

Summary: Europeans Arrive in the Americas

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus believed he could reach Asia by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. He asked King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain to pay for the trip. They were at war with North African Muslims. These North Africans had ruled southern Spain for 700 years. The Spanish rulers needed the money to pay for the war. They hoped Columbus would find riches. They also wanted to tell people about Roman Catholicism. Columbus landed on an island in the present-day Bahamas. He thought it was close to India. He called the peaceful Taíno people who lived there Indians.

The Columbian Exchange

The Spanish rulers wanted Columbus to start a settlement and look for gold. His ships carried horses, cows, pigs, wheat, barley, and sugar cane. These animals and plants were new to the Americas. The Spanish also carried new diseases. People died in epidemics. Most of the Taíno died. The settlement destroyed many plants and animals. Columbus took home new foods, including potatoes, corn, beans, peanuts, and cacao. This movement of plants and animals between Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas is called the Columbian Exchange. Potatoes became an important food in Europe.

Exploration Continues

Other European rulers soon sent their own explorers to the Americas to claim lands and find riches. Pedro Alvares Cabral claimed eastern South America for Portugal in 1500. In 1513, de Balboa saw the Pacific Ocean from Panama. Ferdinand Magellan tried to circumnavigate the Earth. He named the ocean Pacific, which means peaceful, because it looked so calm. Magellan was killed, but his crew was the first to sail around the world.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

settlement *noun*, a small community of people living in a new place

epidemic *noun*, an outbreak of a disease that spreads quickly and affects many people

circumnavigate *verb*, to sail completely around something



After You Read

REVIEW Why did Ferdinand and Isabella finally agree to give Columbus money for his voyage in 1492? Highlight the sentences that tell two reasons Ferdinand and Isabella wanted to pay for Columbus's explorations.

REVIEW How did the Columbian Exchange change the diet of Europeans? Underline the words that tell which food became important in Europe.

REVIEW Who named the Pacific Ocean and why? Circle the name of the explorer. Highlight the sentence that tells the answer.