

RESOURCE LIBRARY
ACTIVITY : 20 MINS

Crossing the Atlantic: Then and Now

Students use a map to compare and contrast transatlantic travel during colonial times and today, including changes in travel time and comfort.

GRADES

1, 2

SUBJECTS

Geography, Human Geography, Physical Geography

CONTENTS

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OVERVIEW

Students use a map to compare and contrast transatlantic travel during colonial times and today, including changes in travel time and comfort.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/crossing-the-atlantic-then-and-now/>

DIRECTIONS

1. Introduce the concepts of ocean travel and ocean crossings.

Ask: *Why might people want to travel all the way across the ocean?* Elicit student responses, such as to visit family and friends; to explore new sites on vacation; to trade goods; and to move or resettle. List them on the board. Encourage students to think about why people would want to move from one side of the ocean to the other and resettle. Ask students to imagine that they will be taking a trip across the Atlantic Ocean. Ask: *What type of transportation might you take to cross the ocean?* (plane, boat)

2. Discuss the differences between ocean crossings hundreds of years ago and today.

Explain to students that hundreds of years ago people often crossed the Atlantic Ocean to explore new places and move from one place to another. They traveled on sailing ships. Tell students that people traveling from Europe to North America during the colonial period of 1600-1799 faced a long, dangerous journey. They often became sick and even died while making the crossing. Ask: *Why is making the same journey today much faster and easier?* Elicit from students that ships no longer rely on wind and that airplanes are now the fastest way to make the same journey.

3. Distribute copies of the worksheet **Crossing the Atlantic**.

Ask students if they know what the large body of water is in the center of the map. Then read aloud its label: Atlantic Ocean. Point out that the landmass on the right (east) side of the map is the continent of Europe, and the land on the left (west) is North America. Ask students to point out where they live on this map. Next, point out Amsterdam on the map. Explain to students that this is a city in Europe where many planes and boats leave to travel across the ocean—both today and during the colonial period. Point out New York City on the map. Explain that this is a popular destination for planes and boats traveling across the Atlantic Ocean. Encourage students to use a ruler and the scale bar on the map to measure the distance between Amsterdam and New York City. Finally, point out the icons on the map that depict three different forms of transportation used to travel across the Atlantic Ocean. Tell students that the plane and modern ship are used for ocean crossings today, and the sailing ship was a popular form of transportation for crossing the ocean hundreds of years ago. Explain that students will use the map to compare journeys made on a colonial ship, a modern ship, and an airplane.

4. Compare the time needed to cross the Atlantic Ocean by ship and airplane.

Ask students to estimate how long it might take to sail a ship across the Atlantic Ocean. Ask: *Would it take an hour, a day, a week, or longer?* Tell students that Henry Hudson was a European explorer traveling across the Atlantic during the colonial period. It took Hudson more than two months to sail from Amsterdam to New York City on his sailing ship, the *Half Moon*. A modern ocean liner, such as the *Queen Mary 2*, makes the trip from Europe in seven days. By plane, the trip is less than an 8-hour flight. Look at a calendar and mark the number of weeks, days, and hours for each trip, using a different colored marker for each increment of time. Help students write the length of time for each mode of transportation on their worksheets. Then pick a departure date and have students count how many days the voyage will take for each of the different transportation modes. Have students add this number to their maps.

5. Have a whole-class discussion about crossing the Atlantic, then and now.

Have a whole-class discussion. Ask:

- *If the two boats and the plane were in a race, which would win? Which would come in second? Which would finish last?* Have students number each of the three modes of transportation on their worksheets with 1 being the fastest and 3 the slowest. (1-plane; 2-modern ocean liner; 3-sailing ship)
- *How was the Half Moon powered?* (Wind filled the sails, which moved the ship across the ocean.)
- *What might happen if there was no wind?* (The ship would slow down or even stop.)
- *Why do modern ships travel much faster than colonial ones?* (Modern ships have powerful engines that help them move much faster; they don't rely on wind.)
- *Why are planes able to cross the ocean so quickly?* (They travel much faster through the air than ships travel on water.)

Informal Assessment

Ask students to think about what they learned and orally state things that affect how long a journey across the ocean might take. Students' ideas should include, in their own words, the distance that must be traveled, the type of transport, how a vessel is powered, the weather, and how modern the method of transport is.

Extending the Learning

Ask students to imagine that they need to pack for a journey across the Atlantic Ocean. They may travel by colonial sailing ship, modern ship, or plane. Have them draw a picture of the items they would need to bring for each type of trip. Have students share their drawings and compare items that would be needed for each of the modes of transportation.

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography

- [Human Geography](#)
- [Physical Geography](#)

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- identify reasons people cross the Atlantic Ocean
- compare modes of transportation for ocean crossings in the colonial period and today
- use maps to compare the amount of time it takes to cross the ocean with the different modes of transportation

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Discussions
- Hands-on learning

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
 - Acquiring Geographic Information
 - Analyzing Geographic Information

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- Standard 1:

How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

• **Standard 17:**

How to apply geography to interpret the past

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HISTORY

• **The History of the United States: Democratic Principles and Values and the Peoples from Many Cultures Who Contributed to Its Cultural, Economic and Political Heritage (K-4) Standard 6:**

Regional Folklore and Cultural Contributions That Helped to Form Our National Heritage

Preparation

What You'll Need

MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Calendar
- Colored markers
- Pencils
- Rulers

PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom

GROUPING

- Large-group instruction

BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

Background Information

Travel across the Atlantic Ocean was much more difficult for American colonists during the colonial period (1600-1799) than it is today. Using a map to compare three methods of transportation reveals how travel has changed over time. Improved technology has turned a long, dangerous voyage into a much faster, safer journey.

Prior Knowledge

Recommended Prior Activities

- [Sailing Through History](#)
- [Time Period Clues](#)

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
Atlantic Ocean	<i>noun</i>	one of Earth's four oceans, separating Europe and Africa from North and South America.
continent	<i>noun</i>	one of the seven main land masses on Earth.
explorer	<i>noun</i>	person who studies unknown areas.
good	<i>noun</i>	object or service that serves a human need or want.
landmass	<i>noun</i>	large area of land.
resettle	<i>verb</i>	to move and build a life in a new place.
transportation	<i>noun</i>	movement of people or goods from one place to another.

For Further Exploration

Interactives

- [The Hudson: The River That Defined America](#)

Websites

- [Library of Congress: America's Story, Jump Back in Time](#)

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