

Great Leaders in History

Melissa Bontadelli

Week One: Explorers – The Age of Discovery

Objective: to learn the timeframes and overview of the Age of Discovery

Lesson 1: Overview



Ptolemy's World Map from the 2nd Century

The Age of Discovery began primarily with Portugal and Spain. Portugal began the systematic mapping of the Atlantic and the coast of Africa in the early 1400s. Spain focused their attention on the new world and the Americas. France, England, and the Dutch all joined in the exploration and discovery but much later.

There were many reasons exploration by ship became important. The old trade routes along the Silk Road were now under Muslim control, and many Europeans could no longer trade over the old land routes. There were also technological advances in shipbuilding and compasses that made navigation and travel by sea much easier. Explorers were also looking to discover riches for their country.

There were many famous explorers during this time. Some of the first were Leif Eriksson and Prince Henry the Navigator. Later explorers include men like Christopher Columbus and Vasco de Gama. Many of the famous names in navigation can be found in areas and countries across the Americas.

Whatever reason these explorers had for their desire to discover new routes or lands, it changed the world forever. Empires grew from newly found land and resources. The understanding of the world and its lands grew.

Activity

Identify Portugal, Spain, and Italy. Which area is called the Iberian Peninsula?



Lesson 2: Portugal and Spain



Portuguese Trade Routes (Blue) in 1568

Portugal launched the Age of Discovery. Among the pioneers in Portugal, one explorer was Prince Henry the Navigator. During his life, Henry the Navigator sent out more than fifty expeditions down the coast of Africa. His expeditions used a new type of boat called a caravel. He never went on the voyages himself, but his interest and curiosity prompted more Portuguese explorers to travel down the coast of Africa.

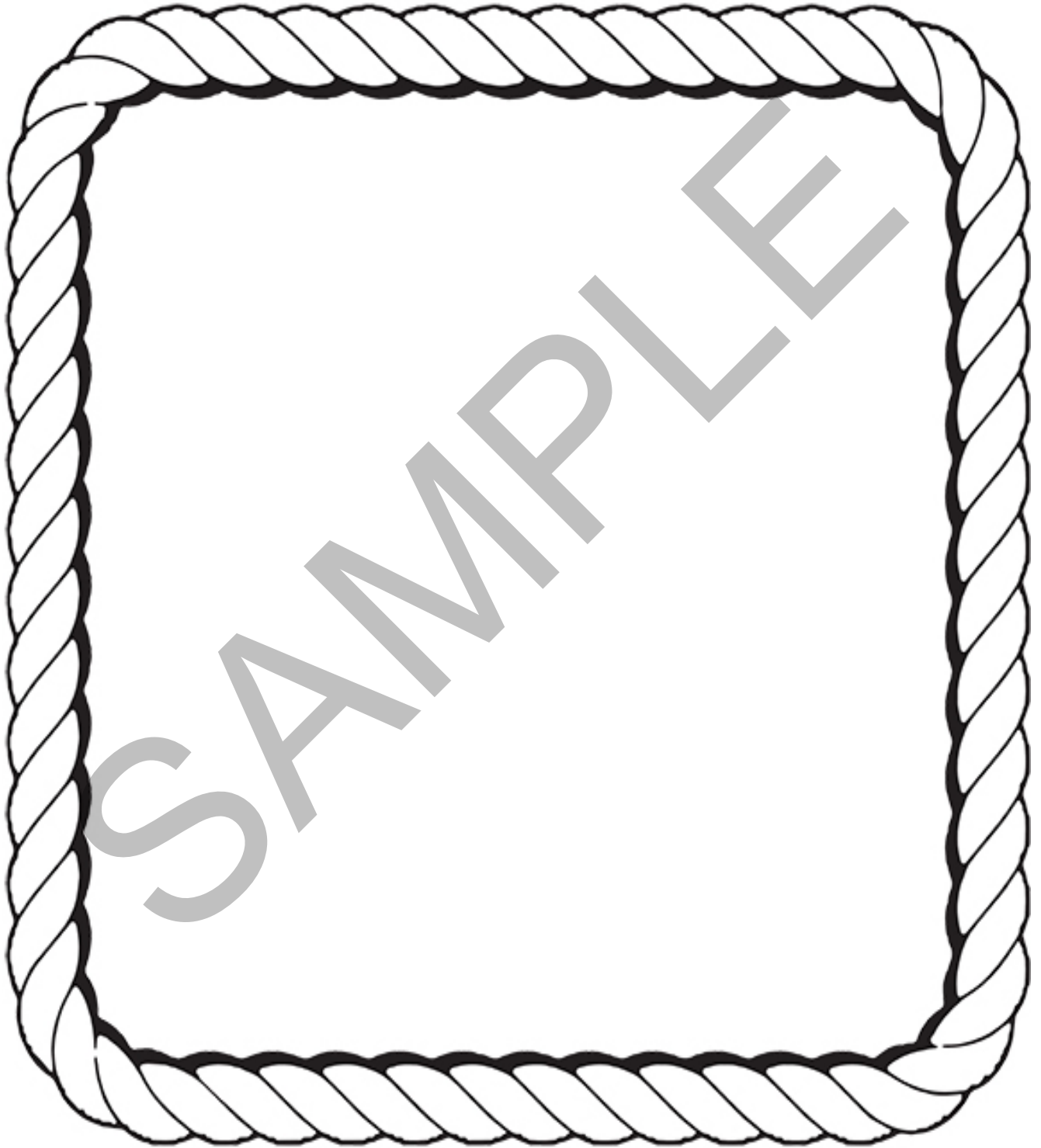
The Portuguese first discovered the Madeira Islands in 1419. After the Madeira Islands, they went farther and found the Azores in 1427. These explorers continued to push farther and farther down the coast of Africa. In 1490, the Portuguese reached the Cape of Good Hope. Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama followed their route all the way to India in 1498.

Spain was behind Portugal in exploration. Portugal had freed itself from Muslim rule long before Spain. It wasn't until Spain was unified again under the crowns of Castile and Aragon that Spain began to explore. In 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella conquered the last Muslim land in the Iberian Peninsula. That same year, they funded Christopher Columbus on his voyage to find the Indies through a different route than Portugal was exploring.

Columbus found the island of San Salvador, instead of India, which today is a part of the Bahamas. He also explored Hispaniola, which today is Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Columbus made three more trips to the Americas. He explored parts of Cuba and the Central American coast. He also led the way for other Spanish explorers. Men like Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro followed the journey of Columbus to the Americas.

Activity

Find some pictures of caravels. Try and draw your own caravel here.



Lesson 3: Early Explorers



Painting of The Landing of The Vikings

Before Columbus found the new world, it was found by a Viking. Leif Eriksson was the son of Erik the Red who founded a settlement in Greenland. Leif became the leader of the settlement after his father's death.

Leif was born in Iceland. He moved with his father to Greenland in 985. In 999, Leif sailed to Iceland and then went to Norway. When he was in Norway, he became a Christian. He brought Christianity back to the community in Greenland and preached to the other settlers.

A Norse sea captain brought tales to Greenland of a land he had spotted to the west. Leif went off in search of this in 1000. Leif made no maps of this voyage, so no one is sure where they landed, but he and his crew found a land covered in grapes. They called this Vinland and spent the winter there. They returned to Greenland after the winter, and Leif did not go back to the new land.

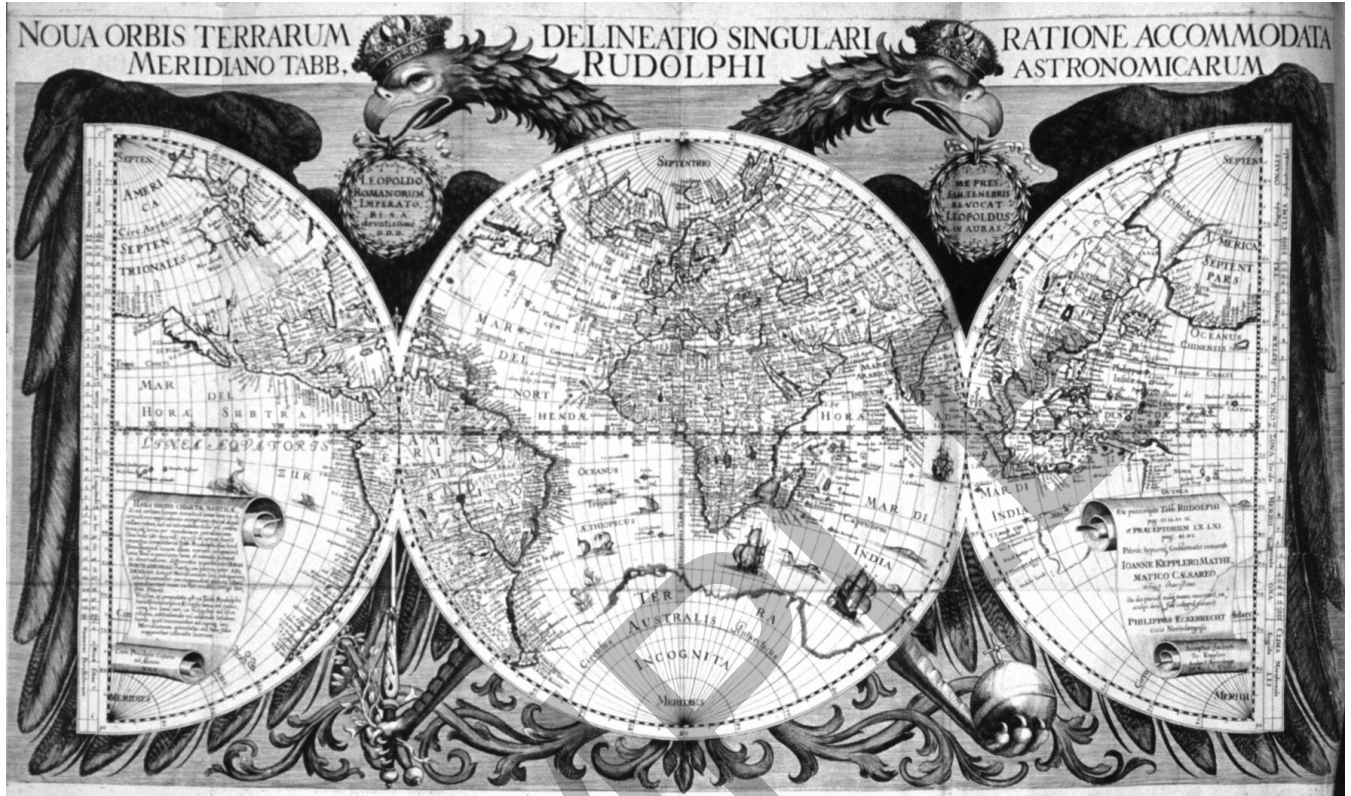
The tales of Leif Eriksson's voyage and crew is told in Icelandic sagas. Sagas are stories that are mostly about ancient Norse history. The sagas describe Leif finding land they called Flat Rock Land, but they continued to move south on their journey until they found Vinland. Remains of a Norse settlement have been found on the island of Newfoundland.

Activity

Define the following terms associated with exploration.

1. Caravel
2. Discovery
3. Silk Road
4. Navigation
5. Compass
6. Cape of Good Hope
7. Iberian Peninsula
8. Sagas

Lesson 4: Effects of Exploration



World Map by Johannes Kepler

The development of alternate trade routes to the east changed the economic picture of Europe. The center of the economy moved from Italy and the other Baltic nations to the west and cities like Antwerp and Amsterdam.

Suddenly these western European countries had a lot more spices, silks, and other goods from the east. Chinese pottery became so popular it was named china, and other nations attempted to duplicate the designs and methods.

The discovery of silver and gold in the new world also caused problems. Spain flooded the market with their silver. This caused inflation. Inflation is a sustained increase in prices of goods and services over time. The prices of goods didn't just rise for a short time, the inflation meant that the prices rose and stayed higher.

The one benefit the inflation had been for the tenet farmers in England. These farmers saw real decreases in their rent. Some of the lords even opted to sell their land, which allowed for small-land-owning farmers to develop.

Lesson 5: Quiz

1. What two countries are credited with starting the Age of Discovery?
2. What country was Henry the Navigator from?
3. Who sailed to North America in 1000?
4. What year did Columbus sail to the new world?
5. What is a sustained increase in prices of goods and services over time?

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Going Deeper

Video

[The Age of Discovery 1400 1550](#)

[World History The Age of Discovery in 5 Minutes](#)

Readings

[World Book: The age of European exploration](#)

[World Book: Navigation](#)

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