Jacques Cartier

The French explorer Jacques Cartier was born in 1491 in the village of St. Malo, Brittany France. He is most remembered for his discovery of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and many of the islands as he approached what is now Canada.

It is thought that Cartier may have sailed with Giovanni da Verrazzano perhaps to Brazil but what is known for certain is that Cartier’s first voyage came at the directive of King Francis the 1st. His mission was to find a Northwest Passage to Asia and explore those islands along the way that were thought to have many riches.

Cartier began his first of three voyages on April 20th of 1534. Cartier made the Atlantic crossing in just 20 days. Among his discoveries he found the Magdalen Islands and Prince Edward Island. Further on in this first voyage he discovered New Brunswick, the Gaspé Peninsula where he landed his party and claimed all of the lands in the name of France and her King. Before returning to France Jacques also found Anticosti Island.

Upon reporting to the King that the lands he discovered were not bleak but were actually quite warm and hospitable, the King sent Cartier back to Canada. This second voyage lasted more than a year. Starting in May of 1535 Cartier found the area of Stadacona near the present day Quebec City and was forced to remain at Stadacona over a very severe winter. Cartier lost many men due to scurvy which occurs from a diet lacking in fruits and vegetables. Chief Donnacona of the nearby Iroquois Indians showed Cartier how to make tea from cedar trees which saved the explorers.

Cartier made one last trip in 1541 to these same areas this time discovering the Lachine Rapids and the Ottawa River. His discoveries were great in their geographical findings but not in locating the vast amounts of gold and other treasure desired by his King.

Cartier spent his final years as a successful businessman. He died at the age of 66. Not having succeeded in finding the passage to Asia, Jacques Cartier discovered the entire area of Canada within the St. Lawrence River region up to Montreal.
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Jacques Cartier  Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. Where was Cartier born?
   a. Spain
   b. Portugal
   c. France

2. Where did Cartier sail from?
   a. England
   b. France
   c. Italy

3. What was Cartier’s destination?
   a. Asia
   b. Canada
   c. North America

4. How long did it take Cartier to cross the Atlantic Ocean?
   a. 20 days
   b. 20 weeks
   c. 20 months

5. What tribe of Native American Indians helped Cartier and his men to survive?
   a. Ottawa
   b. Mohawk
   c. Iroquois

6. How many voyages to Canada did Cartier make?
   a. 2
   b. 3
   c. 6

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Jacques Cartier  Short Answer Questions

1. Why did the King of France finance Cartier’s voyages?

2. Think about other explorers who sailed west across the Atlantic Ocean looking for Asia. Why would Cartier be looking for a Northwest route to Asia?

3. What do you think about the fact that Cartier crossed the Atlantic Ocean in 20 days in 1534? Do you think that was fast or slow considering the technology of the time?

4. When Cartier returned to France after his first voyage, he reported that the land he found was warm and hospitable but we know that Canada has a cold climate. Why did Cartier make such a mistake?

5. Today no one can just go to another land and claim it for their ruler. How could Cartier and other explorers do that in the 1400s and 1500s?

6. In the United States today we don’t hear about the disease of scurvy. Why is that?

7. Cartier did not succeed in finding the route to Asia that he was looking for. Do you think he still deserves to be remembered in history? Why or why not.

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Jacques Cartier Answer Key

Multiple Choice
1. c.
2. b.
3. a.
4. a.
5. c.
6. b.

Short Answer Response Questions
1. In search of the riches of Asia, including gold.

2. Other explorers had sailed straight across the Atlantic or in a southerly direction and not reached Asia. A northwest route needed to be explored.

3. Individual answer.

4. He arrived in May which is summer. He did not yet experience the cold winter weather.

5. There weren’t many people living in North America where the explorers landed. They saw empty land and claimed it. Today the world population is so much larger and we have so much more communication between countries and people.

6. People eat a sufficient amount of fruits and vegetables.

7. Individual answer.