Understanding Location:
Europeans and the Known World

The Greek historian Herodotus began his book *History* with a description of the world that was known to him in the fifth century. This included the area around the Mediterranean Sea. The Greeks also recorded tales of some of the first brave sailors to sail out of the Mediterranean and venture down the African coast. At the time, many more areas of the world had humans living on them, but European explorers had not yet reached them.

In the Middle Ages, explorers from Scandinavia sailed as far west as what is now Newfoundland, Canada. Along the way, they established colonies in Scotland, England, Ireland, and Greenland. These Scandinavian explorers were unable to set up colonies in North America. They do not seem to have shared their knowledge of the Americas with the rest of Europe.

Centuries later, southern Europeans used the coast of Africa to guide them on an eastern course towards Asia. They focused on reaching India and its known riches. Lucky accidents followed. Pedro Cabral steered to the southwest from Africa and ended up finding Brazil across the Atlantic Ocean. Columbus had similar good fortune in sailing south and not directly west from Spain. This allowed him to use westward blowing winds to reach America.

John Cabot sailed west from England and used the northern route to reach North America. Explorers continued to search for an easy way through this new continent to Asia. Magellan explored the coast of South America looking for a passage through when he found a dangerous, narrow strait. Bravely, he pushed through it and realized he had entered another ocean, the Pacific. It was so vast that his men nearly starved to death crossing it. However, when they finally reached East Asia, they recognized a part of the world they knew from sailing in the other direction. Sailors heading east and west had finally met by sailing around the globe.
Europeans sailed in all directions to reach Asia and explore the world.

**Directions** Answer the following questions.

**Understanding the Concept**

1. **Labeling** Label the following geographical features in the outline map above: Mediterranean Sea, Africa, North America, South America, Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, India, and China.

2. **Explaining** Why did explorers seeking a sea route to Asia use the African coast? Why didn’t they sail west at first?

3. **Identifying** How did Cabral come upon Brazil and South America while sailing around Africa?
Applying the Concept

4. Analyzing Why did Europeans keep looking for a way through the Americas, instead of exploring the new continent?

5. Making Connections How was the discovery of the Americas just as important to Europeans as finding a sea route to Asia?