

How to Talk to
Kids About...

**CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS
AND THE DISCOVERY
OF AMERICA**

A Quick Reference Guide
for Conversations and
Activities with Kids

A Brief History...

In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

Hundreds of years ago, the king and queen of Spain asked Christopher Columbus—an Italian navigator—to find a new way to get to Asia. At that time, the world wasn't fully mapped out, so there were whole sections of the globe that were unknown to Europeans. Today, we have satellite images and smart phones that give us directions and let us see what the world looks like. But in those days, people had to actually sail around the world to discover new lands and map out trade routes.

So, in August of 1492, Columbus and his crew set sail from Spain on three ships—the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María. A few months later, on October 12, the ships arrived on San Salvador Island—what we now call the Bahamas.

While Columbus wasn't the first explorer to travel to the Western Hemisphere, his journey is notable because it opened the way for European settlers to come to "the New World," and it unlocked a new trade route for European merchants.

Americans have celebrated Christopher Columbus and his accomplishments for generations. The first Columbus Day celebration took place in 1792 in New York. It became a federal holiday in 1937.

Ten Cool Things About Columbus!

1. Columbus was an explorer! That's cool!
2. Columbus was brave. At the time of his explorations, many people thought the earth was flat and that ships would simply fall off the edge of the world. Some even thought dragons and other terrifying creatures lived on the edge of the world. Columbus and the men who sailed with him had to be very brave to set sail!
3. Columbus was Italian ... and pizza is also Italian.
4. Columbus was the first to successfully record seafaring routes between Europe and the Western Hemisphere.
5. Columbus contributed to the mapping of the Atlantic Ocean and the previously unknown American continent.
6. Columbus came from humble beginnings and rose to become a famous explorer.
7. Our nation's capital—the District of Columbia—is named after Columbus.
8. Columbus was a devout Catholic, and his faith helped to guide his actions.
9. Columbus adopted a Native American boy.

10. Columbus is also celebrated throughout Latin American, in parts of Canada, and in some cities in Italy and Spain.

Questions and Answers

Why do we celebrate Columbus Day?

We honor Columbus with a holiday because of his bravery, curiosity, and adventurous spirit. But Columbus Day doesn't celebrate just one man. It celebrates a major turning point in world history and the ideals of Western Civilization generally. For Italian Americans, Columbus Day is a celebration of their heritage; for Latinos, it is a celebration of the culture born of the Spanish colonization of the New World; for others, it is a celebration of immigration to America generally. As President Ronald Reagan once noted, Columbus Day is "a day to celebrate not only an intrepid searcher but the dreams and opportunities that brought so many here after him and all that they and all immigrants have given to this land."

Why is Columbus Day controversial today?

Some Native American groups and political activists falsely claim that Christopher Columbus is responsible for the "genocide" of the indigenous peoples of this hemisphere. They unfairly blame Columbus for any mistake made by the many European explorers and settlers who came after him. But Columbus himself sought peace and trade with the native people. He ordered his men to treat them with respect and punished those who did not. It is true that European explorers

and settlers brought disease from Europe, which killed an untold number of native inhabitants of the Americas. But they didn't do this intentionally, and this certainly wasn't Columbus's fault alone. Historical ignorance is another reason that Columbus Day has become so controversial in the modern age. Many individuals simply don't know enough about Christopher Columbus and his many accomplishments, and he has become a symbol of everything they don't like about this country.

Why do some people want to change the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day?

Some people believe that the European explorers destroyed the peaceful paradise of the native people. This is false. Although some of the indigenous tribes were peaceful, many others were brutally violent. Some practiced human sacrifice. Some even ate children (YIKES!). The native tribes that inhabited this hemisphere at the time of Columbus were often at war with each other. The Spanish explorers made alliances with some tribes and helped them fight their enemies. But it is simply not true that Columbus introduced violence to this hemisphere. As historian Jarrett Stepman explains in his book *The War on History*, "What is never explained is why so-called indigenous peoples are worthy of celebration if Columbus is not."

Did Columbus treat Native Americans poorly?

By standards of his day, Columbus was a man better than most. Although he allied himself with some of the native tribes, he went to war with others and brought some native people back to Spain as slaves. (During the late 1400s and early 1500s, slavery was practiced around the world.) But overall, Columbus served as a check

on bad behavior, punishing soldiers who mistreated the natives against his orders. He even seemed to have faced arrest by his fellow explorers for punishing—and executing—those who abused natives. Columbus was not perfect, but at all times his goal remained trade and evangelization, not war or genocide.

Why are statues of Columbus being taken down?

Columbus today is a symbol of Western Civilization and an archetype of American ideals: adventure, innovation, and risk-taking. Sadly, some people today believe that America is an inherently oppressive country and want to take down any symbol of American greatness. Local communities should be allowed to decide which statues remain or are removed. Yet, today, some statues—including statues of Columbus—have been vandalized or taken down by mobs. That's not acceptable.

Fun Activities to Learn About Christopher Columbus

- * Ask your child to research Christopher Columbus and write a short biography or a book report.
- * Ask your kids to create their very own paper Niña, Pinta, and Santa María. Have a boat race in the tub.
- * Download Christopher Columbus [printable coloring pages from Crayola](#).
- * Make a spyglass out of toilet paper or paper towel rolls.

- * Make a pumpkin globe by painting pumpkins blue and then drawing in the shapes of the continents. Kids can add on paper boats or even tacs to show where Columbus travelled.
- * Have your children make a map showing Columbus's journey from Spain to the Bahamas.
- * Take your kids to the library to check out books on Columbus.
- * Watch a documentary on Christopher Columbus.

Further Reading for Kids

- * *Let's Celebrate Columbus Day* by Barbara deRubertis. Beginning when Columbus was a young boy with dreams of being a sailor, this book explains that Columbus was courageous and determined to find the riches and land he sought to explore. (young readers)
- * *Heroes of History: Christopher Columbus, Across the Ocean Sea* by Janet and Geoff Benge. The Heroes of History series offers true stories of fascinating men and women who changed the course of history. This book explores how Columbus was determined to find the gold-laden civilizations of the Great Khan and ... got slightly sidetracked! (ages 10-14)

For more

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