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Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy in 1451. His career in exploration started when he was very young. As a teenager he travelled the seas and eventually made Portugal his base. While spending most of his early years at sea, Columbus began to believe that he could find a shortcut to the Indies by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. He appealed to the kings of Portugal, France and England to finance his belief but all denied his request. After ten years Columbus was forced to present his idea to the King and Queen of Spain. In 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella agreed to pay for his trip. They gave him a crew and three ships, the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria. Columbus sailed aboard the Santa Maria.

After stopping in the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa, Columbus' ships hit the open seas. Covering about 150 miles a day, the trip was long and hard. The crew was afraid of sea monsters and grew more restless every day because land was not sighted and they wanted to turn around. Columbus offered a reward for the first person to sight land. After two months at sea, a crew member aboard the Pinta sighted one of the Bahama Islands. Columbus set foot on what he believed was one of the Spice Islands, a group of Islands in Asia (now known as Indonesia), where valuable spices and riches came from. He named the land San Salvador. Columbus failed to find the riches he expected, and continued to search for China. He next visited Cuba and Hispaniola (Dominican Republic). Columbus named the native people he saw "Indians", because he believed they were inhabitants of the Indies.

Columbus returned to Spain a hero. He was named viceroy of the Indies. Some began to believe that Columbus had found "a new world" rather than a shortcut to the Indies.

In actuality, Columbus found North America, a brand new continent at that time. Columbus, however, couldn't be convinced. He died with the belief he had found the shortcut to the Indies. Soon, however, other explorers and nations understood the importance of his discoveries. Columbus' discoveries set the stage for the Age of Exploration, one of the most fascinating and exciting times in world history. His discoveries were instrumental in the establishment of Spanish colonies in North America. Today, we celebrate Columbus Day in October to commemorate his discoveries.