

Christopher Columbus

For many years, Christopher Columbus was given the credit for discovering America.



Who was Christopher Columbus?

Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1451, to a merchant family. From an early age he was ambitious and adventurous, and believed he had been chosen to achieve great things. He began sailing as a young teenager and learned about map-making and navigation.

Columbus decided to seek his fortune by finding a quicker, easier route to the East Indies, which was where all the exotic spices were found - and spices meant great wealth at the time! He thought that the world was much smaller than it actually was, and that if he sailed west from Europe he would reach the East Indies, quicker than it could be reached by land along the increasingly dangerous Silk Road. He needed a sponsor for his explorations and went unsuccessfully to the kings of Portugal, England and France before finally persuading King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain to pay for his voyage.

Columbus set sail from Spain in August 1492 with three small ships - the Santa Maria, the Pinta and the Nina - and just 90 men. The ships stopped first in the Canary Islands to restock, and then set out across the Atlantic in September, reaching an island in the Bahamas on 12th October. Columbus named the island San Salvador and called the people he met there "Indians" because he was convinced he had reached the East Indies. He then went on to reach Cuba, which he thought was China (or Cathay, as it was called then) and Hispaniola. At Hispaniola the Santa Maria ran aground and had to be abandoned, so he left some of his men there to establish a colony and returned back to Spain, where he was received as a hero.

The following year he set off on his second voyage with 17 ships and 1200 passengers! He made four voyages to the New World in total, establishing settlements and discovering and naming many islands of the Caribbean and coastal regions of Central and South America along the way. His career ended in disgrace when he was accused of tyranny and incompetence and taken back to Spain in chains. Although he was later freed he became increasingly unwell in later life and died, aged about 54, in 1506, a very wealthy man.

Christopher Columbus never realised that he had reached a "new world" and died convinced that he had sailed west to the East Indies. When another Italian explorer, Amerigo Vespucci, realised what had happened, the New World was named after him - America.

Did Columbus discover America?

No! The first European to land in North America was a Viking, Leif Ericson, around 1000 AD. And of course the land was already populated by Native Americans. His voyages were, however, the beginning of the European exploration and colonisation of the Americas.

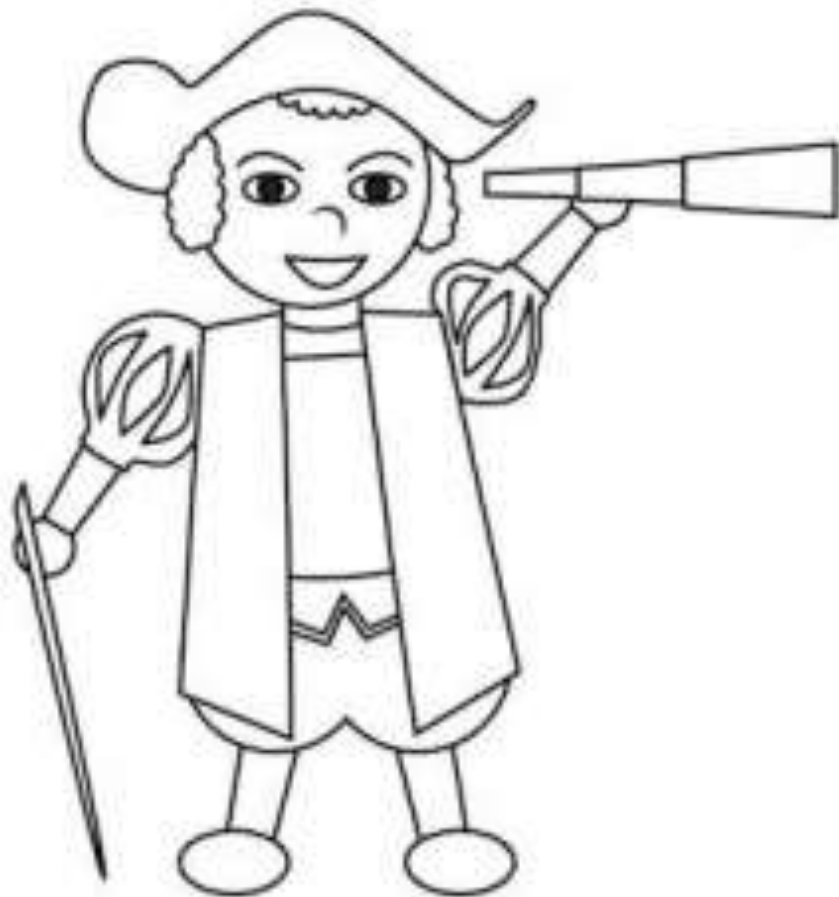


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This Christopher Columbus colouring page has a rhyme to help you remember the date.

In 1492,
Columbus sailed
the ocean blue.



Write a newspaper report on Columbus's 'discovery' using this Christopher Columbus newspaper writing prompt.

Village News

No. 12354

October 1492

1 gold coin

Columbus Lands in Indies



Christopher Columbus

Born: _____

Nationality: _____

Occupation: _____

What was he famous for? _____

Would you have liked to meet him?

What would you have talked about?



Learn to Draw Christopher Columbus

