indian Heritage

Many Indian civilizations flourished in the lands that the European explorers “discovered,” explored, and, in many instances, conquered. Choose one of the Indian cultures listed here, or pick a different Indian group. Learn all you can about the culture you chose. Use encyclopedias and your library to locate sources on the culture you have chosen.

As you do your research, answer the seven questions below. Also write down any other information you think is interesting and important. Divide into small groups, and present the information you found out loud to your classmates. Ask them what things they would like to know about the culture. Use their suggestions and questions to help you finish your research. Then write a report responding more fully to the six questions here and to others you think are important.

Arawak
Aztec

Inca
Pueblo

1. Which Indian civilization did you choose?
2. What do you consider the most impressive accomplishments of this civilization? Why?
3. In what ways did the natural surroundings influence the development of this civilization?
4. What aspects of this civilization seem most different or mysterious to you? Why?
5. What aspects of this civilization remind you most of our own culture? Why?
6. What do you consider to be the greatest strengths and weaknesses of this civilization?
7. What was the effect of European contact on this civilization?

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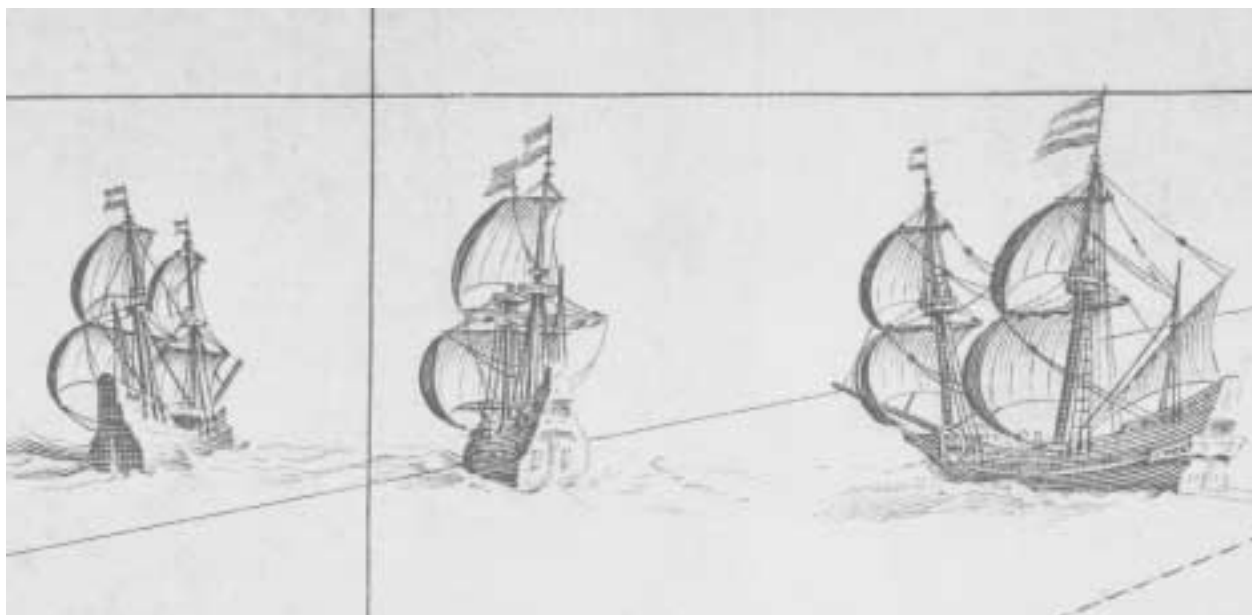
LESSON 3

Note-Taking Activity

Objective: To give students practice in note taking and test their overall comprehension of the video.

Use **Activity Sheet for Lesson 3** (opposite page).

1. Review some of the basics of good note taking with the class. Discuss why taking good notes is important.
2. Reproduce copies of **Activity Sheet for Lesson 3**. You may choose to hand the activity sheet out before viewing the video, so students know what points to look for. Or you may choose to hand out the activity sheet after you have shown the video, to help them determine how detailed their notes are.
3. Show the video and ask students to take good notes. Tell them they will be answering questions on the activity sheet based on their notes.
4. After viewing the video, have students write down their responses to the questions on **Activity Sheet for Lesson 3**.
5. Use these responses to help them evaluate their note-taking skills, and as the basis for a class discussion on the important concepts of the video.



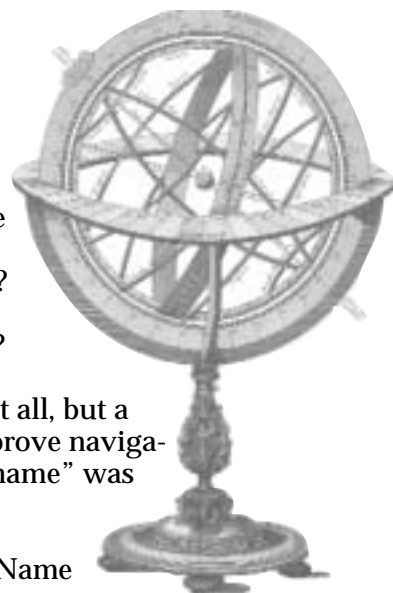
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Activity Sheet for Lesson 3

Note-Taking Activity

As you watch **THE GOLDEN AGE OF EXPLORATION**, take good notes about the events, people, places, and ideas that are mentioned in the video. When the video is over, use these notes to write down answers to the following questions:

1. The Chinese were among the first explorers. What was one tool they invented that helped them navigate?
2. Europe launched the great Age of Exploration and discovery during the Renaissance. But before that period, Europeans seemed to have little interest in the world around them. What was this time in history called?
3. An interest in trade grew out of the Crusades. What were the Crusades?
4. One of the great figures of the Age of Exploration was not an explorer at all, but a Portuguese prince. He set up a school for explorers. He also helped improve navigation equipment and paid for many voyages of exploration. What “nickname” was given to this prince?
5. Christopher Columbus set out from Spain with his three ships in 1492. Name these three ships.
6. What was the name of the group of Indians Columbus met when he first reached the New World?
7. Vasco de Balboa was the first European to reach the eastern shore of an important body of water. What is it called?
8. Two great Indian civilizations — the Aztecs and the Incas — were conquered and destroyed by the Spanish explorers. Which Spanish explorer conquered the Aztecs in the area of present-day Mexico? Which explorer conquered the Incas in South America?
9. Name the Spanish explorer who discovered a beautiful land he called “Florida” while searching for a mythical “Fountain of Youth.” What does “Florida” mean?
10. What was Ferdinand Magellan’s contribution to exploration?
11. Several nations sent explorers on long and fruitless searches for a northern route to the Orient. This water route was believed to exist in what today is Canada. What name was given to this imaginary water route?
12. A French explorer gave the name “St. Lawrence” to a great river in Canada and also gave the name “Mount Royal” to a place that eventually became the city of Montreal. Name him.



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LESSON 4

Independent Study Project

Objective: To give students the opportunity to learn more about the history of exploration through an independent study project.

Use **Activity Sheet for Lesson 4** (opposite page).

1. Reproduce copies of **Activity Sheet for Lesson 4** and hand them out.
2. Explain to students that they will be doing an independent study project. Have students choose a project from the five described on **Activity Sheet for Lesson 4**.
3. Encourage students to think up their own projects if they wish. But before allowing them to proceed, have them write up brief outlines of their projects for your approval.



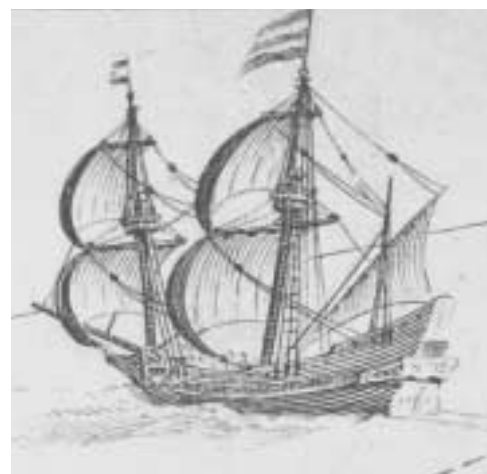
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Activity Sheet for Lesson 4

Independent Study Project

Here are five ideas for an independent study project on the history of exploration. Read each one, and then decide which one interests you the most. Then follow the instructions to complete that project. You may also come up with your own independent study project, but be sure to get your teacher's OK first.

1. Life wasn't always easy for the early explorers. For example, Magellan feared his crew would starve when they ran out of food on their voyage around the world. Read more about Magellan's voyage. Then pretend that you are planning your own voyage around the world in Magellan's time, following his path. How much food would you pack for the trip? (Keep in mind: food spoils and you'll need room for other supplies, and people!) What kinds of food would you bring? Collect information from a local travel agent. Use it to make a travel guide of places along the route where you would stop to visit and get more food. Clip a picture of each place and write a brief paragraph explaining what the place is like, what sights you would see, and what foods you would get there.
2. Pretend that you are starting a Hall of Fame for explorers. Choose the five explorers you think should be the first to be included in the Hall of Fame. Write a brief paragraph explaining why you think they deserve this honor. If other members of your class or group have chosen this project, share your ideas with them. Then vote on the five who will be chosen first.
3. If you could have traveled with one adventurer from the Age of Exploration, which one would it have been? Read more about that explorer and the places he visited. Write an essay explaining the reasons you would like to have traveled with that adventurer.
4. The "dateline" in a newspaper is the line at the beginning of an article that tells where the story happened. Look at the datelines in your newspaper for one week. List all of the datelines. Using encyclopedias and other sources, find out how many of these countries were once part of the empires that European nations set up during the great Age of Exploration in the 1500s and 1600s. Read more about one of these countries. Then write a brief report about that nation and the ways its development was influenced by its European beginnings.
5. After the Age of Exploration began, many foods were discovered and introduced into other parts of the world. For example, lemons that once grew only in Southeast Asia are now grown in many parts of the world. Clip pictures of the fruits and vegetables in grocery ads in your local newspaper. Read the encyclopedia to learn more about these foods. Draw a map of the world and attach the pictures next to the nations where these foods were originally grown.



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Video Script

COLUMBUS (Dramatic Voice)

“Soon many of the islanders gathered round us. I gave them red bonnets and glass beads which they hung 'round their necks, and many other things of small value, at which they were so delighted and so eager to please us that we could not believe it. They must be good servants, and intelligent, for I can see that they quickly repeat everything said to them. I believe they would readily become Christians; it appeared to me that they have no religion. With God's will, I will take six of them with me for Your Majesties when I leave this place, so that they may learn Spanish.”

NARRATOR

The words were written by Christopher Columbus. They tell a familiar story, of Columbus as a brave explorer, discovering and befriendng Native American tribes and bringing some of them back to Europe. But there is another side to this story; a side that is not so pleasant. The people who lived on this continent when Columbus arrived had created well-established and complex civilizations. From their perspective, Columbus and the other explorers were invaders who looted all the gold and jewels they could find; burned their libraries; and enslaved, abused, and killed hundreds of thousands.

Which version of history is correct? Were Columbus and the other European explorers of that era great heroes? Or were they nothing more than over-glorified pirates? There are facts and opinions to support both views. But one fact is beyond dispute. After Christopher Columbus planted his flag in the Western Hemisphere, the world would never be the same.

That small event would come to symbolize the beginning of the active and complex period called the Golden Age of Exploration.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF EXPLORATION

Before the Explorations

Up until 1300 AD, the world seemed like a place of tiny isolated communities, with little contact or interaction between peoples and places. But there was a lot more traveling and interaction between peoples than one might think. China, for example, was a highly advanced society that explored other lands as early as 100 BC. Chinese ambassador/explorers traveled very far from China in search of trade and allies. Chinese caravans carried food, silks, and spices to the West.

The Chinese even invented the first magnetic compass, a tool that would revolutionize the ability to navigate the oceans. The Chinese were using compasses to guide ships as early as 1000 AD. But despite this, the Chinese never expanded these efforts or attempted to conquer far-off nations. And while their trade with the outside world was active, they didn't need that trade to survive. Europe presented quite a different situation.

The Roots of Europe's Exploration Efforts

In the so-called “dark ages” of early medieval Europe, small isolated farming communities were the norm. Travel was very difficult. People generally grew their own food and met their other needs with little outside help. The world view of the average person was shaped by this isolation and by the Catholic Church — the only church allowed in most of Europe in the Middle Ages.

The Church taught that people should focus on life after death; on the next world, not on the affairs of this world. Europe was not a fertile place for new ideas to grow or spread — that is, until rumors about the Holy Land began to provoke both the Church and its flock.

The Crusades: Exploration as Religious War

The year was 1070. The word through Europe was that Muslims had captured the Holy Land in Palestine. Rumors began to trickle back that Christians under Muslim rule were being treated brutally. As a response to these stories, Europe mounted what came to be called the Crusades, an armed invasion designed to reconquer the Holy Land.

Like many religious wars, the Crusades were full of horrors and atrocities on both sides. The Crusaders' entry into Jerusalem led to the indiscriminate slaughter of all the city's inhabitants: Muslim, Jew, and even fellow Christians.

Winning Jerusalem did not lead to further success, and Europe was never able to take control of the Holy Land. But the Crusaders returned to Europe with exotic products from the Middle and Far East. These spices, fruits, silks, and woven cloth gave many Europeans a taste for new luxuries. And the growing demand for these goods created a new desire for wider trade.

Geography and a Taste for the Exotic

In the 1300s and 1400s, an interest in wealth, knowledge, and power began to spread in Europe. This restlessness in Europe collided with the suspicions between peoples of neighboring areas; an attitude created by the mountains that isolated one nation from another.

Despite this climate of distrust, there was a great deal of trade between the nations of Europe, because no single nation could produce all the goods it needed. And Europe's long, winding coastlines and seafaring traditions made some of this trade much easier. Ships often followed these coastlines, carrying goods from city to city. This was much easier than taking goods over the mountains in caravans.

A new class of merchants emerged, lured by the riches they could gain by feeding the growing demand for exotic luxury goods. A new interest in the world outside of Europe grew out of these opportunities to get rich.

Marco Polo: A Business Trip to China

What these merchants needed most to meet these growing demands was a more reliable set of trade routes to Asia. The Italian explorer Marco Polo's expedition to China in the 1200s helped mapmakers find these land routes to the Orient and its fabulous wealth.

Marco Polo managed to gain the trust and protection of the Chinese emperor Kublai Khan, and he was able to cover vast territories within China. When he returned to Europe, he wrote a book that described what he had seen. His book opened the eyes of Europe's ambitious merchants and helped guide many other Europeans to the East in search of even quicker and more profitable routes to China.

Trade and the Renaissance

As trade grew, towns and cities grew as well. The Italian cities were nearer than most parts of Europe to the overland trade routes to Asia. This geographic advantage fueled these cities' growth as centers of banking and trade and, ultimately, helped them transform into very powerful city-states.

The political rulers of these city-states supported artists and others with a keen interest in the natural world. This nurturing of art and science was the foundation of the Renaissance — the time of the “rebirth” of Europe out of the darkness of the Middle Ages and into the light of commerce, art, and learning.

The spirit of learning, combined with entrepreneurial energy, generated great innovations in shipbuilding and design, improvements in compasses, and other navigational tools to enhance travel and trade. The traditional European fear and reluctance to travel to unknown lands was wearing down in the face of technical improvements and better maps.

Politics was changing as well. Medieval Europe had been divided into tiny areas controlled by local noblemen. Kings had little real power over these landlord rulers. But the spread of technology and wealth began to increase the power of kings and create more powerful central governments.

Setting the Stage for Columbus

This growing power and wealth of both merchants and kings generated the means for the kings and their governments to pay the high costs of the increasingly essential voyages of exploration. These voyages were not only expensive, they were extremely difficult and very risky. But with great wealth and power as the possible payoff, the explorers and their royal financial backers had great motivation. And given the rivalries between the city-states of Europe, it became even more important to maintain a competitive edge.

And competition drove progress. Portugal, for example, became worried about the power that the Italian city-states were gaining with their lucrative trade routes east. Portugal's Prince Henry was so worried that he began a number of projects. He started a school for explorers, sponsored work to improve navigation equipment, and actually paid for many voyages. These activities earned him the name “Henry the Navigator.”

Prince Henry sent sailors to map the coast of Africa. These new maps would become very important to other explorers. The Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias was the first European to sail around the tip of Africa with hopes of reaching India and its silks and spices. At first, Dias didn't even know he had sailed around the Cape of Good Hope. But soon, he realized he was in the Indian Ocean. At that point, his weary crew would sail no farther. They forced him to return to Portugal, and Dias never did reach India.

The next explorer to sail around the Cape of Good Hope was Vasco da Gama. He finally did reach India in 1498. Da Gama's trip to India took nearly a year, and when he arrived, Arab and Persian merchants threatened to kill him. These merchants feared Portuguese competition for the lucrative trade between India and the West. Da Gama was able to negotiate his way around these threats and was permitted to load his ship with spices. He made it back to Portugal in only three months.

It was in the midst of this fervor for exploration that Columbus made his first great efforts.

The Voyages of Columbus

In 1492, an Italian adventurer named Christopher Columbus set sail for Asia. Instead, he found a New World — the Americas. As a boy, Columbus was fascinated by the trading ships that stopped in Genoa, Italy, where he lived. The ships carried gold, gems, and spices from Asia. At the age of 19, Columbus began working on these ships. Soon, he began to dream about finding a new, easier route to Asia and its riches.

Columbus believed the shortest route to Asia was to the west, across the Atlantic. At first, he asked the leaders of Portugal to help him prove this. Columbus thought Japan was only about 3,000 miles from Portugal. But advisers to the king of Portugal believed that Columbus's estimates were completely off and that the world was much larger than he claimed. The king turned Columbus down. So Columbus turned to Spain for help.

Spain was ruled by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. The queen listened carefully to Columbus and believed in his plan. Her belief in Columbus was backed by the largest payment ever offered to an explorer. But he was expected to turn the queen's big investment into even greater profits.

Columbus set sail in 1492 with three ships, the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria, all paid for by the queen. He headed westward on what he believed would be the shortcut to the Orient — India and China. As Columbus and his crew faced the open Atlantic, they looked into a frightening and unknown horizon... a frontier as unfamiliar to them as outer space is to us.

For five long weeks, Columbus sailed west, into the uncharted seas of the Atlantic. A tense and frightened crew was probably very relieved when one of them sighted land on October 12, 1492. Since he knew of no other lands between Portugal and Japan, Columbus decided he must be in the Orient, somewhere near India.

The island he landed on was not empty. The people he met on the beach looked as strange to him as he probably looked to them. Since he thought that he was somewhere in the East Indies, he called these people "Indians." This label was, of course, a major error, since the island he landed on turned out to be in the West Indies, in the Caribbean. This place would later be called the Americas and the New World, though the mistaken label he gave to the native peoples would survive up to the present day.

Ironically, it was while da Gama was in India that Columbus made his third voyage to the lands he still believed were somewhere in or near India. In fact, even after all four of his voyages, Columbus still thought that he had discovered the western route to Asia. So while the Portuguese were correct about the size of the globe, Columbus's error actually revealed the hidden hemisphere that would become the New World for Europe.

The Peoples Columbus “Discovered”

The so called “Indians” Columbus met when he arrived in the New World were called the Arawaks, or Aruacos, who were in fact explorers themselves. Centuries before, they had set out in large canoes from their home base on the Guajira peninsula of northern South America, becoming the first colonists of the Caribbean islands. But to Columbus they were naked savages that he thought might make good slaves, and wound up mistreating them based on those opinions.

Thousands of other Indian tribes also lived in the New World. These tribes were spread throughout North and South America. Each Indian tribe spoke its own language and had its own unique way of life.

Some Indians moved from place to place. Others lived in small villages. Some lived in great cities. A few of these tribes — the Aztecs and the Incas, for example — had built powerful, well-organized civilizations. The Inca empire covered areas that are now parts of Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile. A complicated system of roads connected the distant cities of this empire. This scene shows the famous Inca city of Macchu Picchu. It is located in a remote area high in the Andes Mountains.

The Aztecs established their empire far to the north, in what is now Mexico. And there were other great civilizations in Central and South America that we're just beginning to learn about from new archeological discoveries.

In many ways, these civilizations were as advanced as those in the Old World. They had developed systems and analytical tools for writing, agriculture, astronomy, and mathematics. They had permanent settlements with domesticated animals and highly organized governments.

But the arrival of the Europeans changed everything. Columbus and those who followed him would virtually demolish and obliterate these rich cultures and civilizations.

After Columbus

Columbus's discoveries created great momentum. Soon other explorers picked up where he left off, and each effort yielded more information. Amerigo Vespucci was credited for identifying the Americas as a completely “New World.” While the significance of Vespucci's actual role is questioned by many historians, his fame was fixed by the fact that the Americas were named in his honor.

Vasco de Balboa was the first to reach the Pacific. This opened up exploration of South America's western coast. Balboa saw the Pacific from a mountaintop in Panama. Four days later, he marched into the waters of that ocean and claimed it and its shores for Spain.

In 1521, a Spanish “conquistador,” Hernando Cortés, conquered the Aztecs in Mexico. Cortés had landed on the shores of present-day Mexico in 1519. He wrote these observations of life as he saw it in this new place:

CORTÉS (Dramatic Voice)

“November 8, 1519: ... I will say only that these people live almost like those in Spain, and in as much harmony and order as there, and considering that they are barbarous and so far from the knowledge of God and cut off from all civilized nations, it is truly remarkable to see what they have achieved in all things. ... The most important of their idols, the ones in whom they have most faith, I had taken from their places and thrown down the steps; and I had those chapels where they were cleaned, for they were full of the blood of sacrifices; and I have images of Our Lady and of other saints put there, which caused Montezuma and the other natives some sorrow.”

NARRATOR

Interestingly, Cortés is said to have purposely beached his ships when he landed. This left him and his 500 men with two stark options: conquer an empire of millions, or be destroyed.

After establishing the city of Veracruz, he led troops on horseback to the capital of the Aztec empire, Tenochtitlán, the site of present-day Mexico City. Soon, he took the Aztec leader Montezuma prisoner. Within two years, Cortés had conquered the entire Aztec empire.

After his first explorations of the land of the Incas, Francisco Pizarro reported to the Spanish king that the Incas were a great source of gold. The king quickly sent him back to claim that wealth for Spain.

Eleven years later, with about 200 men, Pizarro captured and killed the Inca ruler and conquered the Inca empire, giving Spain control over a large part of South America centered in what is now Peru. Like Cortés, Pizarro seized huge amounts of silver and gold from the Indians and sent it back to Spain.

Indians had told another Spanish explorer, Juan Ponce de Leon, of a marvelous fountain that could make old people young again. He never found this mythical “Fountain of Youth.” But while he was searching for it, he discovered a beautiful land. He named it “Florida,” which means “full of flowers.”

A Spanish explorer named Francisco Coronado led his army overland from Mexico across the Great Plains of North America to what is now Kansas in his search for the legendary Seven Cities of Gold. But he found only Indian villages — plus the Grand Canyon and the Continental Divide.

Many other explorers made discoveries and land claims for Spain in the 1500s. By the end of that century, Spain controlled most of South and Central America — and even much of what is now the United States. But Spain was not the only European nation to claim territory in the New World.

In 1500, the Portuguese explorer Pedro Cabral’s fleet was blown off course while sailing for India. He reached Brazil and claimed it for Portugal. Today, Brazil is the largest nation in South America. And while people from many other lands settled in Brazil later, Brazilians still speak Portuguese. In the rest of South and Central America, people mainly speak Spanish.

MAGELLAN (Dramatic Voice)

“Wednesday, 28 November 1520: ... Engulfing ourselves in the Pacific Sea, we were three months and 20 days without getting any kind of fresh food. We ate biscuit, which was no longer biscuit, but powder of biscuits swarming with worms, for they had eaten the good part. The whole place stank strongly of the urine of rats. We drank yellow water that had been putrid for many days. We also wound up eating the ox-hides that covered the top of the mainyard.”

NARRATOR

Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese sailor, did not mince words about life on the high seas. In 1519, he led a crew that became the first to sail around the world. Magellan planned to sail west to the Spice Islands and back again. But after reaching the Pacific Ocean, he knew he could continue sailing west to Spain.

Magellan himself was killed by native peoples in the Philippines. But a member of his crew, Juan del Cano, pushed on and completed this first trip around the world, thanks in large part to Magellan's planning and leadership. Many scholars consider this voyage to be the greatest navigational feat in history.

The Search for the Northwest Passage

Since Spain and Portugal came to control most southern trade routes, other nations searched for an alternate route to the Far East, a so-called “Northwest Passage.” This map shows the world as seen from above the North Pole, at least according to the way the mapmakers of the period thought it looked. The northern part of Europe appears in the lower right. The map shows a narrow westward ocean passage to Asia through North America. This detail turned out to be wishful thinking because, in fact, no such passage exists.

But French, English, and Dutch explorers all searched for years for this elusive Northwest Passage to the Orient. Sailing for England, John Cabot thought he had discovered the Northwest Passage when he found the St. Lawrence River. This led him instead to explore the coasts of New England, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. And he made England's first North American land claims. But the St. Lawrence River did not lead to Asia.

An English sea captain named Martin Frobisher also searched for the imaginary Northwest Passage. His search instead took him to Greenland and Labrador, but never to the Orient.

France's king sent Jacques Cartier to find a route to China in 1534. He did not reach China. But he did claim parts of Canada for France. He gave the name “St. Lawrence” to the river John Cabot had explored. And he gave the name “Mount Royal” to a hill towering over that river, a place that became the city of Montreal.

Samuel de Champlain was probably one of the most important of the French explorers. He discovered Niagara Falls while searching for the Northwest Passage. His detailed maps and charts of Canada were a great help to the many settlers and fur traders who came after him. His explorations earned him the name “Father of New France,” which is now in the heart of French-speaking Canada.

Henry Hudson also searched for a Northwest Passage. He wound up exploring lands farther north than any of his contemporaries, and three major waterways bear his name. In the spring

of 1611, his crew mutinied and left Hudson, his son, and seven sailors in a small boat in the bay that would ultimately bear Hudson's name. They were never heard from again.

Europe's New World Empires

The unsuccessful efforts to find the Northwest Passage provided many unexpected successes for Europe's explorers. By the end of the 1500s, these explorers had reached many parts of the New World. And Europeans had established empires, colonies, and Western ways of life in all these new lands. For the first time in human history, mapmakers had finally begun to produce an accurate view of the entire globe. No longer was the globe shrouded in mystery.

And in time, the expansion driven by this knowledge would lead the Europeans to rule over, and exploit, huge areas called empires in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Spain initially controlled one of the largest of these empires, though it eventually lost everything, including its place as a world power.

But the native peoples of all these areas would never be the same. Diseases brought by the Europeans would kill tens of thousands of Native Americans in both North and South America. Seventy-five percent of the native population of the United States was eventually wiped out. In the centuries that followed, the survivors of this genocide were faced with broken treaties and stark poverty.

Spain's first contact with the native civilizations of South America also led to destruction and exploitation. But that harsh beginning was followed by the birth of a new people — Latin Americans, people of mixed Spanish, African, and Native American heritage.

So it may be ultimately impossible to say whether the Golden Age of Exploration was a story of greatness or a story of horrors. Perhaps the inspiring stories of the great bravery of the explorers, alongside horrific stories of looting, genocide, and slavery, can never be reconciled.

But one thing is certain — it was an age that opened up the world to massive changes in power relationships, economics, and knowledge, and generated the realities of present-day North and South America, realities that were forged in the painful contradictions that defined the Golden Age of Exploration.

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