The Age of Discovery (1500-1700 C.E.)

You Mean the Americas Were “Discovered”? &

European Trade with Asia

As far back as the Roman Republic, Europeans wanted products from Asia. Goods that were traded included cloth, silk, **spices**, and **gems**. The trade routes, including the famous Silk Road, crossed the Byzantine Empire, a Christian nation. However, in 1453, Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, was captured by the Ottoman Turks who were Muslims.

At that point, Europeans began to look for trade routes to Asia which did not cross lands controlled by Muslims. To do so, goods would have to be carried by ship. New technology made these trade voyages possible. For example, the astrolabe, a tool used by Arab sailors to find locations by measuring the position of the planets and stars, permitted sailors to travel greater distances for longer periods of time.

European Explorers Sail to Africa, India and the Americas

The first European nations to send explorers seeking new routes to Asia were Portugal and Spain. Later, England, France, and the Dutch also prospered from exploration. One of the most important adventurers was Prince Henry of Portugal. Henry used his wealth to pay for voyages along the western coast of Africa. He also started a school to teach sailing, navigation, and map-making. Portuguese sailors increased Portugal’s power in the world. In 1488, Bartolomeu Dias reached the southernmost point of the African coast. A storm pushed Dias’ ship around the tip of Africa and Dias and his crew became the first Europeans to sail into the Indian Ocean. Vasco da Gama, in 1498, sailed from Portugal to India, a voyage of 27,000 miles. By 1510, Portugal captured the city of Goa in western India.

Spain, too, wanted to grow rich from trade with Asia, but instead of sailing to Africa and India, the Spanish king and queen supported the voyage of Christopher Columbus. Columbus believed that merchant ships could reach Japan, China, and India by sailing west from Europe. In 1492, Columbus crossed the Atlantic. However, instead of arriving in Asia, he reached the Western Hemisphere. Columbus made a total of four voyages to the “New World,” also known as the Americas.

European nations wanted to create **colonies** in the Americas. In 1494, Portugal and Spain agreed to divide the world in half by signing the **Treaty of Tordesillas**. In this agreement, Portugal was given influence over Africa, the Indian Ocean, and the eastern part of the South America (today, Brazil). Spain would control North and South America and any trade routes through the Pacific Ocean. In 1519, Spain sent Ferdinand Magellan on a journey to Asia by sailing around South America. Magellan sailed across the Pacific Ocean and although he died during the journey, his crew returned to Spain in 1522. This is the first time a ship had sailed around the world. The English and French sent explorers across the Atlantic to North America in the hope of finding a route to Asia. John Cabot, in 1497, set off to explore the coast of Canada though his **fleet** of ships was lost at sea. Nearly 100 years later in 1577, Francis Drake sailed around the world, flying the flag of England. Drake also became a **privateer** who attacked Spanish merchant ships in the Americas.
European Explorers Sail to Africa, India and the Americas (cont.)
In 1534, French explorer Jacques Cartier became the first European to sail to the Saint Lawrence River and gave the name “Canada” to that territory. Cartier failed, however, in finding a route to Asia. By 1600, the Dutch had entered a “Golden Age” of trade. Through exploration, their merchant fleet became the greatest in the world. To help manage their economic plans and fortunes, the Dutch East India Company (1602) and Dutch West India Company (1621) were created. These companies are considered to be two of the earliest multinational corporations ever created.

Impact of Exploration
Because of European exploration, Christianity was carried to the New World, India, and southeast Asia. European sailors and merchants created trading posts along the coast of Africa and traded in gold and slaves. In Asia, European companies, especially from Portugal, England and the Netherlands, controlled the spice trade. In the “New World,” Spanish explorers quickly conquered territories in North and South America. Hernan Cortez defeated the Aztec Indians in central Mexico in 1521. By 1532, Francisco Pizarro conquered the Inca Indians in western South America.

Key Vocabulary
| Spices: plants and herbs used to flavor food. The most common spices are pepper, cinnamon and vanilla. |
| Southernmost: the point of land furthest to the south; also, northernmost, easternmost, westernmost |
| Colony: territory in one place under the control of a nation in a distant place. Plural form is colonies. |
| Treaty: a formal agreement or contract between two or more groups or nations |
| Trading post: a place (building, city, port) where merchants exchange goods |
| Fleet: a large group of ships |
| Privateer: someone who is given permission by a ruler to attack another country’s ships |
| Multinational Corporations: a company with manufacturing and sales in one or more foreign countries |

Quick Review
1. Complete the diagram.
   Which answer best replaces the “?”
   A. Circumnavigation
   B. Treaty of Tordesillas
   C. Causes of the Thirty Years’ War
   D. Multinational Corporations

2. Match the explorer with the country for which he sailed:
   a. Christopher Columbus  1. France
   b. John Cabot  2. Portugal
   c. Jacques Cartier  3. England
   d. Vasco da Gama  4. Spain
   e. Ferdinand Magellan
   f. Francis Drake

3. Which European country had the greatest impact on development of South America?
   A. England
   B. France
   C. Spain
   D. Netherlands

4. According to Bartolomeu Dias, the purpose of European voyages to Africa, Asia and the Americas was...
   “to serve God and his Majesty [the king], to give light to those who were in darkness and to grow rich as all men desire to do.”
   How does the phrase “God, glory and gold” describe the motives for exploration? Provide two to four examples.

Connection to Today
Can you think of any places in the universe still to be explored? Should governments support exploration in these places?

Resources
- FCPS Library Resource - ABC Clio: European Exploration
- Learn 360
- English, French, Dutch exploration
  http://goo.gl/PKzAmx

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