

# Christopher Columbus

## 1451-1506



In October, we celebrate Columbus Day. We have heard about Christopher Columbus' three ships. We know he found new land. We may know the poem *In 1492*. There are still many questions about him. Did he find Asia? Did he find gold and spices? Did he really discover America?

Many people wanted the riches of gold, silk and spices from Asia. They traded their goods for Asia's riches. Many people traveled by land and sea to the Far East. Some sailed around the tip of Africa. Christopher wanted to find a shorter route. He heard about an east-to-west ocean current near Africa. He had heard the old Viking tales who sailed the Northern Atlantic 500 years before. He planned to sail west across the Atlantic Ocean. Many thought he was crazy. He brought his idea to the Portuguese government. But, they were working on a route to Asia by sailing around Africa. This did not stop him. He knew his plan could work. He would find someone else to help him.

Christopher went to the King and Queen of Spain. They were too busy fighting a war. This did not stop Christopher. He made many friends in the royal court. He talked about his plans. He talked about the gold and riches that could be found and brought back to Spain. They liked this idea. When the war ended, the King and Queen had time to listen to his plan. They believed that Christopher's trip would be unsafe for any ship. The royal court did not agree. They spoke with the Queen. She gave Christopher what he needed for his trip.



Christopher left Spain with three ships and a crew of 89 men in August 1492. By October the small fleet found land. They named the island San Salvador. This land is now called the Bahamas. The crew met friendly Indians. The Indians wanted to learn about the strange men. They traded with them. They told them about gold on other islands. The fleet reached Cuba by late October. The captain of the *Pinta* took his ship to search for gold on their own. The *Santa Maria* and the *Nina* sailed to another island. They named it Hispaniola. Soon, the *Santa Maria* ran into a reef and broke up.

The crews of both ships would not fit on the smaller *Nina*. Christopher had the crew build a fort. They left 40 men behind. They would stay there until they could get a larger ship. When Christopher returned for them the next year, the fort had burnt. An Indian village nearby had burnt too. There was no sign of anyone. No one knows what happened. In January, the *Pinta* returned. The two ships returned to Spain by March 1493.

Christopher thought he had reached the Far East. He brought back some gold, some Indians, birds, foods and exciting stories. Christopher thought the Indians could be sold as slaves. The King and Queen were very happy with Christopher's findings. They wanted their kingdom to grow. They wanted more gold and treasures. They gave Christopher money and supplies to make three more trips. Each trip explored more land and built new colonies.

Christopher died in 1506. He thought he had reached Asia. More people sailed to the colonies he built. They knew this land was not Asia. It was a place no one knew was there. Christopher's findings brought good and bad changes to the new land. The Indians learned of people that lived across the wide ocean. Today, we celebrate Christopher for discovering the new lands that became the Caribbean and the Americas.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Christopher Columbus

1451-1506

### Discussion Questions:

1. What were people looking for from Asia?
2. Name one thing about sailing across the Atlantic east to west that made Columbus believe it could be done.
3. If, there were no North or South America between the west coast of Spain and the east coast of Asia, would Columbus have been able to get to Asia by sailing west from Spain? Why or why not?
4. Did Columbus find the “Indians,” as he called them, friendly or unfriendly when he first arrived in the new land?
5. What did Columbus think could be done with the Indians?
6. Columbus never did reach Asia even though he thought he did. Do you think he was a success or a failure? Why?