

Summary: Europeans in America

The Age of Exploration

Marco Polo was an Italian merchant who began a journey to Asia in 1271. His book about his explorations made Europeans eager to go to Asia. Merchants knew they could make big profits selling Asian goods such as spices and silks. European rulers wanted to find safer, faster trade routes to Asia so their countries could become rich and powerful. In Portugal, sailors studied navigation and made new, faster ships. In 1498, Vasco da Gama sailed around the tip of Africa and east to India. His new route helped Portugal grow rich from trade with Asia.

Arriving in America

European people did not know the Americas existed. An Italian, Christopher Columbus, wanted to sail west from Europe to Asia. Queen Isabella of Spain agreed to pay for his expedition because she wanted to make Spain more powerful. She also wanted to spread Christianity. In 1492, Columbus sailed west to an island in the Caribbean Sea. He thought he was in the Indies, but he was not. He named the people he met Indians.

Columbus returned to the Americas three times. He claimed land for Spain. England, Portugal, and France also sent explorers to the Americas. Cabot claimed the coast of what is now Canada for England. Cabral claimed what is now Brazil for Portugal. Cartier claimed land on the St. Lawrence River for France. The Dutch, and later the English, sent Henry Hudson to find a sea route across North America.

These explorations changed both Europe and the Americas. Europeans took home new plants, such as corn, tomatoes, potatoes, and beans. They also brought new things to the Americas, including wheat, sugar, horses, and pigs. This movement of goods is called the Columbian Exchange. Some new things helped American Indians, such as horses and new foods. Europeans, however, also brought diseases that killed many American Indians.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

merchant *noun*, a person who buys and sells goods to earn money

profit *noun*, money left over after expenses have been paid

navigation *noun*, the science of planning and guiding the route of a ship at sea

expedition *noun*, a journey with an important goal

Columbian Exchange *noun*, the movement of goods between Europe and the Americas



After You Read

REVIEW Why did European rulers want to find safer and faster trade routes to Asia? Underline sentences that tell the answer.

REVIEW What new crops did Europeans find in the Americas? Circle the sentence that names crops Europeans took home.