The Discovery of America
Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) was a Genovese sailor who was very familiar with the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic coastal routes. By this time, it was known that the Earth was round, and Columbus was sure that if he sailed west he would come to India.

In 1492, the Catholic Kings took Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Spain. Thus, the Reconquista came to an end and support was finally given to Columbus, who had been asking for help for many years.

The kings wished to continue with their crusade by converting the infidels (as they called all non-Christians) living on the other side of the ocean. They also wanted riches, especially gold.

The voyages of exploration and conquest blended the urgency to convert the infidels to Christianity with the spirit of adventure and the desire to obtain wealth. Some traders organized these voyages in order to make money.

On August 3, 1492, Columbus' ships, the Nina, Pinta and Santa María set sail from the port of Palos. On October 12, they arrived at an island in the Bahamas. Columbus named the island San Salvador. On this voyage, he also reached Cuba and the island of Haiti, which he named La Española.

Upon his return, Columbus amazed the Court of the Catholic Kings with the wonderful objects, animals and people he had brought from the other side of the ocean, together with tales of fabulous wealth. The monarchs decided to finance a second voyage to the Indies, as the Europeans called America. This time, Columbus took fifteen ships and more than one thousand men, all anxious to make their fortune.

Columbus on his return from America.
Juan Cordero, XIX century.

Consequences of the Voyage of Columbus

Columbus believed that he had reached Asia. He never even suspected that he had been responsible for the encounter of two worlds: the old world (Europe, Africa and Asia), and the new world, which would later be called America. From this moment on, two areas of the world that had been separated for thousands of years would come together. Different societies and mutual influences would blend together to change both ways of life.

This encounter was terrible for the inhabitants of the New World. The Europeans took control of the land and forced the indigenous people to work in the mines; they imposed a religion and a new way of life upon them.

Source: SEP, Department of Education.