

Columbus's First Voyage

Name: _____ Date: _____

Christopher Columbus, the famous explorer, traveled to the Americas while searching for an all-water route to China. Columbus began his career at sea sailing on Italian merchant vessels and studying navigation in Portugal. Throughout these years, Columbus theorized that Europeans could reach China by sailing west. After years of study, he approached the rulers of several European countries to fund his exploration. Spain's King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella agreed to fund the voyage and in August of 1492, Columbus set sail from the Spanish port of Palos with three ships and 88 men. Columbus described this first voyage to the Americas in his ship's log. We can learn many facts about the events and dangers of the first voyage from Columbus's own words. However, we can also use this log to learn about the relations between Columbus and his crew.

Read the ship's log excerpts written by Christopher Columbus. Use the log entry to help you answer and discuss the questions. Discuss your ideas and answers with the class.

Primary Source Tips Reading historical documents may be hard for you if they contain words or word forms you are unfamiliar with. If you find words you do not know, look them up in a dictionary or use the other words in the sentences to help you figure out what they mean.

September 24, 1492: "I am having serious troubles with the crew, despite the signs of land that we have. . . . In fact, the more . . . signs that we are near land, the more their impatience and inconstancy increases, and the more indignant they become against me. All day long and all night long those who are awake and able to get together never cease to talk to each other in circles, complaining that they will never be able to return home. They have said that it is insanity and suicidal on their part to risk their lives following the madness of a foreigner. They have said that not only am I willing to risk my life just to become a great Lord, but that I have deceived them to further my ambition. . . . I am told by a few trusted men . . . that if I persist in going forward they will throw me into the sea some night. They will then affirm that I fell overboard while taking the position of the North Star with my quadrant. Since I am a foreigner, little or no account will be asked of the matter. . . . I know that Mart'n Alonso [captain of the Pinta] cannot be trusted. He is a skilled mariner, but he wants the rewards and honors of this enterprise for himself. . . . I must use him, for his support is too great among the men. I am also confident that if I lose command, the fleet will never reach the Indies and will probably never get back to Spain."

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1. Why did Columbus think his crewmen were unhappy? Whom did Columbus fear might replace him?

2. Based on this log entry, what type of relations do you think Columbus believed he had with his crew? Explain.

3. Based on this log entry, how important did Columbus think he was to the expedition? Explain.
