

# The Age of Exploration

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# The Lure of Spices

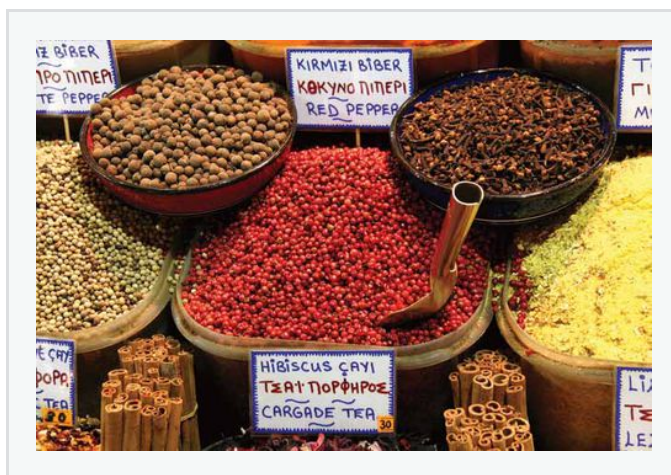
This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic Ocean and accidentally landed on islands off the coast of the Americas. His explorations marked the start of the Age of Exploration.

As news spread about what he had found, people from all over Europe wanted to explore the world. Many European explorers were hoping to find gold and other precious metals.

You can probably understand why explorers were eager to find gold. Gold is a valuable metal even today. However, you may be surprised to learn that many explorers were also excited about finding spices. You might be saying, “Spices? Really? Why were they so eager to find spices?”

Here’s the answer: Things that are scarce, or hard to find, tend to be expensive. That’s why gold is expensive today. That’s also why spices were expensive five hundred years ago. Back then, spices were scarce in Europe. They were hard to find. So they cost a lot. Some spices were almost worth their weight in gold.



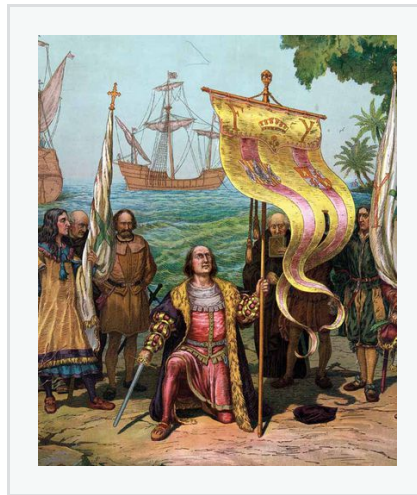
*Spices displayed in a spice market*

# The Age of Exploration

This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

In 1491, most Europeans did not know that North and South America existed. The people of the Americas did not know that Europe existed. Although other explorers had visited the Americas before, Europeans did not know that.

In 1492, that changed. In that year, Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic Ocean and accidentally landed on islands off the coast of the Americas. His explorations marked the start of the Age of Exploration.



*An artist's illustration of Columbus landing in the New World*

As news spread about what Columbus had found, men from all over Spain raced to find treasure. Spanish conquistadors, such as Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, set out in search of silver and gold. They slashed their way through swamps. They marched across deserts. They explored and conquered many lands.

A few years later, other European countries got involved. John Cabot went exploring for England. Henry Hudson explored for England and for the Netherlands. Samuel de Champlain explored for France.

These explorers changed the world. They connected Europe with the Americas.

# Second Sons

This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

Hundreds of years ago, explorers from different countries in Europe set out to explore the world. They wanted to find gold, spices, and land. Did you know that many of these explorers had older brothers? Very few of them were the oldest sons in their families. Can you guess why that might be?

It's not because firstborn children didn't want to go out and explore the world. It has to do with the laws in Europe at the time. Most countries in Europe had laws about who could inherit an estate. These laws stated that the oldest son in a family would inherit all of his father's land, goods, and money.

This was true for kings. When a king died, he would be replaced on the throne by his eldest son. A daughter could only become queen if a king had no sons.

This was also true for nobles. For example, if the Duke of Richland died, his eldest son would become the new Duke of Richland. This eldest son would inherit everything his father owned.

What did the younger sons and daughters get? Nothing.

This system is known as primogeniture. Primo means "first." "Geniture" means born.

Primogeniture is a system in which the firstborn son inherits everything when his father dies. This way of doing things seems very strange to us today. It also seems unfair. Most parents today would not leave all their money and property to their oldest son. They would split the money and property up among all their children. Why, then, did Europeans do things differently back in the 1400s and 1500s?

Noble families wanted to keep their lands together, so their families would remain powerful. That is why they passed laws of primogeniture. This was good news for the oldest son in each family. It was bad news for the other sons and for all the daughters. They had to find other ways to make money and gain power. One way to do this was to be an explorer. If you could not inherit anything in your homeland, why not sail off and discover some other way to make your fortune? This is, in fact, what many second sons did in the late 1400s and 1500s. They went in search of ways to make money they would never have inherited if they stayed in Europe.

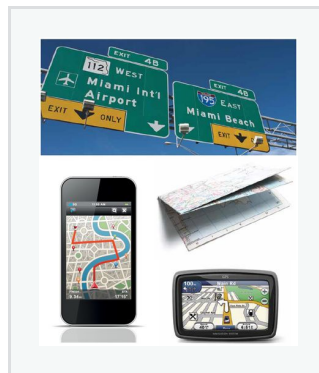
# Navigation in the Age of Exploration

This text is excerpted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

Do you ever go on trips with your family? How do the adults in your family find the places they want to visit? Do they write down directions? Do they use maps? Do they look for landmarks along the way? Do they have an electronic device that tells them where to turn?

Early European explorers didn't have most of those things. Most sailors in those days stayed close to land and looked for familiar landmarks. However, this would not work for explorers. They could not look for familiar landmarks because they were sailing into unknown waters.

Early explorers did have some maps but they were not always accurate. So how did the explorers keep track of where they were?



*Things we use today to find places we want to visit*

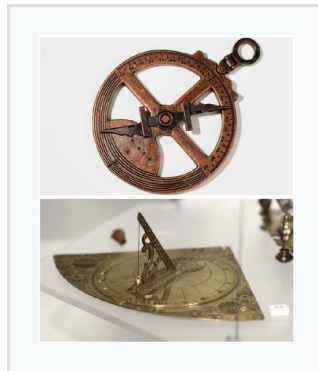
They had several tools that they might have used. One of them was a compass. A compass is a very simple device. It is just a little magnet that sits on a pin so it can spin. The pointer on the magnet points north. Back then, nobody knew why. Now, we know it's because Earth has a magnetic field, which is strongest at the poles. Magnets are attracted to the magnetic field of the North Pole.

Using a compass, a sailor could figure out which direction was north. Plus, if he knew which direction was north, he could figure out south, east, and west. That was a big help.



*A compass*

Explorers also used the stars to keep track of their position. Sailors in this day used two gadgets. One was called a quadrant. The other one was called an astrolabe. The details of how these gadgets work are complicated but the basic idea is not. The idea is that you can keep track of your position on Earth by keeping track of where certain stars appear to be in the night sky. If you can tell where the sun, the North Star and other key stars are, you should be able to figure out where you are on Earth.



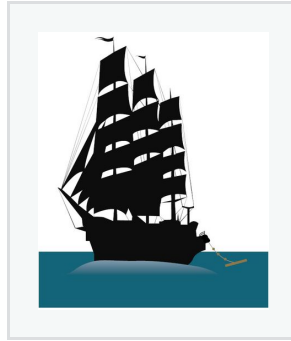
*An astrolabe (top) and quadrant*

Others may have kept track using a method called dead reckoning.

Here's how dead reckoning worked: a sailor had a piece of wood that was tied to a rope. The rope was knotted at regular intervals. There might be a knot every five feet. The sailor would toss the piece of wood overboard while the ship was sailing. When the wood hit the water, the sailor would turn over an hourglass.

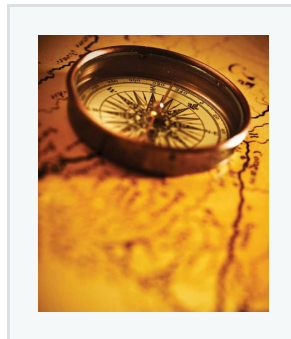
The sailor or the captain of the ship would then watch to see how much rope was pulled out of the ship and into the sea. If the ship was going fast, it would quickly leave the piece of wood behind. It would pull many yards of rope out of the ship before the hourglass ran out. If the ship was going slower, it would not pull as much rope out. Then, the person would count how many knots of rope

got pulled out of the ship before the hourglass emptied out. If you have ever heard of a ship's speed referred to as knots, this is a forerunner of that measurement of speed.



*Dead reckoning helped sailors keep track of how fast and how far they had traveled.*

A ship's captain could use dead reckoning to make an estimate of how fast the ship was moving. Then, he could estimate how far the ship would travel in an hour or a day. He could use a compass to know which way he was heading. He could put all this together to make an estimate of where he was.



*Explorers used many tools to help them navigate.*

# Life of a Young Sailor

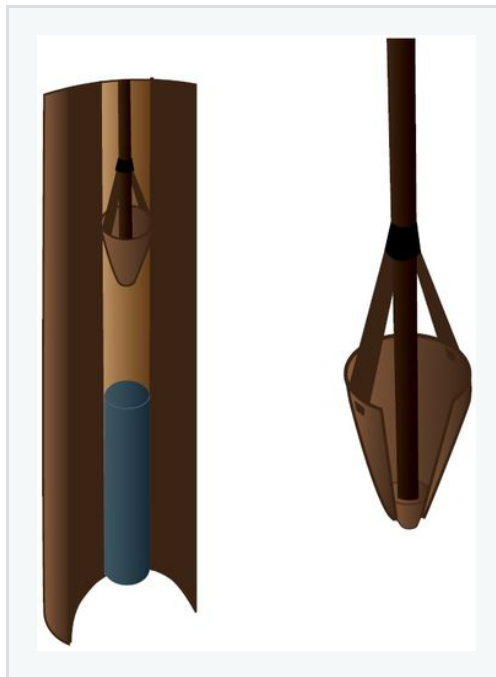
This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

In the Age of Exploration, many European explorers went on journeys around the world in search of land, gold, and spices. They sailed the oceans to explore the unknown. But life on the seas was no picnic. People on these voyages faced terrible food, illness, and poor living conditions. Here is a description of what life might have been like for young sailors on these journeys.

On a ship, young boys served as pages. On land, a page worked for a knight. At sea, he worked for a captain. Pages did all sorts of odd jobs. They carried messages, mopped the deck, helped pass out food, and cleaned up after meals.

Older boys might be asked to work the bilge pumps. Even the best ships sometimes sprang a leak. If a ship leaked too much, it might sink. To keep that from happening, sailors had to pump water out of the ship using a bilge pump. This was a terrible job. The bilge water was disgusting. It smelled bad and it made the sailors sick.

After pumping bilge water all day, it would have been great to sit down to a nice, warm meal. Unfortunately, sailors did not get many warm meals. For most meals, they got hardtack.



*A bilge pump used in Cabot's time*



Hardtack was a kind of bread that was baked over and over. Hardtack was so hard, it was tough to eat. Sailors had to soak it in a drink to soften it up. The good thing about hardtack, though, was that it would not spoil on a long voyage. It was so hard, bugs had trouble getting into it—unless it got wet. Once it got wet, weevils and other bugs could and did get into it. But you could usually see them and brush them off with your fingers.

If a voyage was going well, sailors might get other kinds of food. They might get a little salted meat now and then. They might get some fish or a few beans. But if supplies were running low, they might get nothing but hardtack.

The diet on sailing ships was so bad that many sailors got sick. Lots of them got a disease called scurvy. Today, we know now that scurvy is caused by a lack of vitamin C, found in fresh fruits and vegetables. In the Age of Exploration, people did not know this. So many sailors died.



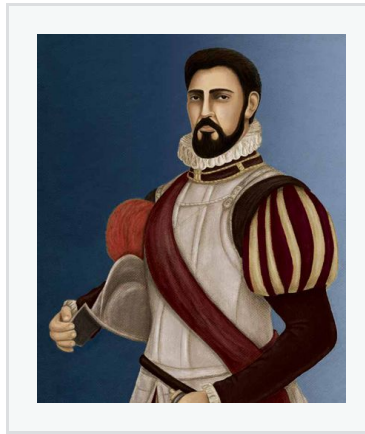
*Hardtack*

After a long day of work, sailors were ready to fall into bed and rest their aching bones. They were ready—but there were no beds for them to fall into. The captain had a bed to sleep in, but the sailors did not. They slept on the deck. As the ship rolled back and forth with the waves, the sailors rolled with it. Most sailors had to stand watch for part of the night. When that was done, they could sleep for a few hours. In the morning, they would get up and do it all over again. A sailor's day started bright and early.

# Coronado Reports to the King

This text is excerpted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

Francisco Vasquez de Coronado was a Spanish conquistador. He explored what is now the American Southwest in search of the Seven Cities of Cibola [SEE-boe-lə], which were said to have streets paved with gold. During the trip, Coronado wrote letters to the King of Spain. In his second letter, written in October of 1541, he described his march across the Great Plains to Quivira [Kee-VEE-rə], in modern-day Kansas. He told the king about the native people he and his men met. He also described the buffalo they saw, which he called “cows.” Below is an edited part of Coronado’s letter:



*Coronado*

Your Majesty,

After I sent my last letter, I met some native people from a distant land. They boasted of their land, which is called Quivira. They said the men there lived in large houses. They said their chiefs dined on dishes made of gold. I did not know whether to believe these reports. I made up my mind to go and see Quivira.

We set off last spring and reached the plains. These plains were vast—so vast that we could not see the end of them. They were flat and open with grasses that blow in the breeze. We traveled over them for more than 300 leagues. The plains were full of cows. There were too many of them to count. There was not a single day when we did not see some of them.



*A buffalo, which Coronado called a "cow"*

After 17 days, we met some native people. They are called Querechos [Ker-AE-koez]. They do not plant crops. They travel around with the cows. They eat the flesh of the cows they kill. They tan the skins of the cows and make clothes from them. They have little tents made of cowhide. They live in these tents while they travel around with the cows. They have dogs that carry their tents and poles from place to place.

We traveled 42 days more. At times, it was hard to find the way. On the plains, there are few landmarks. There are no hills. There are no stones, trees, or shrubs. All we could see was a sea of grass.

We lived on the flesh of the cows we killed. We went many days without water. Sometimes, what we drank was more mud than water. There are no trees on the plains except by the rivers. So, we could rarely find firewood.

After 77 days, we arrived in Quivira.