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# Christopher Columbus

## Resources

To enhance this study for your students, the following resources are recommended:

## Books to Read Aloud

*Christopher Columbus* by Jan Gleiter and Kathleen Thompson (Raintree Publishers, 1987)

*Meet Christopher Columbus* by James T. de Kay (Random House, 1989)

*The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann Wyss (Random House, 1999)

*Where Do You Think You're Going, Christopher Columbus?* by Jean Fritz (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980)

## Videos

Christopher Columbus Video and Activity Book (an animated video) For more information about this video, go to the NestFamily web site at: [www1.nestentertainment.com/store/product](http://www1.nestentertainment.com/store/product) Click on "animated hero classics."

*The Swiss Family Robinson* (Walt Disney Studios, 1960)

## Web Sites

[www.mariner.org/age/columbus.html](http://www.mariner.org/age/columbus.html)

This site provides pictures and interesting information about Columbus including maps showing the routes of his voyages.

[www1.minn.net/~keithp/index.htm](http://www1.minn.net/~keithp/index.htm)

At the Columbus Navigation Homepage, your students can see pictures and discover interesting facts about the three ships Columbus took on his first voyage as well as explanations of various types of navigation and navigational tools used in that time.

[www.shipsofdiscovery.org/columbus.htm](http://www.shipsofdiscovery.org/columbus.htm)

Students will enjoy this web site about recent efforts to find nine of Columbus' ships that sank during his four voyages.

[www.castellobanfi.com/features/story\\_3.html](http://www.castellobanfi.com/features/story_3.html)

What food did Columbus and his crew eat while sailing across the ocean, and what foods did they discover when they landed at their destinations? Your students will enjoy finding out this interesting information about eating in the 15th century.



# Christopher Columbus

## A Boy Named Christopher

The city of Genoa was on the west coast of Italy, and its harbor was always filled with ships. Sailors and traders from all over the world were a common sight on its streets. It was in this sailing town that Christopher Columbus was born in 1451. Though he was not born into a seaman's family (his father was a weaver and cloth merchant) Christopher quickly grew to love sailing. He once said that sailing makes a person wish to learn the secrets of the world. Everyone in town got used to seeing the red-haired boy squinting his eyes, looking out across the sea as if he could see the distant lands where he longed to sail.

He and two of his younger brothers had a small boat that they sailed in the Bay of Genoa. They often sailed to little islands in the bay and camped out overnight, spending their time fishing and swimming, and racing other boats back to the docks.

Chris heard stories about fabulous riches in a place called the Indies far away to the east. While he worked for his father making cloth, the boy dreamed of sailing to new lands and having adventures. Chris' job was to card wool by running a rough comb through it to get out the impurities. But he hoped someday to be a sailor. When he had the time, he sat quietly under the window of a nearby wine shop, listening to the sea tales of sailors inside.

Since he was needed to work in his father's shop, Christopher only went to school for a few hours a day, learning the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. His father taught him how to be a business man. When Christopher was 14 years old, he went with his father on a voyage to buy wool. They sailed for several days along the coasts of Italy and France. That must have been an exciting trip for the young would-be sailor. After that trip, Chris' father often let him go along on the trading expeditions. Perhaps in this way the boy began to learn how to be a true seaman. He noticed the changing colors of the sea and the patterns of the wind and currents. He closely watched the sailors handle the rigging, weigh the anchor and steer.

## Map Activity

Have students find Italy, then the city of Genoa, on a world map or globe. Ask them what sea Christopher Columbus would have sailed on as a boy. (Ligurian Sea) What bigger sea did this lead into? (Mediterranean Sea)

## Talking About Boats

Ask how many students have taken boat rides. Let volunteers share their experiences.

Talk about the fun of riding in a boat. Discuss the various kinds of boats one can travel in today. See how many students can think of (canoe, raft, kayak, rowboat, motorboat, sailboat, houseboat, paddleboat, yacht, tugboat, barge, cruise ship, aircraft carrier, submarine, to name a few). Talk about each kind of boat to make sure students understand the purpose of each and the way it is moved across the water.

Then ask each student to say which boat he or she would like to travel in and explain why. Where would they go? Who would they take with them? Would they work on the boat or just enjoy the ride and let someone else do all the work? How long would they want to be gone?



# Christopher Columbus

## Action Song

Have children sing this song and do the actions, pretending to be Christopher Columbus.

## Sailing Song

*To the tune of "My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean"*

I wonder what's over the ocean.

*(Lean forward to the left as you shade eyes with hand and look far away.)*

I wonder what's over the sea.

*(Lean forward to the right as you shade eyes with hand and look far away.)*

Someday I'll sail over the ocean

*(Move hand in wavy motion.)*

That will be an adventure for me!

*(Jump up and raise hands over head.)*

Sailing, sailing,

*(Move hand in wavy motion.)*

In a ship over the sea, the sea.

*(Point forward.)*

Sailing, sailing,

*(Move hand in wavy motion.)*

That will be an adventure for me!

*(Jump up and raise hands over head.)*

## Explorers Exploring

As Columbus was growing up, many explorers were searching for a direct, safe route to the East. The East Indies (Asia, especially China) was rich in gold, precious stones, silk and exotic spices. The spices were especially wanted because meat often spoiled in those days of no refrigeration. Spices made the meat taste better and flavored other food as well.

Traders had been bringing these popular items from the East for some time on overland trade routes to the city of Constantinople where they could be shipped to various European ports. But when the Turks invaded Constantinople in 1453, renaming it Istanbul, they cut off much of this trade. There was big money to be made for the country that could find a quick and easy way to get the Asian products to Europe. Portuguese sailors hoped to reach the East Indies by sailing around Africa, but no one knew for sure how far south Africa extended or even if it was possible to go around it! Some people believed that getting too close to the equator would be dangerous. Would they be burned to death in fiery waters? Could anyone live that close to the equator?

In spite of the difficulties and possible dangers, King Alfonso V of Portugal encouraged further exploration of a trade route. He hoped to pay off his debts with profits from the discoveries and trade. So Portuguese sailors relentlessly sailed various distances around Africa until Vasco de Gama sailed around the tip of Africa and made it all the way to India near the end of the 15th century. Unfortunately, during these voyages of exploration, the Portuguese stopped at many points along the way and captured Africans, later selling them for slaves. Slave trading became a big business.

## Map Activity

Have students find China on a map or globe. Then have someone point out Africa. Ask students if they think going around Africa would have been the best way to get to the East from Italy or Portugal. Were there any other possible ways to get there?

Have students point out Istanbul on the map or globe. Note its distance from China. Why would bringing things back from the East to Europe be better by ship than by land?

