Vasco Da Gama

Remember that Christopher Columbus made his first voyage from Spain across the Atlantic Ocean to the island of Cuba in the Caribbean Sea near the coast of North America in 1492. Another future explorer named Vasco Da Gama was born in the country of Portugal in 1460.

While Columbus was searching for a sea route to the Indies, another name for India and other parts of Asia, by sailing west across the Atlantic, Vasco Da Gama was following the path of other Portuguese explorers who were sailing along the coast of Africa. India could be reached by sea from Portugal if the sailors sailed around the continent of Africa and then crossed the Indian Ocean in a whopping 13,000 mile voyage.

At this time, there was rivalry between the Spanish and Portuguese royalty. While Columbus was famous for sailing the Atlantic and bringing back a small amount of gold, he did not reach the Indies he sought and did not bring back much in the way of treasure. Meanwhile, over the previous 100 years Portuguese explorers were learning how to navigate the waters around Africa. Finally in 1488 mariner Bartolomeu Dias did sail around the Cape of Good Hope at the tip of Africa but his frightened crew did not want to proceed any further so they returned to Portugal.

However, in 1497 Vasco Da Gama set out with greater determination to reach the Indies and an enormous amount of provisions for the exceedingly long journey. When Da Gama and his crew ultimately reached the Indies (India), they were amazed to find a rich society and a plentiful source of spices like nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger and especially black pepper. These spices cannot be grown in the European climate.

Vasco Da Gama’s achievements are important because of his sailing prowess at reaching India and because his exploits opened up trade between Portugal and India. Vasco Da Gama is a hero in Portugal even today.
Vasco Da Gama Graphic Organizer

Who | What | When

Where | Why | How
Vasco Da Gama Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. How old was Vasco Da Gama when Christopher Columbus reached America?
   a. 22 years old  
   b. 30 years old  
   c. 32 years old

2. Vasco Da Gama followed the route of what other famous explorer?
   a. Christopher Columbus  
   b. Bartolomeu Dias  
   c. Marco Polo

3. How long was Da Gama’s voyage to the Indies?
   a. 1,300 miles  
   b. 13,000 miles  
   c. 130,000 miles

4. What important spice did Da Gama find in India?
   a. Salt  
   b. Mustard  
   c. Black pepper

5. What oceans did Da Gama sail on?
   a. Atlantic and Indian  
   b. Atlantic and Pacific  
   c. Pacific and Indian

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Vasco Da Gama Short Answer Questions

1. What continents are associated with Vasco Da Gama?

2. Columbus sailed west on the Atlantic Ocean looking for the Indies. What direction did Da Gama sail on the Atlantic?

3. Why did you think Dias’ crew became frightened after going around the Cape of Good Hope?

4. Why is Da Gama a national hero in Portugal?

5. Why were Da Gama’s achievements important in history?

6. Would you have wanted to sail with Da Gama? Answer why or why not.

7. Why were spices from the Indies important to people in Europe?
Vasco Da Gama

Answer Key

Multiple Choice

1. c.
2. b.
3. c.
4. c.
5. a.

Short Answer Questions

1. Europe – sailing from Portugal; Africa – sailing along the coast; Asia – destination.
2. South along the coast of Africa.
3. This was uncharted territory.
4. His exploits brought wealth and fame to Portugal.
5. He opened up important trade between Portugal and India.
6. He was looking for the East Indies. He knew that he had been traveling west so he called the islands the West Indies.
7. The spices that grow in India cannot be grown in the European climate.