

Name _____



Vasco da Gama

By Sharon Fabian

Was Vasco da Gama a hero or a villain? Was he an adventurer who bravely explored new lands, or a treasure hunter who took advantage of the people he met? The story of Vasco da Gama shows how a famous person in history can be presented as either a good guy or a bad guy. It also shows how opinions can change.



Vasco da Gama was born in Sines, Portugal in 1460. His father was the governor of his hometown, and Vasco da Gama was brought up as a young gentleman and received a good education.

He began his career as a warrior and a navigator, and he must have been good at his jobs, because soon, in 1497, the king of Portugal chose him to lead an important expedition.

Vasco da Gama's mission was to lead an expedition to find an all water route to India. This was almost the same mission that Christopher Columbus had set out on but, as we know, Columbus landed in America instead. Da Gama set sail with four ships and over 150 men, many of them convicts. His plan was to sail around the southern tip of Africa, known as the Cape of Good Hope, and then north to India. Along the way he made many stops to trade at ports along Africa's East Coast. He completed his mission and landed in Calicut, India the next year, 1498.

It was in Calicut that his troubles really began. The ruler of India was insulted by the cheap "gifts" that da Gama had brought. You might remember that something similar happened in this country. Explorers brought "gifts" to the native Americans here too. The gifts were inexpensive pretty beads and other items of little value, but the

explorers hoped that they would win the good will of the native people here. Da Gama tried the same tactic in India, but it didn't work. Not only did the Indian ruler get angry at da Gama, but the Muslim merchants there wanted to get rid of him too. They felt that da Gama was interfering with their business. Da Gama was kicked out, and he sailed back to Europe.

In 1502, he set sail again on a mission that some people say was all about revenge. This time, he sailed with 20 ships -- 20 well-armed ships. Da Gama's fleet attacked the city of Calicut. They caused heavy damage to the city, and they killed many of the city's people. Some reports say that da Gama treated his enemies with unnecessary cruelty. One report tells of him locking 380 people on a ship that was then burned. The 380 people died. Da Gama then made treaties, or agreements, with India that benefited European traders in the East. This time, he brought back merchandise valued at millions of dollars.

For his accomplishments, Vasco da Gama was given many titles, including Lord, Count, and Admiral. He became very rich. Da Gama had been sent to India because the King hoped to make his country richer and more powerful, but it was the riches and power gained by da Gama that many people objected to.

Many people in India felt that da Gama exploited, or took advantage of, Indian people and Muslim traders. They did not see him as a hero at all. That is why, when Portugal was planning a 500th anniversary celebration of da Gama's voyage, many people protested. Rallies were held against the celebration, and many people decided not to participate.

Sometimes da Gama was treated like a hero, and sometimes like a villain. Some people saw him as a brave adventurer; others saw him as a greedy exploiter. Could he have been both? Opinions change from time to time, and from place to place. What do you think?

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Questions

- _____ 1. Vasco da Gama discovered an all water route to _____.
- A. Spain
 - B. Portugal
 - C. India
 - D. Africa
- _____ 2. The southernmost point of Africa is called _____.
- A. Cape of Good Hope
 - B. Calicut
 - C. Sines
 - D. India
- _____ 3. Many of the men in da Gama's crew were _____.
- A. Indians
 - B. prisoners
 - C. kings
 - D. gentlemen
- _____ 4. Which happened last?
- A. He was educated in Portugal.
 - B. Vasco da Gama found an all water route to India.
 - C. He was kicked out of India.
 - D. He attacked Calicut.
- _____ 5. Which happened first?
- A. Da Gama sailed with 4 ships.
 - B. Da Gama stopped at trading ports in Africa.
 - C. Da Gama sailed with 20 ships.
 - D. Da Gama's father became governor.

_____ 6. Another word for treaty is _____.

- A. agreement
- B. governor
- C. merchant
- D. ship

_____ 7. The word exploit means _____.

- A. take advantage of
- B. navigate
- C. trade with
- D. conquer

_____ 8. According to this article, _____.

- A. da Gama was a hero
- B. da Gama was both a hero and a villain
- C. it's a matter of opinion
- D. da Gama was a villain