



*Heroes of*

**AMERICA**

*Stories of Bravery and Courage*

**Amanda Bennett**

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# Introduction

Of the many things that the upcoming generation of students need, it is important that they have heroes—people that they can look up to, learn from, admire and identify with—we all need heroes! I have always loved stories about heroes and their brave acts, and years ago, I came across a wonderful antique children's history book, **American Hero Stories: 1492 – 1865**.

Originally published in 1906, this book captured my attention and my imagination. I hated learning about history from textbooks, and now I had discovered a valuable teaching tool! The stories used heroes and heroic actions to weave a strong fabric of American history for the students. I wanted to share the book with this upcoming generation of children, and worked to update the text and added Internet resources in each story.

With these stories, your children will learn about voyagers and explorers, early American colonies, pioneers and presidents, and more. The story of Dolly Madison's bravery was new to me, and fascinating. The stories include the adventures of George Washington's days as a young soldier and the hard work of Abraham Lincoln to get an education on his own, and many others.

The stories are all here, updated and ready to thrill a new set of students. When reading these stories, discuss the character traits that were important in the story. Point out bravery, honor, loyalty, dedication, courage, selflessness, and other traits that can be seen in each story's characters. Dig deeper into people or topics that surface while working on each hero story, using the Internet Resources provided or Internet search engines (see my search engine tips on the following page).

Enjoy the book, the lessons and the learning, and have fun!

Amanda

# Amanda's Tips on Search Engines

As this book is created, I am using the most up-to-date Internet links available, but the Internet changes moment by moment. With this in mind, I am including my search engine tips for your use, should you find that a link doesn't provide the information that you need, or if you and your student want to dig deeper into a specific topic. I **always** recommend that an adult check the search results first, then share appropriate sites with their students.

## Search Engines for Kids:

[Kids Yahoo Search Engine](#)

[Ask Jeeves for Kids](#)

[KidsClick!](#)

[CyberSleuth Kids](#)

## Search Engine That I Use for My Research:

[Google Advanced Search](#)

(Fill in the search fields making **SURE** to turn **ON** SafeSearch, moderate or strict!)

## If you find a link that doesn't work:

Don't panic! Use these search engine tips to research an answer. The Internet changes second by second, and you can find the information that you need, even if some of the links in this book are broken. These tips and websites should provide alternate websites for the questions in the unit study, should you find broken links.

Parents & teachers - remember that Internet site content can change overnight – **please check the sites** that you plan to use **BEFORE your child** uses them in the study.

# Christopher Columbus

## Who First Crossed the Atlantic Ocean

A little boy once lived in [Genoa, Italy](#), whose earliest memory was the “Boom, boom!” of his father’s shuttle. The father was a wool comber and weaver, and all the near neighbors were weavers. When the boy went to school, he studied and played with the children of weavers. When he went to church, he knelt before an altar that belonged specially to the weavers.

He would probably have become a weaver himself if Genoa had not been a seashore town. The wharves were not far from his home, and even when he went to walk on the hills in back of the city, he could not help seeing the white-sailed ships coming and going. When he was fourteen, he sailed away on one of them, and for fourteen years he went on one voyage after another. Between the voyages he helped his father comb wool and weave.

Genoa was full of sailor boys. No one knew that this boy would become a famous man, and so no one wrote any account of his boyhood. Almost the only thing we know about his early years is that he managed somehow to learn a great many things. He learned how to sail a ship by watching the moon and stars and using the instruments that sailors used then.

He learned all that was known about geography. He learned to draw beautiful maps and sea charts. Some of these maps were different from those of today. When he drew a map of Europe, for instance, he put the Atlantic Ocean west of the Continent, and Asia west of the Atlantic. In those days, Europe was buying spices, silks, and many other things from China and eastern Asia; but bringing them overland by caravan was very expensive. “Why can’t we cross the Atlantic,” Columbus said to himself, “and so go directly to China?”

There were several reasons why people thought this could not be done. A few believed that the earth was a sphere and could be sailed around. But some said the Atlantic was full of monsters and demons, and others thought that the water at the equator was boiling hot. Columbus was not troubled by any of these fears, but he had no money to provide ships and men for such a voyage.

In those days, [Portugal](#) was a great sea power, so he appealed to the Portuguese king. “If you will give me ships and men,” he said, “I will cross the Atlantic. Then you can trade directly with the great cities of China and Japan, and Portugal will become the richest country in Europe.” He gave all his reasons for believing that this could be done, and King John agreed to lay the matter before four learned men. These men replied, “It is a wild and foolish scheme.” But one

of them added, "If there is any truth in it, why should we let this foreigner have all the glory? Let me keep him waiting awhile and send out one of our own sailors." So, a ship was sent out secretly; but a storm arose, and in a few days it came back. "No one can ever cross the Atlantic," declared the frightened captain.

Columbus heard of the trick and was indignant. "I will go to the King and Queen of [Spain](#)," he said to himself, and set off on foot to cross the mountains. Some time before this, he had married, and he and his wife had a little boy, Diego. Before Columbus left for Spain, his wife died and Columbus and six-year-old Diego were on their own as they set off for Spain. Diego walked until he was tired, then his father carried him. And so they journeyed this way all the way to Spain.

Once in Spain, Columbus left Diego with his aunt, so that he could go meet with [King Ferdinand](#) and [Queen Isabella](#). The queen liked Columbus and was interested in his plans. When she asked the opinion of her learned counselors, they said, as the council in Portugal had said, "It is a wild and foolish scheme." The queen was not convinced, but the kingdom was at war and there was little money to spare for expeditions. So, after seven years of waiting, Columbus took Diego and set off for [France](#).

Before they had walked far, the boy was hungry and his father rang the bell of the convent of [La Rabida](#). "Will you give me some bread for my son?" he asked. "Yes, surely," replied the monks. "Bring the boy in and let him rest." One of these monks, called Brother Antonio, noticed that Columbus was no common beggar, and they had a long talk together.

Brother Antonio was almost as much interested in geography and astronomy as Columbus himself, and soon Columbus told him his plans for crossing the ocean and all his disappointments. The leader of the convent also became interested. "Do not go to France yet," he said. "Before I came here, I knew the queen. I will write to her, and perhaps she will listen to me." She did listen; and before many days had passed, the little seaport town of Palos was in a fever of excitement, for three ships were to sail from there to cross the [Atlantic](#), the "Sea of Darkness," as it was called.

One bright morning in August, 1492, the ships sailed. "They will never come back again," said the wise people on the shore. It was not long before the sailors were ready to agree with them, for the needle of the compass no longer pointed to the north. Then the ships began to pass great masses of



floating seaweed. "It will grow thicker and thicker," said the sailors, "and we shall never get out of it." Columbus explained these wonders as well as he could, but soon there was more trouble. "The wind always blows from the east," declared the men, "and we shall never be able to get home again."

Fortunately, the wind changed one day and blew from the west. Day after day passed, and still no land was seen. The men began to gather in little groups and to whisper together. "There is no land here," they said. "The admiral is crazy. Let us throw him overboard and go home before our provisions give out." Columbus learned what they were saying. He called them up before him and said, "The king and queen of Spain have sent me to find the Indies, and with the help of God I will go on until I see them." The very next morning, a green branch floated by, and a stick that had been cut by a human was picked up. Later, the branch of a tree with red berries was seen. The men forgot their fears and were as eager as the admiral himself to hurry on.

Night came, but Columbus could not sleep. He stood gazing earnestly into the west, and suddenly he saw a light that moved, as if someone was walking and carrying a torch. When the moon rose, it shone on the white sand of one of the islands that are now called the [Bahamas](#).

In the morning, Columbus put on his richest uniform, all aglow with scarlet and gold, and was rowed ashore. He fell on his knees, kissed the ground, and thanked God for His goodness. Then he unfurled the royal standard and cried, "In the name of the glorious sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, I take possession of this land and name it San Salvador."

All this time a crowd of people, half hidden in the woods, were watching Columbus and his men with wide-open eyes. At first they were frightened, but when they saw that the strangers did not attempt to harm them, they came nearer and nearer. "Those are good spirits come down from the skies," they whispered. They threw themselves on their knees before the Spaniards to show their reverence. Then they touched the clothes and beards and white skin of the explorers, and welcomed them as well as they could by signs. Columbus gave them glass beads and little bells and red and blue caps. In return, they brought him tame parrots, baskets of fruit, and great balls of cotton yarn.



These natives were copper-colored. Their hair was straight and black, and they had no beards. They were naked, unless the rings that some of

them wore in their noses could be called articles of dress. The Spaniards looked eagerly at these rings, for they seemed to be made of pure gold. "Where does the gold come from?" they asked as well as they could by signs. "Over there," the natives replied, pointing to the southwest. Columbus supposed that he was on one of the islands off eastern Asia, and that they were pointing to the mainland.

For many weeks, he sailed among the islands, hoping to find some of the great cities of Asia. Then, he decided to go home and report back to the king and queen. "I can come again next year," he thought. "Now that I have found the way to India, there will be no lack of ships or men."

More than two months later, the bells of Palos rang merrily, the shops and schools were closed, and the whole town flocked to the wharves, for Columbus was coming up the river. As soon as he had landed, a procession was formed, and he went to the church to thank God for bringing him safely home. It is easy to guess where he went next, for Columbus never forgot those who had been kind to him. He went straight to his old friends, the monks of La Rabida. From there he sent a letter to the king and queen.

Then, there was great excitement at the Spanish court. The sovereigns wrote Columbus a letter, addressed to "Don Christopher Columbus, our admiral of the ocean, and viceroy and governor of the islands discovered in the [Indies](#)." This letter instructed him to come to their court at once, and Columbus obeyed. All the way, people lined the roads and stood at the doors and windows, gazing at the great man and cheering as he went by.

When he reached Barcelona, a procession was formed. First came six Indians that Columbus had brought back with him. They were followed by the sailors carrying parrots, stuffed birds, the skins of strange beasts, plants, berries, and ornaments of gold that had come from the other side of the Atlantic. Then came the admiral on horseback in a handsome uniform, and after him came a brilliant company of young nobles flashing with jewels.

When they reached the royal audience room, there sat the king and queen on their throne, with a



glittering canopy of gold over their heads. Around them stood the courtiers and the proudest nobles of Spain, all watching to catch the first glimpse of the man who had made the wonderful voyage. Among them must have been Columbus' son, Diego, for the queen had made Diego a page to her own son.

Columbus walked slowly up the room, gray-haired, dignified, and as stately as any of the lordly Spaniards. He knelt before the throne to kiss the hands of the king and queen, but they rose as they would have risen to greet any mighty king and asked him to be seated. Then he told them about the voyage, the new lands, and the strange people that he had seen. "There are even greater discoveries before us," he said. "The wealth of many kingdoms will come to Spain, and there are thousands of heathen to whom Spain can teach the religion of Christ."

The king and queen wished Columbus to make another voyage at once. He did not have to plead for help now, for they said, "Send us the list of what vessels, food and arms you will need, and they shall be supplied." As for men, there were thousands who would have been glad to go with him, for people believed that whoever went on this voyage would make his fortune. Soon the fleet of seventeen vessels was ready, and crowds of people stood on the shore cheering as they sailed away.

It is almost a pity that the story of Columbus does not end here, for in the rest of his life there was much trouble and disappointment. He went on a third voyage, and this time he coasted along the continent of South America. He would have been glad to explore farther, but he had to go to Haiti to care for some colonists who had crossed the ocean with him on his second voyage. They had no idea of working for the wealth they expected to get. They were discontented and quarrelsome, and they blamed Columbus for all of their troubles. Some of them returned to Spain, and there made such complaints of the admiral that an officer named Bobadilla was sent to Haiti to take his place. Bobadilla threw Columbus into chains and accused him of so many crimes that he expected to be put to death without even a hearing. The great man was taken on board a vessel to be carried back to Spain. As soon as they were away from Bobadilla, the captain and the owner of the vessel knelt before the prisoner and began to take off his irons. "No," said the admiral, "the king and queen sent the man who put these chains upon me, and they alone shall take them off."

All the way to Spain, Columbus wore the chains and irons, but he was treated with as much honor as could have been shown to the king himself; and as soon as the king and queen saw what wrong had been done him, they tried to make amends. Still, they were almost as much disappointed as the colonists, for they had expected that Columbus would find the rich cities of Asia.

Something had happened, while he was gone on this voyage that made them even more dissatisfied. A Portuguese named [Vasco da Gama](#) had discovered

that it was possible to sail around Africa; and he had returned with loads of silks and satins, spices, ivory, emeralds, and rubies. "That is the way to go to the Indies," declared the sea captains. "What is the use of trying to get to Japan and China by crossing the Atlantic?"

Then Columbus determined to go on a fourth voyage. He had no thought that a vast continent and the Pacific Ocean lay between China and the islands that he had seen. He believed that he could find a passage between the islands which would lead from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. Of course, no such passage could be found, and he had to return to Spain, where he died less than two years later. He had dreamed of being very rich; all his life he was poor. He had dreamed of finding the Indies, but he had failed. He died a disappointed man, but if he could have looked ahead five hundred years and seen the America of today, he would surely have rejoiced that he was the discoverer. Not the discoverer of a shorter way to India, but of a mighty continent.

## Internet Resources

[Webster's 1828 Dictionary](#) -- A very useful online dictionary, originally written in 1828, and many of the words in these stories can be found at this site

[Word Central](#) -- Online dictionary

[Maps of the Major Islands of the World](#) – an interactive listing and map of the major islands of the world

[The Story of Columbus at La Rabida](#) – the story of Columbus' visit to La Rabida, for children

[Christopher Columbus](#) – a brief biography of Columbus

[Christopher Columbus Coloring Pages](#)