



---

HISTORY SHAPERS

---

# THE STORY OF COLUMBUS

GLADYS M. IMLACH



This edition published 2025  
by Living Book Press  
Copyright © Living Book Press, 2025

ISBN: 978-1-76153-562-8 (hardcover)  
978-1-76153-571-0 (softcover)

First published in 1906.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any other form or means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner and the publisher or as provided by Australian law.



A catalogue record for this  
book is available from the  
National Library of Australia

# THE STORY OF COLUMBUS

*by*

GLADYS M. IMLACH



## GET ALL OF THE ‘HISTORY SHAPERS’ BOOKS

### The Story of...

David Livingstone	Robert Bruce	Chalmers of New
H. M. Stanley	General Gordon	Guinea
Abraham Lincoln	Lord Clive	Bishop Patteson
Sir Francis Drake	Captain Cook	Joan of Arc
Sir Walter Raleigh	Nelson	Napoleon
Columbus	Lord Roberts	Cromwell

### PLEASE NOTE

In this series, you will read about historical figures who displayed courage, bravery, self-sacrifice, and many other admirable traits. Their stories remind us that many people in history took bold actions and made tough choices. Yet, even those who achieved great things sometimes held ideas or pursued goals that were not beneficial to everyone. History is full of complex individuals—parts of their lives inspire us to be brave and stand up for what is right, while other parts remind us to consider the unintended consequences of our actions.

As you explore these biographies, we invite you to reflect on the qualities that enabled these figures to achieve greatness and the lessons we can learn from their mistakes. Maybe you too can become a History Shaper—someone who learns from the past and helps to make our world a better place for everyone.

# CONTENTS

1.	The Unexplored Seas	1
2.	In Spain	6
3.	Across the Ocean	11
4.	San Salvador	19
5.	Cuba and Hayti	24
6.	The Return of the Adventurers	34
7.	The Fate of the First Colonists	40
8.	The Settlement of Isabella	48
9.	Trouble in Hayti	56
10.	The Third Voyage	62
11.	The Fourth Voyage	72
12.	The Death of Columbus	84



## THE UNEXPLORED SEAS

In Genoa, a famous seaport of Italy, walled in by rocky mountains, Christopher Columbus was born about the year 1447. He was the eldest son of a weaver, and had three brothers and one sister. Two of these brothers, Bartholomew and Diego, especially the more daring and vigorous Bartholomew, were afterwards his companions and helpers in his great discoveries.

Their home was not far from the harbour. Very often the children must have wandered down there, and looked at the great trading ships with their white sails, and the long, narrow war-vessels with their rows of oars. And they would talk to the sailors, and hear their stories, and smell the salt sea smell. So, while Christopher was quite small, the sea mastered him and made him her own, and when he was fourteen years old he went for his first voyage.

But before this he was sent to the weavers' school, where he was soon taught to read and write. He did so well that people said of him that if he had spent his time copying letters and documents in his beautiful handwriting he would have been a rich man. He learned many other things also—arithmetic, and drawing, and painting, and Latin; and he was especially fond of studies that would

help him when he became a sailor, such as geography and astronomy, the study of the stars that guide the ship by night. Even when he had left school, and had gone to sea, he made use of his spare time in learning more of these things.

Now, when Christopher Columbus went to sea, sailors did not take very long voyages. In those days, Australia and America and South Africa were not known, and the ships used to keep close to the land as they sailed from one port in France or Spain to another. The Portuguese, who were the bravest seamen of that time, had sailed some way down the west coast of Africa, but, as they had no maps to guide them, their ships were often wrecked on the unknown shores.

Men were not, however, as ignorant as they had been, for they had begun to believe that the world was round like a ball, instead of being flat like a sheet of paper. And they said to themselves, "If it is round, we should be able to sail on and on till we come back to some place we know." Then they said, "What is the most distant country we have heard of?" The answer was "Asia." So they thought, "If some one were to sail to the west over that great Atlantic Ocean, surely he would come at last to Asia." For they did not know that America lay between, and a man must come there first, as Columbus afterwards found. And no man was brave enough to try. For the Atlantic Ocean was very terrible with its storms and its unknown miles of sea, and perhaps its huge serpents

and monsters; and many ship's captains said, "Ah, yes; but suppose the world were flat after all, and we came to the edge and fell over. No; we will not go."

As Columbus grew up he thought a great deal about this, and wondered continually whether any one would ever be able to sail across the Atlantic.

And he did many brave deeds. Once he went with a ship of war to Tunis, while all his men begged him to go back and ask for help; and there he captured a great foreign vessel. He took part in much of the fighting that went on in those days in the Mediterranean Sea, and he sailed to Iceland and Madeira and many other places. He said himself, "Wherever ship has sailed, there have I journeyed."

When he was about thirty years old he went to live at Lisbon, and he married a Portuguese lady, and got to know many of the Portuguese, and heard about the discoveries they were making. And he read all the books of travel he could find, and wrote to the wisest men who then lived, asking them what was known about Asia, and if they thought it could be found by sailing across the Atlantic. Some of them thought so, and they all told him it was full of gold and silver and diamonds and spices, so that he could fill his ships with riches. The wisest of all, Toscanelli, sent him a map which he had made, in which he showed Asia lying just where America is on the other side of the Atlantic, and told him to sail always to the west, for if he missed the most wonderful country,

Japan, he would come to China, or India, or some of the places marked on the map, and so would be able to direct his course. He wrote: "I perceive your magnificent and great desire to find a way to where the spices grow. I do not wonder that you, who have great courage, and all the Portuguese people, who have always been men eager for all great undertakings, should be with a burning heart and feel a great desire to undertake the said voyage."

Columbus also talked with sailors, and some of them told him stories of lands they had seen far away to the west; though, indeed, they had probably mistaken some dark ridge of cloud for land. One old man said that a long time ago he had found the bodies of two men lying on the shore, where they had been carried by the waves. They were brown and broad-faced, not like any Christian people, and must have come from an unknown country. Other seamen spoke of strange reeds and trees, and of a carved staff which had drifted from the west across the ocean. And the more Columbus thought, the surer he became that he was the man to go on this strange voyage, and that he would succeed in finding the far-off land.

So, because he was one of those men who never grow careless and lazy, nor forget any great plan they have made, he began, after many years of waiting and thinking, to look for the ship and the crew that would take him across the seas. For he was a poor man, earning his living by drawing maps, and he could not buy a ship, while no ordinary person would lend one for such a dangerous

voyage. So it was long before he was able to sail. Yet all this time he was as certain of his success as if his eyes already saw the land.

## IN SPAIN

Because Columbus was living in Portugal, he went first to the King of that country and told him of his plans. King John was a wise man, and wished to have new lands to rule over, but he was also very crafty. He asked his counsellors what they thought of Columbus' proposal, and when they said it would cost too much money to send the ships he listened to them. Then he did a mean thing; he secretly sent a vessel of his own to see whether Columbus was right and there was any land beyond the ocean or no. This ship sailed out for some days, and the crew saw only the waves and the sky, and they became afraid and put back to Portugal, saying scornfully that Columbus was only a dreamer, and that of course no land was there. But when he heard of this voyage, and understood that the King had kept him at Court by false promises only to deceive him, Columbus was very angry, and swore that he would leave Portugal for ever. Then he went to the Courts of many of the princes of Europe, and even to his own city Genoa, and found faith nowhere. He sent his brother Bartholomew to our own King Henry VII. of England, but on his way the ship was captured by pirates, and poor Bartholomew was

taken a prisoner to a foreign land, where he remained for a long time.

Meanwhile King John repented of his folly, and sent to Columbus and begged him to come back, promising all he had asked for. But the latter was too prudent to trust any man a second time, who had once played him false.

At last Columbus went to the Spanish Court. Ferdinand and Isabella, the King and Queen of Spain, were rich, powerful, and fortunate, and Isabella was very kind-hearted. She liked Columbus from the first, and he was a man to be liked, for he was tall and dignified, and spoke pleasantly and well. He had a fine head too, with keen blue eyes and a well-cut nose, though his hair grew white while he was still young. And he was sure of the success of his plans, and very proud, and determined that when he found the far-off lands he would not give up all the glory of their discovery to the King and Queen who had sent him. So he told them, "You must make me Admiral of your ships in the new western seas, and Viceroy, or under-king, in the lands I shall gain for you. More than that, you must give me a tenth part of all the riches I find, for I shall need money when I am great. And I wish my little son Diego and his children to have these rights when I am dead, so that the family of Columbus may be honoured for evermore."

Ferdinand and Isabella thought that Columbus asked for too great a reward, and their ministers told them that the voyage could never be made; so they hesitated instead of giving him an answer at once. Then a war broke out,

and they were too busy to think of him, though he waited patiently for a long time.

When he could not bear any further delay, he resolved to go to the King of France. On the way he passed through the little port of Palos, from which he was afterwards to sail. Near this port there was an old convent. At its gate Columbus stopped to ask if he and his young son Diego, who was with him, might rest for a little. The friar who came to them readily gave permission, and brought them some bread and a pitcher of water. Columbus talked with him about his hopes, and he became so much interested that he asked the prior of the convent to listen to the strange story. The prior was delighted with Columbus and believed him, and told him not to leave Spain yet, for he would try to help him. Accordingly he sent to his friends among the merchants of Palos, and one of them, Martin Alonzo Pinzon, said he would go on the voyage, and would help to provide the ships.

The prior then rode to the Court to see the Queen, and came to her, and told her that Columbus had given up hope of Spanish help, and was setting off for France. She said, "No, he must not go, even though I sell my own jewels to get the money." And, remembering how poor he was, Isabella sent a mule for him and a costly suit of clothes, that he might not be ashamed to come to Court. When he arrived she summoned him at once, and she and Ferdinand promised that he should be Viceroy, and Admiral, and have part of the riches, if he discovered the

lands across the ocean. Lest he should fear to leave his children alone in a strange land, they made Diego page to their own son Juan, and promised to take great care of Fernando, who was only four years old.

So Columbus thanked the King and Queen, and hastened back to Palos to get together ships and men for the long voyage. After all these weary years his opportunity had come.

He went to the chief magistrates of Palos and gave them the royal orders to furnish three ships for his enterprise. They marched in a procession to the great church of the town, and from its porch they read these orders to the citizens of Palos.

Then fear spread among the seamen, who said they would not come back from the rash adventure, and among the ship-owners, who thought they would lose their vessels. But Columbus' friend, the prior, reassured them, and Martin Pinzon and his brothers offered to provide one ship. The merchants dared not disobey the King's command, and the other two ships were also found. They were all small—the largest was only sixty-three feet long, the length of a short cricket-pitch—but perhaps that was a good thing, for they were needed to sail among islands and up rivers as well as on the seas; and only one, the *Santa Maria*, was completely decked, the other two, the *Pinta* and the *Niña*, merely had cabins at the prow and stern.

There was trouble with the sailors. Some tried to escape; some hid; some pretended to be ill; some had

wives and mothers, who hung about the ships weeping. Columbus was forced to be harsh, and to refuse to let any stay behind; so that before he left Palos he was hated by all the poor people in the port. Besides ninety seamen, one of whom was an Englishman, and another an Irishman, there were on board some reckless young men in search of adventure, a doctor, some artisans, and some clerks,—in all about a hundred and twenty persons.

By the beginning of August all was ready, and Columbus made confession and took communion before sailing. So, too, did all the crew. Then, on Friday the 3rd of August 1492, he embarked as Admiral on the *Santa Maria*, Martin Pinzon took command of the *Pinta*, his brother of the *Niña*, and the three ships moved slowly out of Palos harbour. They had begun the great voyage.

## ACROSS THE OCEAN

The little fleet first steered to the south-west. At the end of the third day the *Pinta* showed signals of distress, and it was found that the rudder had been improperly secured by the owners, in order that thus the ship might be compelled to put back to Spain. Martin Pinzon, who was a cool-headed man, got a rope put round the rudder, and managed to reach the Canary Islands, where he meant to charter a new vessel and to leave the *Pinta*. But because Columbus heard that the King of Portugal, in his jealousy of the Spanish power, had sent to seize him and so to put a stop to the expedition, he dared not delay longer than was necessary for repairing the damage, and set off again on the 6th of September.

At first only light winds blew, and the vessels moved slowly over the calm sea, but when they had lost sight of land, the sailors began to be afraid. They looked around and saw everywhere the grey sea meeting the grey sky, and they wept and groaned piteously, calling out that they would never see their country and their friends again. The Admiral was much disturbed and annoyed by their cowardice, but he went among them and comforted them. He talked to them of the wonderful countries of Asia, and

of the fame and riches each man would gain by his voyage, until they were all quite gay and cheerful, and busied themselves heartily with their work.

Columbus saw, however, that he would have trouble with them in the future, and that night he began to keep two log-books, a true one for himself, in which he entered the number of miles the ship had really gone every day, and a false one for the men to see, where he set down a much smaller number. For if they thought they had covered only a short distance, they would not be as impatient as if they were daily expecting the end of the voyage; and Columbus knew the way might be longer than any of them supposed. As indeed it was.

He was prudent enough to give orders to the captains of the *Niña* and the *Pinta* that if they were separated from him by storm or fog, they should sail due west for 2000 miles, and then wait, for there he hoped to find land.

He soon learned that he dared not trust his sailors to steer, for continually they let the ships fall off to the north-east. So he watched over the course of the fleet by night and day. He took charge of the instruments, the quadrant and the compass, and always made the reckoning himself. He kept a journal too, and wrote in it an account of all that happened on the way. And he prepared maps in which to draw the new lands, that all men might see exactly where he had been. It was not surprising then that, anxious and hard-working as he was, he did not rest

much during the voyage; indeed, he said himself that he forgot sleep.

About the middle of September the sea was no longer barren of all interest. First a mast went floating by, and dismayed the sailors with thoughts of the lost crew and with forebodings as to their own fate. Then they saw a tern and a boatswain bird, and rejoiced, because these birds do not venture far out on the sea; but on the next day they were alarmed by a great meteor with a trailing wake of fire which fell into the sea before them. And the needle of the compass turned, pointing to the north-west, and they fancied that some evil power must be working to mislead them.

They grumbled, too, saying that it was all very well now for the wind to blow from the east, but if it did not change they could never sail back to Spain. Then they were delighted by an announcement of Pinzon's, whose boat was the lightest and the fastest, that far off he could see a low, long mist which must be land, and just as much disappointed when the supposed land turned out to be a cloud. All this time Columbus bore with them patiently, and their complaints and hopes did not affect his mind, and he still gave the sailing orders: "Westward always."

Then they saw masses of driftweed on which live crabs were floating, and flocks of birds passed overhead, but when they let down a weight to feel for a bottom, the sea was deeper than they could sound. The weeds grew thicker and thicker, until the ships could hardly make any

progress, and on all sides they seemed to be surrounded by dry land.

And again the crews murmured, and declared the country was enchanted, and that the ships were caught in the weeds, and would be held fast for ever. The sun shone gloriously, the weather was wonderfully calm and mild, and three small birds perched on the rigging, and sang all day long as if they had been among fields.

At last the wind changed and blew gently from the south-west, and the Admiral was able to say that now at least they could go back whenever they wished.

Soon they left the region of the weeds, and the sailors bathed alongside the ship in the calm sea. But suddenly it rose, and heavy waves tossed the ships about, though there was little wind. This often happens in the middle of the ocean, but even Columbus had not known such a thing occur before, and he could not allay the men's fears. They began to talk openly about the risks they ran, and to mock at their leader.

"Oh yes," they said, "he thinks of nothing but being Viceroy and Admiral; he does not see that he will soon have lost his life and our lives into the bargain. He is a madman. Why should we obey him? There is little enough to eat now, and soon all our provisions will be finished. The ships are leaking too. Nobody in Spain will blame us if we bind him with cords, and tell them that under this mad leader we nearly died. Or, better still, let us throw

him into the sea, and say he fell overboard while he was gazing up at the stars in his ridiculous way.”

Thus they talked and wailed, but none of them was brave enough to lay his hand on the Admiral, though, if they had known it, Columbus' own heart was heavy, and he wondered how much longer he would be able to make them obey him. After a time, however, he went to them and called them his comrades, and speaking with great coolness and sweetness, reminded them that if they returned to Spain without him, their punishment would be death. And he spoke to them of the birds they had seen, which must have flown from some land near by. They were quieted for a little, but there were many weary days to pass yet.

One day at the end of September, Martin Pinzon signalled again from the *Pinta* that land was in sight on the south-west. The crews fell on their knees and thanked God. And Columbus, who hoped that he was now near Japan, climbed up the mast and watched anxiously, as the prows of the ships were turned towards it. But only a cloud was there, and despair followed their excitement.

On the 1st of October, by Columbus' own reckoning, they had crossed 2100 miles of sea, and still they were surrounded by the waves. The water was full of fish, particularly of flying fish, which leapt in and out, and flocks of birds passed overhead, but there was nothing else to interest the voyagers. A sum of money had been promised to him who first saw land, and all day long the

excited men were persuading themselves that this or that cloud was some island, and startling the whole ship with their shouts. To put an end to these useless alarms, the Admiral at last declared that if any man again made a mistake, he should not have the reward, even though he were fortunate in the end. This, of course, made them all very careful.

However, on the 7th of October, the sound of a gun was heard from the *Niña*, and a flag was run up to her mast. This was the signal all had been waiting for, and the men pressed eagerly on deck. But it turned out to be the cruellest disappointment of all, and nearly ended Columbus' voyage. For when on the next day the fancied land had disappeared, the sailors on the *Santa Maria* rose up in a body and went to him, and said that they would not go farther with him, and that unless he would change the ships' course for Spain, they would find a new captain of their own to take them back. As always, he stood boldly up before them, and asked them how they dared approach him thus, saying firmly: "I will not turn back till with the help of God I find that land."

But though the men cringed before him like frightened dogs, and shuffled their feet, they were more afraid of the strange seas than they were of their Admiral, and, when he ordered them to go to their work, they remained sullenly crouching against the bulwarks, like wild, despairing animals. He saw that this time he could not master them, and for a moment his heart failed within him.

This then was to be the end of all; he had planned and worked and prayed, and given up his whole life just for a dream. And yet even now he was sure that land must be near. At last he raised his head and said very quietly, without a trace of the struggle in his mind: "Give me, my men, but three days." The men assented silently and moved away, and they worked and waited for the third day when they might turn homewards. For they had ceased to care about any fame or riches they might gain, and grudged every hour's sail to the west.

Two whole days went by, and Columbus' hopes fell lower. But on Thursday, the 11th of October, the sailors picked up a thorn-branch with fresh red berries on it, which must have been newly broken off. They found too some river weed, and a small cane cut by a man's hand. They were all excited by these discoveries, especially as Columbus had added a velvet doublet to the promised reward; and that night no man went to sleep, while the Admiral himself watched from the high poop of his vessel.

At ten o'clock, Columbus fancied he saw a light, but it disappeared before he could be sure. It seemed to reappear again, and he called to one of his officers, who saw it distinctly. As they watched, they saw that it moved a little and sometimes was hidden altogether, as though some person were carrying a torch among trees. But it was very faint, and when the crew were told of it, some of them could not distinguish it at all, and others were not certain that the glimmer must be a fire of man's making.

At last, at two o'clock, the *Pinta* discharged a gun and sent a boat to the *Santa Maria* to report that Roderigo de Triana, a man noted for his keen eyesight, had seen the outline of an island looming through the darkness. A few minutes later, as it grew lighter, Columbus himself saw the land about six miles away. The three ships stopped in their course and waited for morning, while the men sang, and leapt, or even wept, and praised God who had brought them safely through their perilous voyage.

## SAN SALVADOR

When the sun rose on the 12th of October 1492, the sailors saw before them an island several miles long, covered with trees. The sea was calm, and the sky without a cloud, and they could distinguish figures coming from the woods and collecting on the shore to gaze at the strange vessels. The sails were furled and a boat lowered, and the Admiral, dressed gorgeously in red, took his seat in it. He was followed by Martin Pinzon and his brother, in whose hands were two banners embroidered with green crosses and a large F. and I. for Ferdinand and Isabella. Columbus himself held the royal standard of Spain.

As the boat neared the shore, they noticed that the plants were of strange growth with wonderfully coloured flowers, and that on the trees were many kinds of fruit they had never seen before. When they came into shallow water the natives ran back and watched the movements of the Spaniards from some distance in absolute quiet. As soon as Columbus had reached dry land, he fell on his knees and kissed the ground, calling out for joy, with tears in his eyes. His example was followed by his men, who then thanked God with him.

After the first few moments the Admiral rose, holding