

Read the opening paragraph of the information page on Columbus (21st Century)

1. What impressions do we get of Columbus?

What skills are the questions below testing? (LOCATION, INFERENCE or TECHNIQUE?)

- What impressions do we get of Columbus from the information page?
- Find 5 facts about Columbus' journeys.
- How does the information page make Columbus seem interesting?
- Where was Columbus born?
- How does the information page make us admire Columbus?
- How many miles could one of his ships travel in one day?
- Why was Columbus so determined to travel east?

Make a mark scheme for two questions – they need to be a mix of Location, Inference or Technique questions. When you've done this, give your partner 30 minutes to answer both questions.

Read the historical account of Columbus (19th Century)#

2. How does the writer try to persuade us that Columbus was a barbaric pirate?

The following questions are based on both texts.

3. How is Columbus is presented in each text? Use the following sub-headings to organise your answer:
 - Why he decided to discover new lands.
 - The impact he had on the wider world.
4. Compare how Columbus is presented in both texts.
5. Your school are considering holding a Columbus Day when all students will celebrate the achievements of the great explorer. Write a speech arguing for or against this proposal.

Columbus... the intrepid voyager!

Christopher Columbus - born Cristoforo Colombo - grew up in Genoa, Italy and had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and exploration. Even though he was very religious, he had an inkling that the world was round and decided to prove this by sailing west. This would also - he thought - help his Spanish masters to an easier route to India and Asia.



Admiral of the High Seas

15th century Europeans were not aware of the American continents and maps were not reliable. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain - with the promise of gold, spices and silk from the Far East - eventually gave him ships and a crew. He set sail in 1492. He was also determined to spread Christianity. In return, Columbus would be given the title "Admiral of the Ocean Seas."

The ships would cover about 150 miles a day. His crews would use a compass for direction and a knotted line (with a weight attached at the end) to measure speed. A sailor counted how many knots were let off the reel in set amounts of time and this would help to give a rough estimate of the distance travelled. Columbus - with his considerable experience - relied on 'dead reckoning' instead, meaning he used his experience, guesswork and observations to determine his ships' positions.

The routes he took to and from his discovered lands are ones we still use; his use of the Atlantic Canary Current was a sign of his genius.

Although his discovery of new lands led to the nearly complete destruction of the people of those lands, and their environment, Columbus appreciated the beauty of the places he discovered. 'Before me', he said, as he surveyed the islands of the Caribbean '...is the bounty of God's handiwork'.

Christopher Columbus opened up new worlds to Europe, and it is hard to overstate the significance of these discoveries and their impact today. The exchange of flora and fauna, of human beings and their cultures has left a mark on us today. During the Age of Discovery western Europeans acquired the ability to exchange information with nearly all parts of the world.

As one of the great pioneers of the age, Columbus deserves recognition for the intellectual transformation that occurred during the Renaissance. As a result of his endeavours, the modern age was ushered in, and the world would never be the same again.

When we begin a judicial inquiry into the condition of our fellow-beings, we should try to be as courteous as we can, but we must be just; consequently a man's fame and position must not turn us aside, when we are acting as historical investigators.

Therefore, we shall be bold and speak the truth, and although we shall take off our hats and bow very respectfully, we must still assert that Christopher Columbus was the first who practised piracy in American waters.

When he sailed with his three little ships to discover unknown lands, he was an accredited explorer for the court of Spain, and was bravely sailing forth with an honest purpose, and with the same regard for law and justice as is possessed by any explorer of the present day. But when he discovered some unknown lands, rich in treasure and outside of all legal restrictions, the views and ideas of the great discoverer gradually changed. Being now beyond the boundaries of civilization, he also placed himself beyond the boundaries of civilized law. Robbery, murder, and the destruction of property, by the commanders of naval expeditions, who have no warrant or commission for their conduct, is the same as piracy, and when Columbus ceased to be a legalized explorer, and when, against the expressed wishes, and even the prohibitions, of the royal personages who had sent him out on this expedition, he began to devastate the countries he had discovered, and to enslave and exterminate their peaceable natives, then he became a master in piracy, from whom the buccaneers afterward learned many a valuable lesson.

It is not necessary for us to enter very deeply into the consideration of the policy of Columbus toward the people of the islands of the West Indies. His second voyage was nothing more than an expedition for the sake of plunder. He had discovered gold and other riches in the West Indies and he had found that the people who inhabited the islands were simple-hearted, inoffensive creatures, who did not know how to fight and who did not want to fight. Therefore, it was so easy to sail his ships into the harbors of defenceless islands, to subjugate the natives, and to take away the products of their mines and soil, that he commenced a veritable course of piracy.

The acquisition of gold and all sorts of plunder seemed to be the sole object of this Spanish expedition; natives were enslaved, and subjected to the greatest hardships, so that they died in great numbers. At one time three hundred of them were sent as slaves to Spain. A pack of bloodhounds, which Columbus had brought with him for the purpose, was used to hunt down the poor Indians when they endeavored to escape from the hands of the oppressors, and in every way the island of Hayti, the principal scene of the actions of Columbus, was treated as if its inhabitants had committed a dreadful crime by being in possession of the wealth which the Spaniards desired for themselves.

Queen Isabella was greatly opposed to these cruel and unjust proceedings. She sent back to their native land the slaves which Columbus had shipped to Spain, and she gave positive orders that no more of the inhabitants were to be enslaved, and that they were all to be treated with moderation and kindness. But the Atlantic is a wide ocean, and Columbus, far away from his royal patron, paid little attention to her wishes and commands; without going further into the history of this period, we will simply mention the fact that it was on account of his alleged atrocities that Columbus was superseded in his command, and sent back in chains to Spain.