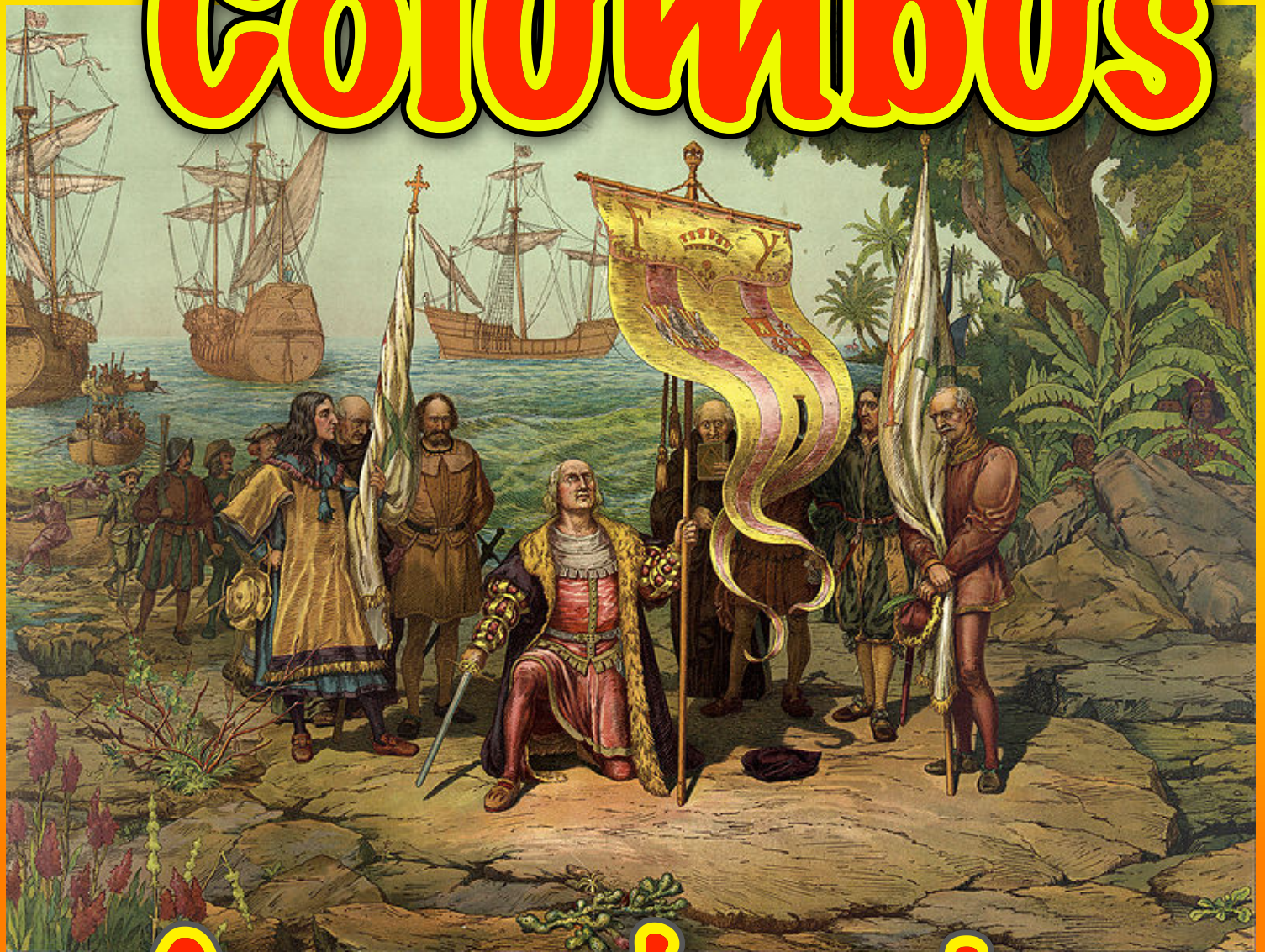


Christopher Columbus



Comprehension

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus was born in 1451 in Genoa, a busy Italian trading port. Columbus went to sea when he was thirteen, and soon became an experienced sailor and navigator. This was a time when merchants in Europe made money by trading spices and silks from Asia. The traditional sea route to Asia was going around the southern tip of Africa, then across the Indian Ocean to India, China and so to the Spice Islands (now called Indonesia). This route was long and dangerous, and one powerful nation – Portugal – could block others from using it. And so other wealthy trading countries in Europe were searching for a way to sail west to Asia rather than along the traditional eastern route.

But no one in Europe had yet explored what lay to the west. Yet some, including Columbus, were convinced that you could sail west to reach Asia. Columbus thought that the Spice Islands must be 2,400 miles west of Portugal (although a later explorer, Magellan, was to find out it was actually around 10,000 miles). Columbus was willing to make the journey, but he needed someone to pay for it. So he travelled around Europe telling kings of his plan to sail west. Most were not convinced. But eventually Columbus persuaded the king and queen of Spain to fund an expedition. In return, he promised to claim any new land for Spain, and to bring back riches.

In August 1492, Columbus set sail with a crew of ninety men in three ships. Because Columbus thought the Spice Islands were much nearer than they actually were, when he sighted land five weeks later, he thought he had reached the East Indies. Instead he had found an island in the Bahamas, which he named San Salvador, which meant 'Saint Saviour'. Columbus also explored the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola, and he claimed land for Spain as promised.

Columbus met native people on these islands, and he called them 'Indians' because he was sure he had reached the East Indies. He had simply not expected to find another continent between Europe and Asia. Columbus left some men behind to form a colony, before setting off home. He returned to Spain in triumph, and impressed the king and queen of Spain with the exotic gifts he brought back. As a result, they funded three more expeditions to the Americas.

For the rest of his life, Columbus thought the new land he explored was part of Asia. But he is often remembered now as the European who discovered America. Even though his own attempts at a colony failed, he opened the way for more European exploration and in time there would be settlement in the Americas.

Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'expedition'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'expedition' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'expedition'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'expedition'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'expedition' means.

Try this for other words, too. 

Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: port	harbour

Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

Eventually the king and queen of Spain agreed to fund Columbus.

Christopher Columbus was born in Genoa in 1451, and he went to sea aged thirteen.

No European had explored what lay to the west before, and Columbus had trouble getting funds for his expedition.

Columbus returned to Spain, and then went on three more voyages to explore the Americas.

At the time, there was only one sea route to trading posts in Asia. People in wealthy countries searched for an alternative.

Columbus set sail in 1492 and reached land in five weeks. He thought he had found Asia, whereas he had actually reached the Bahamas.

Get to the facts

1 When was Columbus born?

2 How old was Columbus when he first went to sea?

3 Who funded his expedition to sail west?

4 How many ships did he sail with?

5 Which continent did Columbus think he had reached?

Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.

On the horizon

Imagine you are someone living on one of the islands that Columbus explored. One day you are looking out to sea, when you see something strange on the horizon. As it gets closer, you think it might be a ship, but it is not like anything you've seen before... (now complete the story)

Below is a plain text version for printing:

Understanding words:

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- b From that sentence, suggest what 'expedition' means.
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Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym).

For example:

Key word – port Synonym – harbour

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Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense:

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