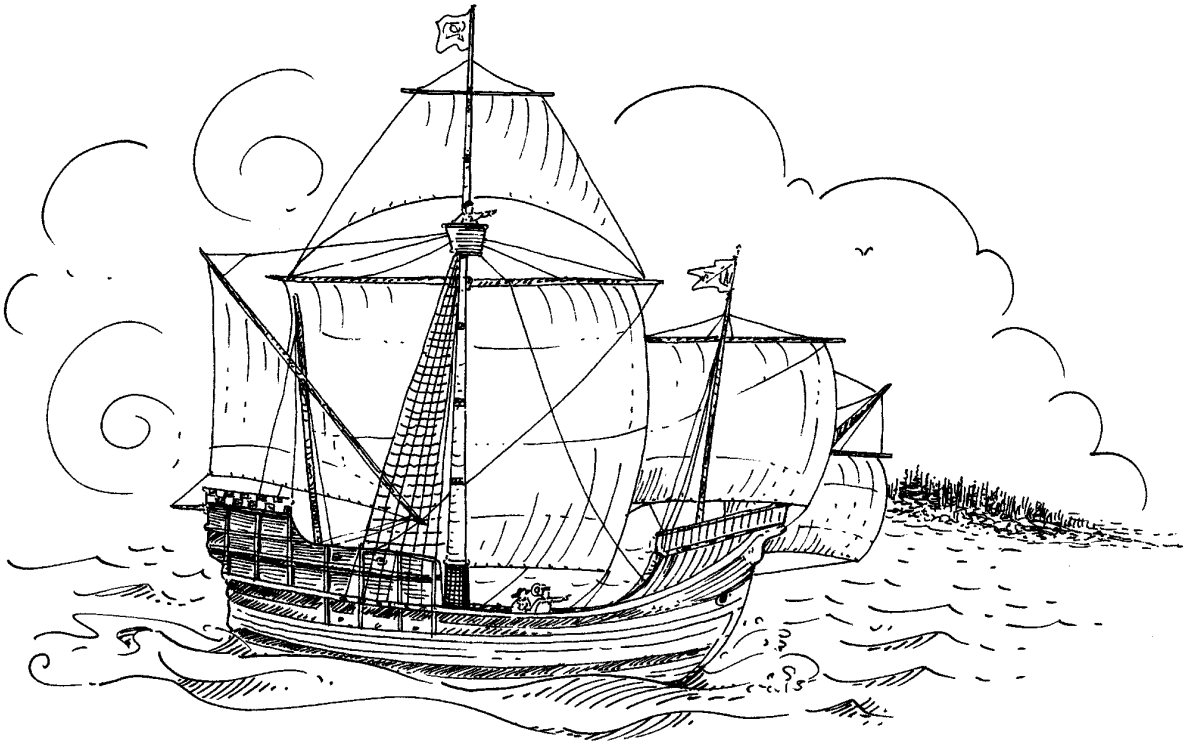


COLUMBUS'S MISTAKE

Exploring America (1492)



Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

Narrator

Paolo Colca: *Italian merchant*

Christopher Columbus: *Italian explorer*

Doña Felipa Perestrello: *Columbus's wife*

Bartholomew Columbus: *Christopher's brother*

Isabella: *Queen of Spain*

Ferdinand: *King of Spain*

Sailors 1-3

Rodrigo de Triana: *Sailor on the Pinta*

Taino Man

Taino Woman

— ACT I —

SCENE 1: A SHOP IN ITALY, 1478

NARRATOR: What was Columbus's mistake? He was sailing to Asia. He didn't know that North and South America were in the way. Nobody in Europe knew the continents were there.

PAOLO COLCA: Christopher Columbus, I hear you're getting married soon. I just got some beautiful silk from China. It would make a fine suit for you to get married in.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: It is beautiful, but it costs too much.

PAOLO COLCA: What can I do? The cost is high because Asia's a long way off. The roads are so dangerous.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: It would be safer to travel by sea to Asia.

PAOLO COLCA: Safer? Everybody knows there are monsters in the sea.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: Not so long ago everybody thought the world was flat. Now we know it's round. There aren't any monsters in the sea.

PAOLO COLCA: I know you make maps. I know you've been a sailor. Tell me—if you know so much, why don't you find a way to sail to Asia?

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: Maybe I will.

SCENE 2: COLUMBUS'S HOUSE IN ITALY, 1483

NARRATOR: Columbus married Doña Felipa Perestrello. Her father had sailed for Prince Henry, the king of Portugal. She gave all of her father's maps to Columbus.

DOÑA FELIPA PERESTRELLO: What do you think, Christopher? Is it possible to sail to Asia?

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: I've looked at your father's maps. I think it's possible. Everybody knows the earth is round, but I think the world is smaller than people say it is. I could sail west from here and reach Asia in less than a month.

BARTHOLOMEW COLUMBUS: In less than a month—are you sure?

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: I think Asia is only 3,000 miles west of us.

BARTHOLOMEW COLUMBUS: But nobody has ever sailed that far west before. You don't know what you might find.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: I won't ever know if I stay here.

DOÑA FELIPA PERESTRELLO: You'll need ships and men and lots of money for a trip like that. The only people with that much money are kings and queens.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: If they give me the money to find a sea route to Asia, they'll be even richer. It'll be safer and quicker and cheaper to bring goods back from China and India and Japan and the East Indies.

DOÑA FELIPA PERESTRELLO: Which king and queen shall we ask first?

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: King John of Portugal.

◀ ACT 2 ▶

SCENE 1: THE COURT OF QUEEN ISABELLA AND KING FERDINAND IN SPAIN, 1492

NARRATOR: For a long time, nobody believed Columbus's plan would work. The king of Portugal turned him down. Doña Felipa died. Columbus went to Spain. He asked Isabella and Ferdinand to support his plan. They thought about it for a long time.

ISABELLA: I understand that Portugal turned down your plan, Columbus. Why should we give you money?

FERDINAND: And so much money!

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: Portugal has found an eastern sea route to India.

ISABELLA: Then why do you want to sail west to Asia? Why don't you want to sail around Africa like they're doing?

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: Wouldn't you like Spain to have its own route to Asia? You wouldn't have to worry about Portugal or any other country getting in your way.

FERDINAND: That would mean more money for us!

ISABELLA: Are you sure about this route of yours, Columbus? If you're wrong, we'll lose a lot of money.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: I'm not wrong.

ISABELLA: Very well. We'll give you ships, money, and a crew.

SCENE 2: ON THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, SEPTEMBER 1492

NARRATOR: On August 3, 1492, Columbus set out with the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*, and 87 men. Three days later, Columbus had some trouble with the *Niña* and *Pinta*. He spent over a month on the Canary Islands getting the ships fixed.

SAILOR 1: I don't know about this trip. I have a funny feeling about it.

SAILOR 2: Columbus knows what he's doing.

SAILOR 1: How can he know? Nobody's ever sailed this far before.

SAILOR 2: Eat your fish and cheese and stop complaining.

SAILOR 1: What was that! Did you see that! A fire in the sky!

SAILOR 2: It was a falling star! That's not good. That's not good at all.

SAILOR 1: It's a bad sign, that's what it is. We'll never see Spain or Asia.

▲ ACT 3 ▲

SCENE 1: ON THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, OCTOBER 1492

NARRATOR: The ships got stuck in the Sargasso Sea, which was filled with plants. The sailors grew more and more unhappy. Many of them wanted to turn back. Columbus told the crew that the ships had sailed farther than they really had.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: We've sailed over 2,500 miles. We'll see land any day now. I want you all to keep your eyes open.

SAILOR 3: All I see is sea and more sea.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: I'll give the sailor who sees land first a big reward.

(Columbus leaves.)

SAILOR 1: What good is money or gold when there's nowhere to spend it?

SAILOR 2: If we see land, then it's got to be Asia. There'll be plenty of things to buy—silk and spices.

SAILOR 1: How are we going to get back to Spain? The wind will be against us. We'll never be able to sail back.

SAILOR 2: I don't know. I've been thinking about that, too.

SAILOR 3: I've had it. I want to go back home!

SCENE 2: ON BOARD THE *PINTA*, OCTOBER 9, 1492

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: We haven't spotted land yet, but we will soon.

SAILOR 3: I don't believe you. I want to go home!

SAILOR 1: What about the wind? I don't even think we can get back home!

SAILOR 2: Don't forget the shooting star! That's a bad sign.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: What kind of sailors are you? Are you afraid of a little water and wind?

SAILOR 2: I'm afraid of this water and this wind!

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: All right, I'll tell you what I'll do. If we don't see land in three days, we'll turn back. We'll go back to Spain.

SAILOR 1: If we can turn back. That wind is blowing against us.

SCENE 3: ON BOARD THE *PINTA*, OCTOBER 12, 1492

RODRIGO DE TRIANA: Look! Look over there! Land! Land ho!

(Columbus rushes in.)

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: Good job, Rodrigo!

SAILOR 1: I knew we could do it.

SAILOR 2: That wasn't so bad. It's only been 33 days since we left the Canary Islands.

SAILOR 3: Rodrigo! Can I borrow some money?

▲ ACT 4 ▲

SAN SALVADOR (NOW THE BAHAMAS), OCTOBER 12, 1492

NARRATOR: As you can see, Columbus didn't "discover" the Americas. Native Americans had been here for as long as 20,000 years. The Taino people who lived on the island were friendly to Columbus and his men. Columbus still believed he had reached Asia. Neither the Americans nor the Europeans knew how this meeting would change this part of the world.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: We've landed on one of the islands of the East Indies. I claim this land for Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain.

(Columbus plants a Spanish flag in the sand.)

TAINO MAN: What do you think he's doing with that flag?

TAINO WOMAN: Maybe he's sending a signal to his ships.

TAINO MAN: Where do you think they came from?

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS *(to the Tainos)*: You must now follow the rules of Spain. Spain will protect you.

TAINO MAN: What is he saying?

TAINO WOMAN: I can't tell. Do you think they're going to stay long?