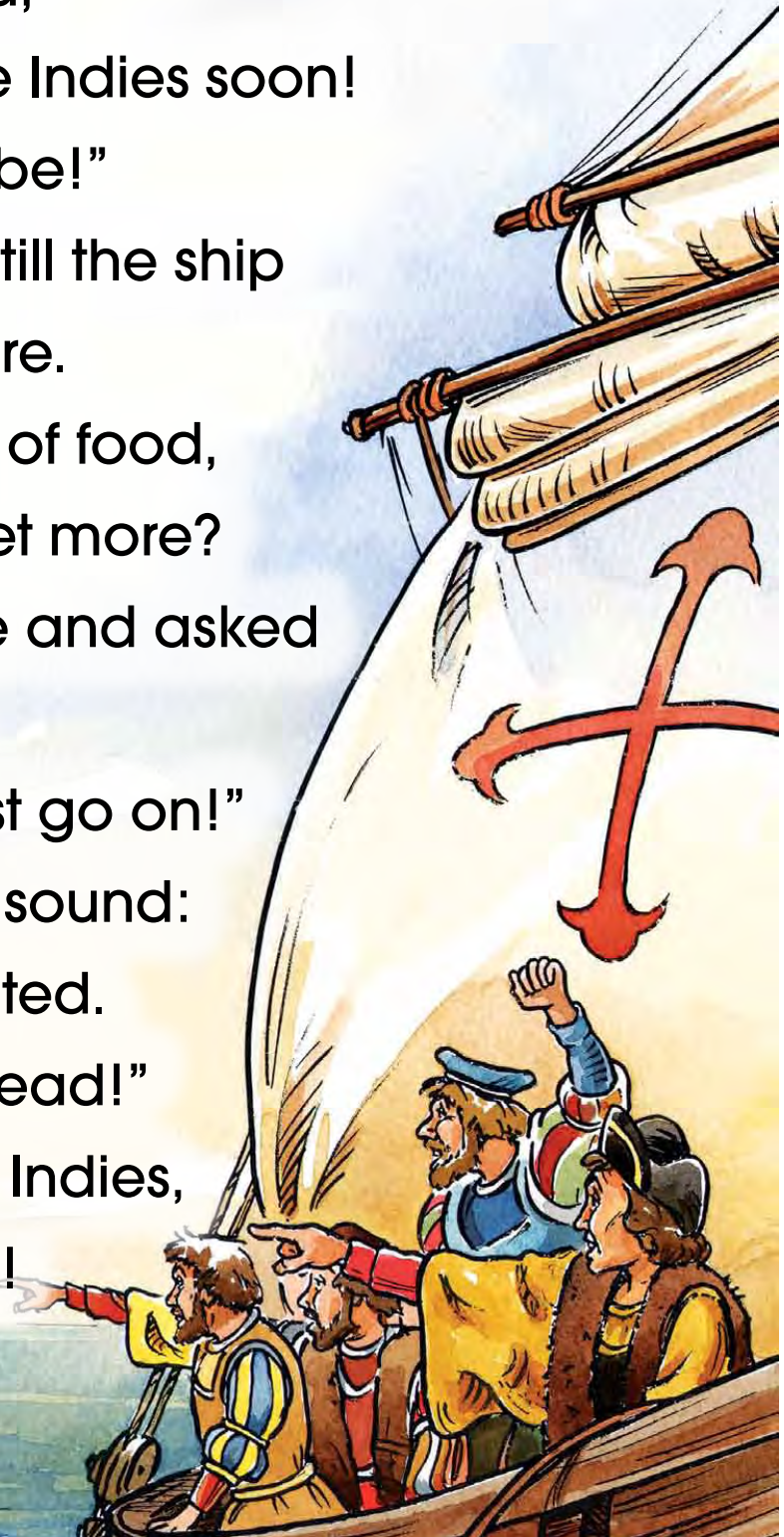


Christopher Columbus



Columbus at Sea

As Christopher Columbus sailed
Across the deep blue sea,
He thought, "I'll reach the Indies soon!
How nice that place will be!"
But weeks went by, and still the ship
Was nowhere near a shore.
The crew was almost out of food,
And where could they get more?
They wanted to go home and asked
To turn the ship around.
Columbus said, "We must go on!"
And then they heard the sound:
"LAND HO!" a sailor shouted.
"I see people straight ahead!"
They hadn't reached the Indies,
But the Americas instead!



Christopher Columbus

(Born: 1451; Died: 1506)



Christopher Columbus was Italian, not American, but he is an important part of American history. In 1492, Columbus wanted to sail from Spain to China and India to look for gold. He knew he'd need to sail around the whole world to get there! Ninety sailors went on three ships: the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*.

The trip was very hard. The men were at sea for seventy days! Finally, they spotted land. Columbus thought they'd reached India, but he was wrong. It was a different place that people from Europe had not visited before.

When Columbus arrived, the Taíno people were already living there. Since Columbus thought he was in India, he called them "Indians." When Columbus went home, he told everyone about this "New World." Soon others visited. After a while, settlers began to move to the place we now call America.

Teaching Tips

At the heart of every good story is a compelling character—and the story of our country is no different! This mini-lesson features a brave and heroic explorer—Christopher Columbus—an ideal person to read and learn about in October, or any time!

Columbus' tale is told in a catchy, rhyming poem, making the content easy to understand—and remember. As a companion to the poem, you'll find a short, read-aloud biography that provides more background information. And of course, the poem and the biography do much more than teach content. Designed for shared reading, this pair is a natural for boosting literacy skills.

It's time to rhyme, America! Enjoy!

Before Reading

Print and distribute copies of the poem, or display on an interactive whiteboard. Make sure children can see the text, whether working with the whole class or a small group.

Before introducing the poem to children, find out what they may already know about the subject. Ask questions to spark prior knowledge, for instance: *What do you know about George Washington? Where can you see his face?* You might then pass around a dollar bill for children to examine.

For figures who may be less familiar to children, such as Dian Fossey, you might begin a more general discussion: *What's your favorite wild animal? Do you think it's important to protect animals in the wild? Why?*

Finally, read the person's name aloud and have children look at the illustration. If appropriate, you might explain the holiday or occasion behind your reading.

During Reading

The first time you read the poem, read it the whole way through, giving children a chance to appreciate the language, rhythm, and rhyme. Use your voice to accentuate the natural beats of the language, as well as to express meaning.

On a subsequent reading, you might try doing a line-by-line echo reading of the poem. Read a line aloud, then have children echo it back to you.

When children have heard the poem several times, try doing cloze activities with predictable text. You might place a sticky note over the second word in a rhyming pair. When you come to that point in the poem, pause and have children supply the word.

Read the poem in different shared reading combinations. Partners can alternate lines. Groups can do choral readings of stanzas. You might even try a round-robin version!

When you read the biography, go over any vocabulary that may be difficult for children. Then read the piece aloud, slowly and clearly. If you like, use a pointer or your finger to track the text.

You can use chunks of the biography text for fluency practice. Model pacing, tone, and expression, and then have children repeat the chunk after you.

After Reading

Invite children to share their feelings about the subject and his or her accomplishments. What did they like best about this person? If they could meet the person, what questions would they ask? If children have a lot of questions about a particular subject, do research to find out more!

Invite children to create their own illustrations for the poem. They can show a scene in the subject's life and add a caption. Bind the pages together for a class book!

Have children dramatize a scene from the person's life story. They can work in small groups to improvise action and dialogue.

Give children a writing prompt. They can write a letter to the person, or pretend to be the person and write a journal entry. Younger children might write a postcard or dictate a short message.

Try the comprehension questions below to assess how well children grasped the biographical information. You can use the questions as homework, in class, or for an impromptu quiz-show-style game!

See How Well You Know...

Christopher Columbus

What was Columbus looking for when he set off on his trip?

Why did Columbus call the Native Americans "Indians"?