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Henry Hudson

by Liana Mahoney

During the Age of Discovery from the 15th to 18th centuries, many European explorers chartered previously unknown areas of the globe. Their discoveries not only changed the map of the world in their times, but also influenced culture in many ways. Henry Hudson was one of these important explorers of the Age of Discovery.



Henry Hudson was an Englishman born in the 1570s. Not much is known about his early life, but many believe that he developed knowledge of sailing while he was young. It is likely that as a boy, he sailed to the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and around Africa on merchant ships with his family. Later, his love for sailing turned into a dream. Like many explorers of his time, Hudson wanted to find a passage through the northern seas to Asia. This dream was to become his life's work.

During Hudson's time, Europeans were earning money by trading goods for spices in Asia. In order to get to Asia from England, though, ships had to travel a long, treacherous journey around the southern tips of Africa or South America. Other countries, such as Portugal and Spain, controlled these travel routes. They made it difficult for people from England to use these routes. So, many trading companies were willing to send explorers out to sea to search for shorter alternative routes to Asia.

In 1607, an English trading company called the Muscovy Company hired Hudson to be captain of a small ship that would explore the Arctic Ocean. Many countries had already sent sailors to explore this area of the northern seas, but none had ever

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discovered a passage to Asia. With ten sailors, Hudson set sail on a ship called The Hopewell. They passed Iceland, reached the eastern coast of Greenland, and then turned northeast toward the North Pole. There, the Hopewell encountered too much ice to continue onward, and by late summer, the ship was forced to turn around. Although Henry Hudson had failed to find a northern route to Asia on this first voyage, he had gotten closer to the North Pole than any other explorer of his time.

On his second voyage, Hudson tried to go north of Russia and around the eastern part of the North Pole. He set sail in 1608, again with a small crew on the Hopewell. By mid-summer, though, Hudson and his crew encountered dangerous icebergs, and when the ship became blocked by ice, they had no choice but to turn around and return to England once again.

When the Muscovy Company refused to fund his next voyage, Hudson moved to Holland. There, he asked the Dutch East India Company to pay for yet another voyage to explore the northern seas around Russia. In 1609, Hudson set sail on a ship called the Half Moon. When the Half Moon encountered the same problems with ice, Hudson decided to try something new. Though his crew wanted to go home, Hudson convinced them that they should head west to explore North America instead. Based on reports from previous explorers, Hudson believed there might be a river that cut through North America and went all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. If correct, he would finally have realized his dream of finding a shorter and safer route to Asia.

The Half Moon headed west, and by July, had reached what we now know as the coast of the state of Maine. Here, Hudson and his crew encountered many Native Americans. Most were friendly, and Hudson was able to trade goods with them. Hudson continued exploring along the Northeastern coast of North America. He explored the

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the areas we now know as Chesapeake Bay In Virginia, and Delaware Bay. In September 1609, Hudson began his most famous exploration, sailing up the river that we now know as the Hudson River in New York. The Half Moon kept moving up the river, looking for a route to the Pacific Ocean and to Asia. But this route simply did not exist. At the time, Hudson believed his voyage was a failure. But Hudson had actually discovered New York and the Hudson River.

Henry Hudson made one final voyage to North America in 1610, but when his crew encountered sickness, Native American attacks, and other dangers, they turned against him. Hudson and eight other men were ordered off the ship and onto a rowboat with no food or water. They were never heard from again.

Henry Hudson never did realize his dream of finding an alternative route to Asia. But because of his determination and his courage as an explorer, he made important discoveries that changed the world. Dutch settlers later colonized the areas around Hudson's North American voyage. Today, the river and bay he explored are named after this important English explorer.

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- 1) What according to the passage made Hudson an important figure in the history of exploration?
 - a. His endless desire to travel around the world amazed many historians.
 - b. His determination and courage as an explorer, making great discoveries that changed the world were outstanding.
 - c. Despite being refused by the Muscovy Company, he never gave up his lofty dream.
 - d. Not many explorers in the history have embarked on as many voyages as he did.

- 2) How do the first three paragraphs help introduce the key idea in the passage and zero in on Henry Hudson with regards to the idea?

- 3) Why were several trading companies desirous of searching for alternative routes to Asia?

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4) What did Hudson decide to do differently during his third voyage and with what purpose?

5) Do you think that names of the ships have a certain significance or meaning? If you were an explorer, what name would you like to have for your ship and why?

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- 2) How do the first three paragraphs help introduce the key idea in the passage and zero in on Henry Hudson with regards to the idea?

Paragraph one introduces the period between 15th to 18th centuries as an era of exploration, explains how this exploration benefited the world during those times, and then presents Hudson as an important figure in this arena. Paragraph two establishes that Hudson too shared a burning desire to find a shorter route to Asia. Paragraph three expands further on why Hudson's voyage to find this alternative route was the need of the hour.

- 3) Why were several trading companies desirous of searching for alternative routes to Asia?

During those times, Europeans were earning money by trading goods for spices in Asia. However, the route to Asia was not only long but also treacherous as countries such as Portugal and Spain, controlled these travel routes. They made it difficult for people from England to use these routes. So, many trading companies were willing to send explorers out to

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- 4) What did Hudson decide to do differently during his third voyage and with what purpose?

When Hudson encountered the same problems with ice, he decided to head west to explore North America instead. Hudson believed there might be a river that cut through North America and went all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. His purpose was to succeed in realizing his dream of finding a shorter and safer route to Asia.

- 5) Do you think that names of the ships have a certain significance or meaning? If you were an explorer, what name would you like to have for your ship and why?

Answers may vary.
