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Throughout the world, Portugal is known for its credible navigation skills and mapmaking techniques. Portugal borders the Atlantic Ocean, thus the Portugueses were forced to sail across the seas to trade with other countries, which helped them develop precise navigation skills. As a result, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, sailors from all over Europe traveled to Portugal to learn how to navigate the oceans. This time became known as Portugal’s “Golden Age.” If a ship’s crew did not have a Portuguese navigator, they at least had Portuguese maps to guide them. Through perfecting the science of navigation, Portugal contributed not only to the discovery of two-thirds of the world for Europe, but also to the discovery of the New World.

Starting Points

1. Ask the students to close their eyes and imagine being alone in a boat in the middle of the ocean. Ask the students how they would get home without getting lost.

2. Share with the students the names of several Portuguese explorers and what their major accomplishments were. Some of these might include Magellan, Pedro Cabral, Vasco da Gama, or the Italian-born Christopher Columbus (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1).

3. Write the following statements on the board:
   a. While forms of navigating were known all over Europe, Portugal perfected the science.
   b. The accomplishments of Portuguese explorers were key factors in several important discoveries.
   c. The dependence of Portugal upon the sea is apparent in Portuguese society.

Information

Navigators

Born in 1394, Prince Henry, the third son of King John I of Portugal, had a powerful influence on the history of Portugal, and the world. He became known as Henry the Navigator when he established the first school of navigation in Europe. He built an observatory and studied the stars to perfect the science of navigation. Under his tutelage, Portugal became a center for sailing. Henry designed the caravel, a vessel used by sailors in the Atlantic (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 2), but his greatest accomplishment was teaching others how to sail and navigate. In that era, if a ship did not have a Portuguese navigator aboard, it at least had access to a Portuguese map.
While Henry himself made no voyages beyond Morocco, he was instrumental in training many other great sailors and instigating Portugal’s so-called Golden Age. Before Henry’s death, Portuguese sailors whom Henry had trained discovered the islands of Madeira, the Azores, and had sailed as far south as Cape Verde. Even after Henry’s death, sailors continued to be trained at the school that he established to train sailors in navigation. In 1488, a Portuguese sailor, Bartolomeu Dias, was the first to travel around the southern tip of Africa, and a colleague, Vasco da Gama, was the first to reach India by sea in 1497. In 1492, Columbus discovered the New World. What is less well known about Christopher Columbus, who sailed under the Spanish flag, is that he was trained in navigation at the school established by Prince Henry, and he also married a Portuguese woman. In 1500, Pedro Alavares Cabral discovered and claimed Brazil as a Portuguese colony. In 1513, Portuguese navigator Fernando de Magalhaes, known to us as Ferdinand Magellan, sailing under the Spanish flag, became the first European to sail on the Pacific Ocean by rounding the southern tip of South America. He died on that trip, but his crew was the first to sail around the world.

**Navigation**

As a result of the aforementioned voyages and explorations, trade routes were established across the seas, helping to increase trade among Europe, Africa, India, Asia, Arabia, and North and South America. This increase in international contact facilitated the cross-cultural exchange of goods, culture, music, and lifestyle. Portugal also established colonies throughout the world. Both the Cape Verde Islands of western Africa and the nations of Angola and Mozambique in southern Africa were established by Portuguese traders and merchants. Because the government of China ceded the island of Macau to the Portuguese to use as a trade port, Chinese law forbade foreigners to enter the mainland; this was similar to England’s arrangement with Hong Kong.

The most well-known Portuguese colony is Brazil. It is the largest country of South America and the fifth largest country in the world. More people speak Portuguese than Spanish in South America. Brazil is also home to São Paulo, one of the largest cities in the world.

With their affinity to conquer the sea and discover new lands, the Portuguese explorers enabled trade and communication between the continents of the earth. Their monks and priests not only spread European culture to foreign lands, but they served as historians, biologists, and linguists in these new lands, which helped the Portuguese people to learn about new and different societies. Because Portugal has assisted in the establishment of various trade routes, citizens of the world have become more united and aware of other cultures—since people today can travel more easily and comfortable. Portugal has made a significant contribution in organizing a global culture; however, there is still much exploration of cultures that can be done.
Activities

1. Ask the students to draw a map of their neighborhood.

2. Teach the students how to use a compass.

3. Ask the students to pretend that they are reporters from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Have them write newspaper articles about an exploration (rounding the Cape of Good Hope, arriving in India, arriving in the Americas, or reaching the west coast of South America).

4. As a class, build boats out of popsicle sticks, milk cartons, or any other materials (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 3). Sail the boats in a stream, pool, or pond.

Discussion Questions

1. What would it be like to discover a new land?

2. How would you communicate with people who speak a language you’ve never heard before?

3. Among some of the great explorers you read about, who would you like to work for? Why?

4. What would be the hardest part about leaving on an exploration voyage?
Diego Cão 1482-85
Explored the western coast of Africa and was the first explorer to pass Cape Bojador, just south of the Canary Islands, and enter the Congo River in what is now known as Angola.

Bartolomeu Dias 1486-87
First European to sail around what was known as the Cape of Storms at the southern tip of Africa. Afterward it was renamed the Cape of Good Hope.

Vasco de Gama 1497-98
First European to sail all the way to India. He began the maritime trade route with Asia.

Pedro Alvares Cabral 1500
On his way to India discovered what is now known as Brazil. He sent a ship back to report the news and he continued on his voyage.

Fernão de Magalhães 1482-85
First person to sail around the world. He actually died in the South China Sea but he is given credit since he navigated the entire journey the point where his crew could sail without him.

David Megueleiro 1660
First European to sail north around Europe and Asia to arrive in Japan.
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 2: Portuguese Caravel
Instructions for Making a Milk Carton Boat

1. Clean out a milk carton and seal it again with glue.
2. Draw a rectangle on one side of the carton.
3. Cut out the rectangle.
4. Tape in a long stick or a straw for the mast.
5. Make a sail out of another piece of paper.
6. Put it in water and use a straw to blow on the sail to move it around.
The green band represents hope in the future and the green fields of Portugal. Red commemorates all who died to make Portugal great. The Armilar Sphere represents the Portuguese navigation of the seas and the first circumnavigation of the globe by a Portuguese navigator. The seven castles commemorate the seven significant battles fought by Dom Afonso Henriques to liberate Portugal from the Moors in the twelfth century. The five blue shields represent the five wounds inflicted on Christ during the crucifixion and the white dots represent the money paid to Judas to betray Christ (30 pieces of silver; the middle is counted twice).