

The historiography of Columbus

Disputed truths about Columbus in popular history magazines

Who was Columbus and where did he come from? Columbus' life and deeds still today raise questions. There are historical uncertainties connected with Columbus that still today arouse interest and also make it possible to use his name and adventures in not always trustworthy ways. Problem-oriented reflections on different historical accounts can be found in the text from Spain labeled "[A certain Christopher Columbus, Discoverer](#)" and in the Polish article "[Christopher Columbus, or a Tale of King Wladyslaw on a Remote Island](#)". Read the articles and reflect upon the questions below.

Tasks (students' view):

What did he look like?

- 1 a. Compare the images of Columbus in the articles. How is he depicted and why does his looks differ?
- b. Test yourself and find out more about Columbus in different images in this [quiz](#).

2 Where did Columbus come from? What places are presented as Columbus' place of birth?

3 Why is it important where Columbus came from? (give different reasons for the controversy surrounding his origins)

4 From what countries do the texts you have read come from? Does this have an impact on how the history of Columbus is portrayed?

5 Is there a true story of Columbus? What makes a historical account true?

Did he know?

- 6 Ferdinand and Isabella are reputed to have said to Columbus after his trip that it seems that you accomplished everything you promised us, as if you already knew it before you told us. An eyewitness claimed that Columbus sailed as if he "sailed along a well-known route".

Discuss with a classmate the following:

- a.** Did Columbus already know that there was a route across the Atlantic Ocean?
- b.** What speaks for and what speaks against the notion that Columbus already knew that there was land beyond the sea?
- c.** If he already knew, should we then rewrite history?