

England: From discovery to empire

1 Before you read: Taking things round the world

In the 15th and 16th centuries things from Asia were very expensive in the north of Europe because it was so difficult to bring them from the other side of the world. Travel was by sailing ship, usually only near the coast. On land, people used animals for the transport of goods¹.

Look at a map of the world (you can use the map of English-speaking countries at the back of **Green Line 3**) and work out how silk² from China or spices³ from Malaysia came to Europe. Remember, there was no Suez Canal⁴ from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean⁵.

2 The age of discovery

The Italian captain Giovanni Caboto, who was called John Cabot⁶ in England, wanted to find a quicker way to 'the Indies' by going northwest. King Henry VII asked people to help him, and the merchants⁷ of Bristol gave him money. In a small ship called the *Matthew*, Cabot sailed from Bristol in 1497 with just 18 men. Some of these men knew the Atlantic and had maybe sailed to Iceland on fishing boats. Where exactly did Cabot land? It isn't clear. But he returned in just 15 days, so he probably did not get as far as the area we now know as Canada, as some historians have said. But this much is clear: When he returned to Bristol, the merchants were not happy; Cabot had not brought back any gold or spices. However, he had found a good place for fishing!



A modern copy of the *Matthew*

🗨️ What do you think life was like on the *Matthew*? Imagine you and your partner are two of the sailors on the *Matthew* in 1497. You have been at sea for 14 days and can't see land. What do you say to each other?

3 Discovering the world

When Portuguese⁸ and Spanish, and later French, Dutch and English sailors set out to discover the world in the 15th and 16th centuries, they were looking for expensive goods that they could sell in Europe: gold, silver, silk, spices, sugar – and slaves⁹. They knew where these things came from, but not how to get there and back. Both the Portuguese and the Spanish had good ships and sailors, and little by little they discovered new places. They sailed round the southern end of Africa as far as India. Some people thought they could find India by travelling west. The Spanish king and queen paid for the ships in which Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic. He did not find a way to India, but instead discovered a 'New World'. The Spanish started colonies in North, Central and South America, and regularly brought ships back to Europe full of gold and silver.

¹goods [gʊdʒ] Waren • ²silk [sɪlk] Seide • ³spice [spɑɪs] Gewürz • ⁴Suez Canal [su:ɪz kə'næl] • ⁵Mediterranean [ˌmedɪtr'eɪniən] • ⁶Cabot ['kæbət] • ⁷merchant ['mɜ:ʃənt] Kaufmann • ⁸Portuguese [ˌpɔ:tʒjə'gi:z] • ⁹slave [sleɪv] Sklave, Sklavin

- 25 Then in 1519 Ferdinand Magellan¹⁰ of Portugal sailed from Spain to find a route to the Spice Islands of southeast Asia by going west. He had to explore¹¹ a long way to the south before he could get round the south of South America, but finally he crossed the Pacific and his expedition¹² was able to return to Spain. (Magellan and many other crewmembers died before they could return to Europe.)
- 30 This opened a new route for the Spanish: from southeast Asia across the Pacific by ship, then by land across Central America (about where the Panama Canal is now) and by ship again across the Atlantic. While the Spanish were in Central America, Portuguese colonies grew in South America and southeast Asia.

Look at the trade routes¹³ you worked out in exercise 1. What changed after the Spanish and Portuguese discovered their new routes?

4 English trade

The Northeast Passage¹⁴

- 35 In 1551 Sebastian Cabot, John Cabot's son, gave London merchants the idea that they could maybe reach China by a Northeast Passage: round the north of Norway. A group of people started the *Company of Merchant Adventurers to New Lands*. Members bought shares¹⁵ at £25 each: This paid for
- 40 three ships, which the company and members filled with goods for trade. The ships started from London on 11th May 1553. However, the weather was very bad. One ship got as far as the north coast of Russia. The sea turned to ice, so the ship stayed there for the winter, but the merchants were allowed
- 45 to trade, and even went to the capital, Moscow. By late 1554 they were back in London again. The company later became the 'Muscovy¹⁶ Company'. It took its name from Moscow.

Later, other trading companies started to go to other parts of the world. Two of the most important were the Virginia Company and the East India Company.

1. Before the Muscovy Company, a merchant risked everything when he sent a ship out to trade: the ship, the people, the goods. The Muscovy Company was the first in the world to sell shares. What difference did that make for merchants?
2. Why was it important for world trade?

DID YOU KNOW?

The Northwest Passage

The Dutch, French and British followed the example of the Portuguese and Spanish and also started to sail to Asia for trade in sugar, spices and silk. However, they still needed to find a way to Asia that was not already in the hands of the Spanish or Portuguese. So for many years Drake and other English captains continued with journeys of exploration, and looked for new ways around the north of North America (the 'Northwest Passage').

5 Explorers

Find out about one of these explorers from books or the Internet:

Martin Frobisher • John Davis • Henry Hudson

¹⁰Magellan [mə'gɛlən] • ¹¹to explore [ɪks'plɔː] auskundschaften, erforschen • ¹²expedition [ɪkspɪ'dɪʃn] Expedition • ¹³route [ru:t] Route, Weg • ¹⁴passage ['pæsɪdʒ] Durchfahrt • ¹⁵share [ʃeə] Anteil, Aktie • ¹⁶Muscovy ['mʌskəvi]

6 Elizabeth I and her sea captains

50 Like her father Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth I wanted to help people to find new lands – and gold! Elizabeth allowed Sir Francis Drake and others to go out and attack Spanish ships. In 1577, with the help of a Portuguese pilot¹⁷, Drake sailed round the world. In the Pacific he attacked and took a Spanish treasure ship full of gold (worth¹⁸ about £7,000,000 in today's money). He got back to England again in September 1580. The queen got half the money and it was more money than she usually got from the whole country in a year!

Another famous sea captain was Sir Walter Raleigh¹⁹. His half-brother, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, explored the coast of North America south of Newfoundland but he drowned on the way back to England. Raleigh asked the Queen if he could do what Sir Humphrey had planned:

60 to start the first English colony in the New World. In 1585 Raleigh sent out seven ships and 108 men, mostly soldiers. They built a small settlement²⁰ on Roanoke²¹ Island off the coast of Virginia. At first they were friendly with the Native Americans, who helped them with fishing and finding other food. One man, John White, made drawings of the 'Indians'. One of the colony's leaders returned to England to get more food and equipment for them and reported that Virginia looked like good country for farming. However, there was a delay with the supplies²². The colonists were no longer so friendly with the Native Americans and in 1586 all the colonists went back to England.



In 1587 Raleigh tried again to start a colony, this time with a mixed group of 150 people. Raleigh wanted them to go further²³ north, but it was late in the year, so they landed on Roanoke Island again. The colonists started to build houses and a small fortress. They needed more supplies from England, but when they got there the Spanish Armada was on its way. Spain was at the head of a great Catholic empire and wanted to attack and take over Protestant England to make sure that England became a Catholic country again. The Queen needed every English ship to defeat the Armada. Again there was a delay in sending supplies to the colony. At last some ships were allowed to go, but Raleigh had found a Portuguese pilot to take them and the pilot told them about the rich Spanish treasure ships. Of course, they went off to look for treasure. They did not get to Roanoke Island until 1591. All the people had disappeared.

Raleigh had no further chance to start a colony in the New World, but Sir Humphrey Gilbert's two sons continued his ideas and eventually English colonisation started on the coast of Virginia and further north. The Virginia Company started the Jamestown settlement in 1607 (James I was then king of England and Scotland). This was the first successful English settlement in the New World. Many others followed it.

1. Why do you think the first colony on Roanoke Island was not a success?
2. Could the second colony have been a success, do you think?
3. Why was the fight against the Spanish Armada more important to Elizabeth than the supplies for a settlement in the New World? (To read more about the Armada, look at 'The Spaniards are coming' on pages 116 – 117 of Green Line 3.)
4. By 1600, other countries in Europe no longer thought of England as a small, weak country. What made them change their minds?

¹⁷pilot [ˈpɪlət] Pilot, Lotse • ¹⁸worth [wɜːθ] wert • ¹⁹Raleigh [ˈreɪli] • ²⁰settlement [ˈsetlmənt] Siedlung, Niederlassung • ²¹Roanoke [ˈrəʊənəʊk] • ²²supplies [səˈplaɪz] Proviant • ²³further [ˈfɜːðə] weiter

7 The pink bits on the map

Over the years British ships and explorers and British trading companies spread all over the world. English and French colonies grew in North America. When the Dutch became stronger at sea, they took over the 'Spice Islands' of southeast Asia, so the English East India Company looked at India and decided to trade there. Merchants sent goods from Britain all over the world, and from all over the world they brought beautiful and expensive things back to Britain. And English was spoken everywhere the British started colonies.

By the time of Queen Victoria's death in 1901, Britain had become a very rich world power with a huge colonial empire; 25% of the planet was under British control.

Look at the map of English-speaking countries again. All of them were countries that were important for trade with Britain or where Britain started colonies. They became part of the British Empire, and many are now part of the Commonwealth. You can find out more about:

- the discovery and colonisation of Australia
- the French and the British in Canada
- the British in India

Use books, films, TV and the Internet to find out more.

8 Looking at words

Find words in the texts in the same word family as

explore • colony • discover

Find some more in your dictionary and look at where the stress is in each word.

Lösungen/Lösungsvorschläge

1

The pupils could suggest transport overland to the eastern Mediterranean or by ship through the Arabian Gulf or the Red Sea, overland to the Mediterranean coast, across the Mediterranean by ship and then overland again through western Europe.

It may be necessary to remind pupils that the known world was limited to the lands surrounding the Mediterranean plus northern Europe. Not much was known about Africa south of the Sahara, and only fishermen after cod and herring knew Iceland and Greenland, with a few possible rumours of lands further west. Asia and particularly China and the Far East, 'Cathay', were known only through the reports of Marco Polo and a few others who had travelled there. America, Australia, the Pacific Ocean were not known in Europe.

2

Sailors and others would probably have known that the earth is round, but nobody knew what the distance might be between Europe and Asia, or that there was a whole continent in between. Pupils may say:

- We've been at sea for 14 days and we can't see land. What are we going to do? What's going to happen?
- Are we just going to sail on and on? We want to find the land that silk comes from.
- Have we got enough food and water? What happens if we don't find any land at all?
- Do you think the captain knows how far it is? He's an Italian, he may know the Mediterranean, but what does he know about the Atlantic?
- I've been north in a fishing boat. If we go on north we'll see the ice-mountains on the sea. They're dangerous. If we hit one at night the ship could sink in a few minutes.
- Can we ask the captain to turn round and go back to Bristol? Have we got enough food to do that?
- Or we just go on sailing until we're all dead.

3

Individuelle Antworten

4

1. When a company sells shares, then the people (merchants) who buy those shares are the part-owners, or 'shareholders', of that company. They get some of the profit, and if there are losses, they share those losses. So if the company loses a ship, then the different shareholders all lose *some* money, but no single person loses *everything*.
2. This was a big step for world trade: The shareholder system made it possible for more and more people to invest smaller sums of money and become active in business. The results: an economy that became bigger and bigger, and a higher standard of living for more and more people.

5

Individuelle Antworten

6

1. The first colony on Roanoke Island had 108 men. The soldiers knew how to fight and how to build a fortress, but they probably didn't know much about farming or growing food. They needed food and other supplies from England and when these did not come, they had nothing to eat. The native people helped them at first but the Native Americans must have got tired of giving them food all the time.
2. The second colony could have been a success if there were more people in it who knew about growing food and they had taken the correct things with them. The women in the families would be used to running a household and preparing food. But it was late in the year when they arrived, so it was probably too late to start growing food for the winter. That meant that they needed help from the native people again.
3. The fight against the Spanish Armada was more important to Elizabeth than the supplies for a settlement in the New World because she had to make sure that England survived as a country. There were only a few English people in the 'New World' and they had not found any gold there. It was not yet important for England as a colony. Elizabeth

had to think about the whole of England. There were so many Spanish ships in the Armada and so many Spanish soldiers that, if they landed and attacked London, they could take over England. The English had to defeat the Spanish ships at sea before they could land. Elizabeth did not have many ships, so she needed all the big ships that other people owned to help defeat the Spanish.

4. There were different reasons not to think of England as a small, weak country any more. English ships had defeated the great Spanish Armada. The Spanish had not been able to attack England as they had planned. English ships were also able to attack Spanish treasure ships and take the gold and silver that they carried. Drake had even attacked Spanish ships in the Pacific. England could attack the Spanish Empire and win! By the end of the 16th century England had also sent ships to discover land in the New World and had started colonies there. Although there was not as much gold and silver for England in North America as the Spanish and Portuguese had taken from Central and South America, the English (and French) colonies meant that Spain could not start colonies in those areas.

8

verb	explore: ●●	colonise ●●	discover: ●●●
noun – thing	exploration: ●●●	colony: ●● colonisation: ●●●●	discovery: ●●●
noun – person	explorer: ●●	colonist: ●●	discoverer: ●●●