Reasons for the Age of Exploration- SS6H6

Why did the European exploration begin to flourish in the 1400’s? Two main reasons stand out. First, Europeans of this time had several motives for exploring the world. Second, advances in knowledge and technology helped make voyages of discovery possible.

**Motives for Explorations—Explain why Europeans began exploring the world via the ocean.**

For early explorers, one of the main motives for exploration was the desire to find new trade routes to Asia. By the 1400s, merchants and crusaders had brought many goods to Europe from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Demand for these goods increased the desire for trade.

Europeans were especially interested in spices from Asia. They had learned to use spices to help preserve food during winter and to cover up the taste of food that was no longer fresh.

Trade with the east, however, was expensive and difficult. Muslims and Italians controlled the flow of trade. Muslim traders carried goods to the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Italian merchants then brought the goods to Europe. Problems arose when Muslim rulers sometimes closed the trade routes from Asia to Europe. Also, the goods went through many hands, and each trading party raised their price.

European monarchs (King/Queen) and merchants wanted to break the hold that Muslims and Italians had on trade. One way to do so was to find a sea route to Asia. Portuguese sailors looked for a route that went around Africa. Christopher Columbus tried to reach Asia by sailing westacross the Atlantic.

Other motives also came into play. Many people were excited by the opportunity for new knowledge. Explorers saw the chance to earn fame and glory as well as wealth. Some craved adventure. And as new lands were discovered, nations wanted to claim the lands’ riches for themselves.

A final motive for exploration was the desire to spread Christianity. Both Protestant and Catholic nations were eager to make new converts. Missionaries followed the path blazed by explorers, sometimes using force to bring native peoples into their faiths.

**Portugal Begins the Age of Exploration**

The Age of Exploration began in Portugal. This small country is located on the southwestern tip of Europe. Its rulers sent explorers first to nearby Africa and then around the world.

**Key Explorers—How was Prince Henry’s influence felt many years after he started his school?**

The key figure in early Portuguese exploration was **Prince Henry**. Nicknamed the “Navigator”, Henry was not an explorer himself. Instead, he encouraged and directed many important expeditions.

Beginning in 1418, Henry sent explorers to sea almost every year. He also started a school of navigation where sailors and matchmakers could learn their trade. His cartographers (map makers) made new maps based on information captains brought back.

Henry’s early expeditions focused on the west coast of Africa. He wanted to continue the crusades against the Muslims, find gold, and take part in trade.

Gradually, Portuguese explorers made their way further and further south. In 1488, Bartholomeu Dias became the first European to go around the southern tip of Africa. Later, Dias died in a storm at sea.

In July 1497, Vasco Da Gama set sail with four ships to chart a sea route to India. Da Gama’s ships rounded Africa’s southern tip and then sailed up the east coast of the continent. With the help of a sailor who knew the route to India, they crossed the Indian Ocean.

Da Gama arrived in the port of Calcutta, India in May 1448. There he obtained a load of cinnamon and pepper. On the return trip to Portugal, da Gama lost half of his ships. Many of his crew members died of hunger or disease. Still, the valuable cargo he brought back paid for the voyage many times over. His trip made the Portuguese even more eager to trade directly with Indian merchants.

In 1500, another Portuguese sailor, Pedro Cabral, set sail for India with a fleet of 15 ships. He first sailed southwest to avoid calms (areas where there are no winds to fill sails). But he sailed so far west that he reached the east coast of present day Brazil. After claiming this land for Portugal, he sailed east and rounded Africa. Arriving in Calicut, he established a trading post and signed trading treaties. He returned to Portugal in June 1501 after battling several Muslim ships.

**Impact of Portuguese Exploration: Purpose—How did Portuguese exploration affect natives?**

Portugal’s explorers changed Europeans’ understanding of the world in several ways. They explored the coasts of Africa and brought back gold and slaves. They also found a sea route to India. From India, explorers brought back spices like cinnamon and pepper and goods such as porcelain, incense, jewels and silk.

The Portuguese took control of the eastern sea routes to Asia after Cabral’s voyage. Portugal’s control of the Indian Ocean broke the hold of the Muslims and Italians on Asian trade. The prices of Asian goods like spices and fabrics dropped, the more people in Europe could afford to buy them.

During the 1500’s, Portugal also began to establish colonies in Brazil. The native people of Brazil suffered greatly as a result. The Portuguese tried to get native people to give up their religion and convert to Christianity. They also forced them to work on sugar plantations. Missionaries sometimes tried to protect them from abuse, but countless numbers died from over work and European diseases. Others fled into the interior if Brazil.

The colonization of Brazil also had an impact on Africa. As the native population of Brazil decreased, the Portuguese needed more laborers. Starting in the mid 1500’s, they turned to Africa. Over the next 300 years, ships brought millions of enslaved West Africans to Brazil.

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**Answer each of the following prompts. Be sure to include at least two pieces of direct evidence for each purpose.**

**Motives for Explorations—Explain why Europeans began exploring the world via the ocean

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**Impact of Portuguese Exploration: Purpose—How did Portuguese exploration affect natives?**

