**STORY 1**

***THE VOYAGE TO AMERICA***

Christopher Columbus - Under the auspices of the [Catholic Monarchs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Monarchs) of Spain, he completed [four voyages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voyages_of_Christopher_Columbus) across the Atlantic Ocean that led to general European awareness of the [American continents](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americas). Those voyages, and his efforts to establish permanent settlements on the island of [Hispaniola](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispaniola), initiated the [Spanish colonization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_colonization_of_the_Americas) of the [New World](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_World).

In the context of emerging western [imperialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperialism) and [economic competition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Competition_%28economics%29) between [European kingdoms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchies_in_Europe) seeking wealth through the establishment of [trade routes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_route) and colonies, Columbus' speculative proposal, to reach the [East Indies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Indies) by sailing westward.

Where Columbus *did* differ from the view accepted by scholars in his day was in his estimate of the westward distance from Europe to Asia. Columbus' ideas in this regard were based on three factors: his low estimate of the size of the Earth, his high estimate of the size of the [Eurasian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurasia) landmass, and his belief that Japan and other inhabited islands lay far to the east of the coast of China. In all three of these issues Columbus was both wrong and at odds with the scholarly consensus of his day.

Though Columbus was wrong about the number of degrees of longitude that separated Europe from the Far East and about the distance that each degree represented, he did possess valuable knowledge about the [trade winds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_winds), which would prove to be the key to his successful navigation of the Atlantic Ocean. It is unclear whether Columbus learned about the winds from his own sailing experience or if he had heard about them from others.

In 1485, Columbus presented his plans to [John II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_II_of_Portugal), [King of Portugal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_of_Portugal). He proposed that the king equip three sturdy ships and grant Columbus one year's time to sail out into the Atlantic, search for a western route to the [Orient](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orient), and return. The king submitted Columbus' proposal to his experts, who rejected it.

Columbus had sought an audience from the monarchs [Ferdinand II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_II_of_Aragon) of [Aragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Aragon) and [Isabella I of Castile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabella_I_of_Castile), who had united many kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula by marrying, and were ruling together. On 1 May 1486, permission having been granted, Columbus presented his plans to Queen Isabella, who, in turn, referred it to a committee. After continually lobbying at the [Spanish court](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cortes_Generales) and two years of negotiations, he finally had success in 1492.

He received the support of the Spanish crown, which saw in it a chance to gain the upper hand over rival powers in the contest for the lucrative [spice trade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spice_trade) with [Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia). During his first voyage in 1492, instead of reaching Japan as he had intended, Columbus landed in the [Bahamas archipelago](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bahamas), at a locale he named *San Salvador*. Over the course of three more voyages, Columbus visited the [Greater](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Antilles) and [Lesser Antilles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesser_Antilles), as well as the [Caribbean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribbean_Sea) coast of [Venezuela](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuela) and Central America, claiming them for the [Spanish Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Empire).

Between 1492 and 1503, Columbus completed four round-trip voyages between Spain and the Americas, all of them under the sponsorship of the [Crown of Castile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_of_Castile). These voyages marked the beginning of the [European](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_ethnic_groups) [exploration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Discovery) and [colonization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_colonialism) of [the American continents](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americas), and are thus of enormous significance in [Western history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_history).

Columbus' voyages led to the first lasting European contact with the Americas, inaugurating a period of European exploration, conquest, and colonization that lasted for several centuries. They had, therefore, an enormous impact in the historical development of the modern Western world.