Great Voyages of Discovery

The Big Idea
European explorers brought knowledge, wealth, and influence to their countries.

Reasons to Explore
1. People in Europe wanted goods from Asia. Italy and Egypt controlled the trade routes and charged high prices. Europeans wanted to find their own trade routes so they wouldn’t have to pay the fees.

2. Christians wanted to spread their ideas about religion to other parts of the world.

3. Advances in technology made exploration possible.

Portuguese and Spanish explorers
Prince Henry the Navigator was responsible for most of Portugal’s success on the seas. He built an observatory and a navigation school and paid people to sail on explorations.

In 1498 Vasco da Gama sailed around Africa and landed on the west coast of India. This established the sea route to Asia.

One Italian sailor, Christopher Columbus, believed that he could reach Asia by sailing west across the Atlantic.

The king and queen of Spain gave Columbus the money to make his journey.

In October 1492, Columbus landed on a small island in the Bahamas. He believed that he had reached Asia.

Ferdinand Magellan was the first explorer to sail around the tip of South America and circumnavigate, or go all the way around, the globe.

Spanish explorers called the Americas the New World.

When they arrived in these lands in the early 1500s, the Aztec Empire in Mexico and the Inca Empire in Peru were at the height of their powers.

The Spanish saw these empires as good sources of gold and silver. They also wanted to convert the native peoples to Christianity.

Having better weapons, the Spanish quickly conquered the Aztecs and Incas. The Spanish also brought new diseases that over time killed possibly three-quarters of the native peoples. Soon, Spain ruled large parts of North and South America.

The English and French in America
Since the Spanish and Portuguese already held the southern routes through the Americas, the English and French explored northern routes.
Although a northern route to Asia was not established, these explorers claimed northern lands for England and for France.

The Spanish controlled the gold and silver from the former Aztec and Inca empires.

An English sailor named Francis Drake began stealing gold and silver from the Spanish ships.

The Spanish were angry with the English for these raids and sent 130 ships, known as the Spanish Armada, to attack England.

The English ships were faster and had better weapons. They were able to defeat the Spanish.

**In Summary**

The explorations brought new knowledge of geography and proved that some old beliefs were wrong.

Geographers made more-accurate maps that reflected new knowledge.

New trade routes gave more opportunities for wealth and resources.

Europeans spread their influence around the world by establishing colonies and setting up new trade routes.