What was the Age of Exploration?

KS2 KS3 Ages 9-14 ⏰ 2 min read

The **Age of Exploration** was like the world's biggest treasure hunt, lasting roughly from 1400 to 1600. European sailors set off across dangerous oceans with wooden ships, basic maps, and loads of courage, hoping to find faster routes to Asia's valuable spices and silk.

Why Did It All Begin?

Europeans were mad about Asian goods — especially spices like pepper and cinnamon that made their food taste less boring. But getting these treasures meant travelling overland through territories controlled by Ottoman Turks, who charged hefty fees. European merchants thought: "What if we could sail around this problem entirely?"

Think of it like this: imagine your favourite sweet shop is at the end of a street controlled by bullies who demand pocket money every time you pass. You'd probably look for a different route, even if it meant going the long way round through unfamiliar neighbourhoods.

The Great Discoveries

What started as a search for trade routes became something much bigger. Christopher Columbus bumped into the Americas in 1492 while trying to reach Asia. Vasco da Gama successfully sailed around Africa to reach India in 1498. Ferdinand Magellan's crew completed the first voyage around the entire world in 1522, though Magellan himself died in the Philippines.

These weren't just pleasant sailing trips. Explorers faced storms, disease, starvation, and the constant fear of sailing off the edge of the world (which many people genuinely believed was possible). Their wooden ships were tiny compared to modern vessels, yet they crossed entire oceans using only stars, compasses, and educated guesses.

Consequences That Changed Everything

The Age of Exploration connected distant parts of the world for the first time. Europeans brought horses, wheat, and unfortunately diseases to the Americas. In return, they took back potatoes, tomatoes, chocolate, and sadly, enslaved people. This exchange of goods, ideas, and diseases — called the **Columbian Exchange** — reshaped civilizations on both sides of the Atlantic.

The period also marked the beginning of European colonization, which brought both technological advances and tremendous suffering to indigenous peoples. While explorers opened up new possibilities for trade and knowledge, they also started centuries of conflict and cultural destruction that we're still grappling with today.

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