

Historica Canada Education Portal

John Cabot

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the [Heritage Minute, "John Cabot."](#) It was John Cabot's 1497 "discovery" of North America that led to the development of the North West Atlantic cod fishery, and England's claim to the new continent.

Aims

The "John Cabot" Minute is the starting point for an examination of several topics.

With role-playing activities and further research, students will study the Atlantic cod fishery, and consider the role of "explorers."

Students will study: resource management and sustainability; historical views of resources versus current views; and current discoveries and explorations. They will also assess Cabot's achievements in relation to Christopher Columbus'.

Activities

1. View the John Cabot Heritage Minute (or listen to the Radio Minute) and have students prepare a dramatization based on the Minute and their own research of Cabot's return to England after his first voyage and the discovery of the new world. Topics to be incorporated into this dramatization might include the environment, the voyage itself, the idea of discovering the west as a new continent, and the abundance of natural resources.

Roles to be played:

- John Cabot: to talk about the experience, discovery
- The crew members: to support him in his account, give personal stories of the voyage
- King Henry VII: to ask questions about the new world and the fishery
- One, or a few, disbelievers: to challenge Cabot's report of the new world
- English bystanders and fishers: to reflect the excitement of the discovery

2. In the Minute, John Cabot is surrounded by cod, where it appeared so thick that a person "could walk across their backs." That news opened the North West Atlantic fishery, which helped feed the world for centuries to come. Why was cod so important to Newfoundland's economy? Have your students look into how cod was used all over the world. Research the ways that cod was caught, preserved, and shipped.

3. In class have students think of, and name, other people who have made voyages or discoveries. Expand the definition to include different kinds of discoveries such as scientific or artistic. Brainstorm with the class about what they consider key qualities of an explorer.

4. Discuss Cabot's stories about the Grand Banks and the cod that he saw there. Discuss his account of a resource that seemed impossible to deplete, and how it has now been depleted due to over-fishing. How does Cabot's initial report compare to the reality of today? Ask your students if they can think of other natural resources that may have seemed infinite. It is important to touch on the sustainability of natural resources and what can be done to protect them. This could either be carried out as a discussion, or expanded and researched as a project.

5. Cabot was an explorer during the first great age of European colonial expansion. How did Europeans view the resources of the new world at the time? How did their mindset affect their use of natural resources and treatment of indigenous people?

6. Have students research the voyages and discoveries of both John Cabot and Christopher Columbus. In class, discuss with students why Christopher Columbus is often credited with the discovery of the new world. This could also lead into a discussion about which figures are recognized in history, and which ones are less recognized or left out altogether.

7. Discuss some modern voyages or discoveries into unknown realms such as outer space, the ocean, or even science and medicine. How are these the same or different from John Cabot's voyages?

Resources

- [Heritage Minute: John Cabot](#)

- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: John Cabot](#)