

# 336. Christopher Columbus and the discovery of America

## Things to think about - KS2 - PDFs only

### Set Two - Things to Think About - 59 (A4) sheets.

low quality samples only

#### Columbus' Three Ships

The King and Queen of Spain made Columbus captain of the High Seas and gave him three ships - the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria. The Santa Maria was the flagship, the most important ship. Columbus was its leader but, the ship was not built for a very long voyage. It was a slow moving cargo ship.

The Pinta was a caravel. Of the three ships, it was the fastest. It was led by Captain Martin Alonso Pinzón.

The Nina was the smallest ship. It was a caravel led by Captain Vincente Yáñez Pinzón.

Onboard the ships were around 90 crew. They were all experienced sailors.



#### What is a caravel?

In 1990, author John Dyson and photographer Peter Christopher reconstructed Columbus' voyage to America. They built their own caravel which they called the new Nina.

The design of caravels was developed by the Portuguese. The ships were fairly small, very low and narrow. They were built to sail through shallow coastal waters.

Columbus' ships were fitted with square sails made out of a material similar to deer skin which meant that the sails caught the full force of the trade winds.

The ships were made completely out of oak which was coated with tar and a substance called oakum. Oakum was made out of old rope which was teased out and used to seal the seams. Even so, the ships of that time always leaked and the filthy water had to be pumped out every day.



#### Life Onboard - Food

- Everything the sailors needed for their journey was stored below deck.
- There was no room below deck for ordinary sailors so they had to sleep and live on the open deck - even during storms at sea!
- The crew usually had three meals a day but only one hot meal a day - if the sea was calm. If the sea was rough, burning 'fuel' might spill from the fire box and set fire to the ship.
- Cooking was done on deck in large copper kettles over a fire in a sandbox.
- Any fresh food had to be eaten before it began to rot, so it was eaten at the start of the voyage.
- Once the fresh food ran out the crew mainly ate hard tack, salted meat and fish.
- Rats and maggots often got into the food.
- Water was stored in barrels. After a week or so the water was bad because of bacteria. To make it drinkable they would add a little salt to make it drinkable.

#### Life Onboard - Work

- The type of job a sailor did depended on his experience and rank.
- The crew was divided into groups and each group was called a 'watch'.
- A watch usually lasted for four hours.
- Time was measured by the ship's boy who turned over a sandglass (also known as an hourglass) as time passed.
- All wooden boats leaked so stinking, dirty water had to be pumped out at least once a day.
- The decks had to be scrubbed.
- The sails had to be hoisted.
- Sails and ropes were made of animal skin.

#### What provisions did Columbus take on his first voyage?

Columbus had a crew of about 90 men. The ships carried enough provisions for a year. This was at a time when two weeks at sea was a long voyage. Here is a list of some of the provisions Columbus took with him on the voyage:

- Almost a ton and a half of unleavened bread, called vicchocho, baked in hard, flat cakes and made with salt to preserve it.
- More than one ton of wine in barrels. The wine would have been mixed with water, increasing the amount of wine as the water became contaminated.
- Barrels of water.
- Jars of oil and vinegar to be used as a food dressing.
- Bags of beans, chickpeas, lentils and rice.
- Strings of garlic.
- Dried fish.
- Salted meat and smoke-cured hams.
- Jars of honey.
- Sea biscuits known as hard tack
- Goat and ewe cheese.
- Bags of raisins, apricots, figs and almonds.
- Live pigs, sheep and hens for fresh meat. These animals were kept in pens on the deck of the ship.

#### What equipment did Columbus take on his first voyage?

Here is a list of some of the equipment Columbus took with him on the voyage:

- Cooking pots and fire irons.
- Spare ropes, pitch and canvas.
- Lanterns and candles.
- Linen and coloured cloth.
- Firewood.

He also carried items to trade with:

- Glass beads
- Scissors
- Mirrors
- Knives
- Needles and pins
- Brass rings, basins and bells
- Knitted caps

#### Columbus' Journal

Columbus kept a journal during the entire first voyage. He wanted to use it to report back to the King and Queen of Spain. In his journal he wrote that he had kept a fake log book of how far the ships travelled each day so that the crew wouldn't think they'd travelled as far as they had. On September 10th he told the King and Queen that they had sailed 60 leagues. In fact, they had sailed only 48 leagues. Columbus made the sailors think they were closer to land than they actually were but, the crew didn't keep the crew happy for long. The crew began to complain. They were angry with Columbus.

