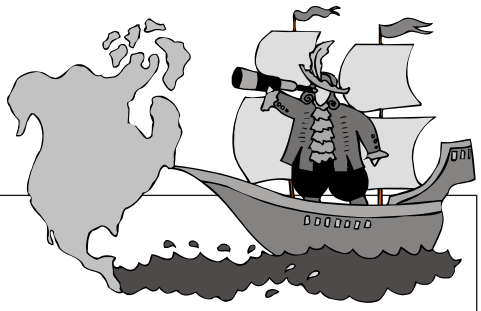
The Age of Exploration

Section 2.6
Voyages of Discovery



Section 2.6 Pre-View

- **Christopher Columbus** – explorer who sailed from Spain in 1492 and discovered the New World
- **San Salvador** – island where Columbus first landed in the New World
- **Indians** – the name Columbus gave to the natives he found on San Salvador
- **New World** – the first name given to the continents between Europe and the Far East; now known as the Americas
- **Columbian Exchange** – the exchange of plants, animals, and disease between Europe and the Americas after the voyages of Columbus

Armed with their navigational tools and sturdy ships, bold sea captains began their search for a sea route to the silks, spices, rugs, and foods that western Europeans craved. The Portugese took the lead by working their way around Africa to India and beyond. Using this route around Africa, Portugal had found its path to the riches of the East. Now Spain, France, England, and Holland would have to find another way.

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus was an Italian sea captain who was convinced he could make it to the East Indies by sailing *west*. In 1492, Columbus once again asked King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain for their help with his bold plan. The rulers of England, France, and Portugal had all said "no!" but the Spanish rulers were eager for their share of the spice trade. They agreed to finance the voyage. In August 1492, three ships, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria, set sail for the Canary Islands. From there, the tiny fleet slipped into the vast unknown of the Atlantic Ocean.

After more than a month and with the crew near mutiny, land appeared on the horizon. As Columbus waded ashore on **San Salvador**, as he named it, he was convinced he had found the East Indies. Unfortunately, he was nowhere near his destination. Even though this was not the East Indies, he called the inhabitants of the island **Indians**. The islands he discovered also became known as the West Indies.

Columbus had promised the King and Queen of Spain gold and riches. He returned to Spain with little gold and a few Indians to show for his trip. Although he made three additional voyages, he never found his way around the two continents that blocked his way to the Far East. He did, however, get credit for discovering the **New World**.

Question 1: What two mistakes did Columbus make when he thought he could get to the Far East by sailing west?

The first mistake Columbus made was to greatly underestimate the westward distance from Spain to China. Some disagreed with his calculations of distance and insisted the distance was greater. As it turned out, they were right and he was wrong. The second mistake was not realizing there were two continents blocking his way to the Orient. No one had any way of knowing about these continents, but it's a good thing they were there since otherwise, he and his men would have died at sea.

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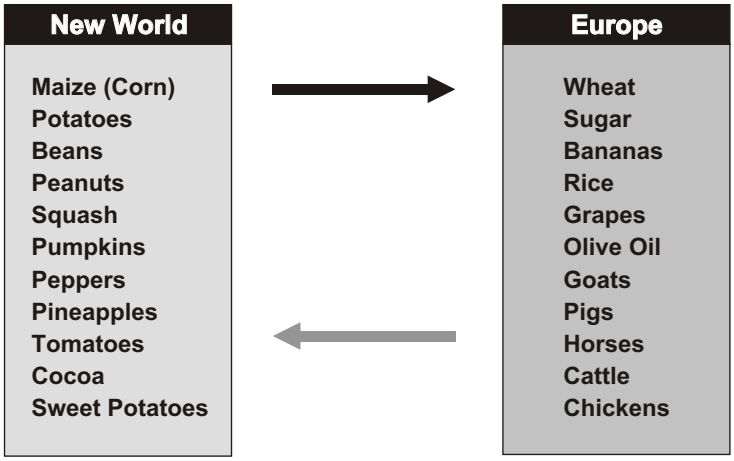
Columbian Exchange

Contact between Europe and the Americas began with the voyages of Columbus. But it by no means ended there. This first meeting of East and West started an exchange of culture that became known as the **Columbian Exchange**. Below is a summary of the positive exchanges.



The new food crops made a tremendous impact on the Europeans. Because of changes in their diets, populations actually grew. But influences from Europe were not always positive. European diseases proved deadly to Native Americans. Since they had not been exposed to the diseases of white Europeans, millions of Native Americans died at the hands of the invisible invaders (diseases) from the East.

Question 2: What made European diseases so deadly to Native Americans?

Since the Native Americans had never been exposed to the European diseases, they had not developed any immunity to them. When the body is exposed to small amounts of various germs, it develops **immunity**, the ability to fight them. The Native American "Indians" did not have immunity to European germs.

Practice

Match each description to the term that it describes. Some terms may be used more than once.

_____ 1. established trade routes to the Far East by going around Africa
_____ 2. negative aspect of the Columbian Exchange
_____ 3. ruled by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella
_____ 4. island where Columbus landed
_____ 5. planned to sail west to China
_____ 6. a food exchanged from Europe to the New World
_____ 7. a food exchanged from the New World to Europe
_____ 8. nation that sponsored Columbus' voyages

A. San Salvador
B. Columbus
C. Spain
D. Portugal
E. European diseases
F. corn
G. wheat

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