

Globe Skills Lesson 2

Paving the Way for Columbus - Grade 6+

Skills used Latitude & Longitude
Using scale to measure distance
Using directions
Critical thinking
Tracing routes on a map
Drawing logical conclusions

Vocabulary expedition

Materials Needed Globe in Horizon Ring Mounting

Lesson

In the following activity, your globe will help you better understand the events that led to the historic expedition of Christopher Columbus in 1492.

On your globe, locate and circle the following locations:

A portion of Western Europe that includes the countries of the United Kingdom (of which England is a part), France, Spain, and Portugal. Center your circle at 45°N/7°W.

The Molucca Islands (part of the East Indies) at 5°S/127°E

Eastern China. Center your circle at 35°N/112°E and include the cities of Beijing, Tianjin, Jinan, Xi'an, Nanjing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai.

The Cape of Good Hope 35°S/18°E

The country of India 20°N/75°E

The country of Iran (ancient Persia) 33°N/50°E

All of the above locations will be used in the following activity. When they are mentioned, refer to them on your globe.

In the revival of learning that occurred during the Renaissance, more and more Europeans became aware of the rich trade goods that were available from Asia. As they learned about these goods it was natural that they should want some of these exotic things for themselves.

In western European countries such as England, France, Spain, and Portugal, two of the most sought after items were fine silks from China and spices from the Molucca Islands (also known as the Spice Islands). Unfortunately for the Europeans, these items were hard to obtain. In addition to the control of the Middle Eastern trade routes by the Ottoman Turks, there was another major reason that made it difficult to transport goods from Asia to Europe. What do you think this reason might have been? (1.) _____

Use your globe to measure the distance between Spain and the Molucca Islands. How far is it? (2.) _____

Not only were Asian goods hard to get, but they were also very expensive. Middlemen bought and sold the goods many times as they moved in caravans along the Silk Road or while being transported over land and sea by way of India and Persia. These numerous sales increased the final cost of each and every item.

The difficulty of getting Asian goods to Western Europe, along with the high prices, provided a great economic opportunity for someone who could find a quicker and less expensive way to move the goods from their sources to the customer.

The Europeans knew that a direct sea route to Asia, if one existed, would offer the best opportunity to tap into this wealth. Even though a sea route might be longer, it would still be faster, and it would eliminate the numerous middlemen and thus lower the cost of the Asian goods.

On your globe draw the three sea routes from southern Spain to the Molacca Islands that would have been possible in the 1400s. Remember, the Suez Canal and Panama Canal were not built until hundreds of years later. (3.) _____

Which of these sea routes do you think would have been the best choice? (4.) _____

Why do you think such voyages were not already being made in the mid 1400s? (5.) _____

In the mid 1400s none of the routes you drew on your globe had been discovered. Even though most educated people of the time knew that the earth was round, they did not know if the surface of the earth was mostly land that surrounded the oceans or if the earth's surface was mostly water that surrounded the lands. As a result, until the opportunity to grow rich trading in Asian goods came along, there was not much reason for governments to put up money for risky voyages into unknown seas.

Imagine that you are the Queen or King of Spain and the year is 1492. You want your country to grow wealthy by being the first in Europe to establish direct sea trade with Asia. You have heard reports that your rivals, the Portuguese, have recently rounded the Cape of Good Hope and determined that the Atlantic and Indian Oceans are part of the same large body of water. They are presently planning additional voyages that might take them all the way to Asia. If successful, these voyages could enable the Portuguese to gain control of the silk and spice trade into Western Europe.

Now an Italian seaman by the name of Christopher Columbus is asking you again to fund an **expedition** that he claims will enable him to reach the riches of China and the East Indies by sailing west beyond the known limits of the Atlantic Ocean. He tells you that he can make the voyage in just a few weeks. The **expedition** will be costly with no guarantee of success, and very few of your close advisors agree with Columbus. What would be your decision?