

Ferdinand and Isabella
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Now that the land route to Asia was closed, kings and queens from all over Europe began looking for the best sea route to the treasures of the East. They greedily sought to claim rare and expensive Asian spices for their own countries.

The race was on! In every European port, young navigators competed to lead adventures to Asia. They were anxious to try out new, lighter sailing ships that made it possible to sail faster and farther than ever before.

One of these navigators was an Italian man named Christopher Columbus. Like all the others, he was an experienced sailor. What made Columbus stand out from the others was that he did not plan on reaching Asia by sailing east around the coast of Africa. He had a very different idea.

Christopher Columbus wanted to sail west, across the Atlantic Ocean, in order to reach the Indies. He visited several kings in different European countries, asking for their help. Laying out his map, he tried to convince them that his idea was a good one. For many years, Columbus tried unsuccessfully to get the support of European kings and queens. The king of Portugal refused him. The king of Italy refused him. The king of England refused him. Only the Spanish seemed interested in his plans to sail west across the Atlantic. But they turned him down too, because Spain was at war, and they had no time or money for Asian trade then. Columbus knew that he could not make the trip without their ships and money.

Now, seven long years after Columbus first met with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, he became hopeful that his long wait was over at last. As he rode down over the mountains, Columbus recalled his first visit to the great Spanish city below. Spain had been at war then.

Now the Spanish war was over, and the Spanish king and queen had won! Columbus hoped that the victorious royal couple, newly rich with the treasures they had taken in war, would have the time, money, and attention to help him. At last, he thought, he might reach his goal of sailing west to the Indies.

A Spanish army officer directed him to the large, fancy tents in which the king and queen were still living, for they had not even had time yet to move from their army camp into the palace. Still, they were hardly suffering. Their tents contained thick, beautiful carpets and full-sized beds. The royal couple sat upon thrones brought from their palace in northern Spain. They dined off plates made of silver, eating fine foods and drinking fine wine. Their many servants were there to take care of them. Most important, with the war over, Ferdinand and Isabella were too happy and

proud to complain much about anything. They smiled as Columbus bowed before them, and told him to rise to his feet. "And now, Christopher Columbus," said the queen, "let us talk about your plan of sailing west to the Indies . . ."

Columbus's heart leaped within him. The queen and the king must have talked it over, and now they were ready to help him act out his long-held plans. Columbus was going to search for the riches of the East by sailing west! He would be in charge of a whole fleet 11 of ships!