

# Renaissance: Trade & Exploration Through Inventions

[RESUME GAME](#) | [NEW GAME](#) | [LOAD GAME](#) | [SETTINGS](#)

*Blended Learning Design: combining the best of classroom-based teaching with the powerful scope of digital educational materials for lessons that reimagine how information can be presented, engaged with, and assessed.*



## GRADE 6 - Social Sciences (History)



### An immersive, choice-based historical activity

This interactive digital activity places learners in the role of decision-makers on a 14th-century European trading voyage. With a branching narrative, learners must investigate key Renaissance inventions (the magnetic compass, caravel and gunpowder weapons), and use what they learn to guide their crew through dangerous sea routes, challenging trade encounters, and moral dilemmas.

Throughout the voyage, learners work as a team to:

- Explore innovations that expanded global trade
- Make realistic, high-stakes decisions at sea and in foreign settlements
- Manage crew morale, cargo, ship condition, and reputation
- Reflect critically on historical ethics, including slavery and the use of force
- Compare leadership choices and outcomes with classmates

Unlike traditional classroom worksheets or passive textbook reading, this activity encourages active engagement, collaboration, cross-curricular thinking, and moral reasoning. Learners track their progress, receive meaningful feedback from the game world, and reflect at the end through discussion prompts and outcome summaries.

Designed with South African curriculum goals in mind, this experience helps build the foundations for understanding the connections between the technological changes in the Renaissance to the founding of the colony in Cape Town, as well as starts the discussion around slavery that will be continued in Grade 7 when learning about the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.



- Each learner will need their own device and internet access
- The activity is designed to be completed in groups of 2 or 3, and cannot be done individually.





## Learning Objectives

By the end of the activity, learners will be able to:

### Historical Understanding

- Identify and describe key inventions of the Renaissance that expanded trade and exploration, including the caravel, compass, printing press, and gunpowder.
- Explain how these inventions enabled longer voyages and the establishment of new trade routes.
- Understand the role of 14th-century European traders and the global impact of their voyages.

### Critical Thinking & Decision-Making

- Evaluate different navigation and trade strategies in historical context.
- Make informed decisions using research gathered during the investigation phase.
- Reflect on the ethical consequences of historical actions, including slavery and the use of force during trade.

### Collaboration & Communication

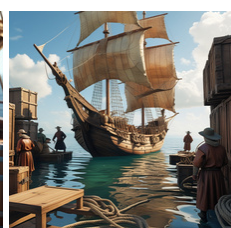
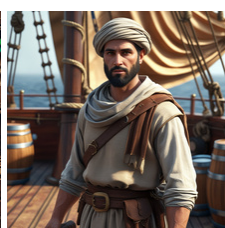
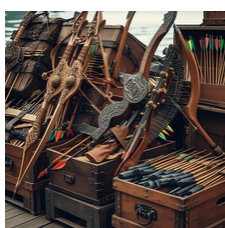
- Work cooperatively in small groups to investigate, plan, and execute a simulated trade mission.
- Discuss and negotiate key decisions, such as when to use weapons, how to treat foreign communities, and when to push forward or turn back.

### Systems Thinking

- Track and manage variables such as crew morale, cargo capacity, ship condition, and team reputation.
- Recognize how early economic decisions impact long-term outcomes in trade, diplomacy, and survival.

### Reflection & Empathy

- Reflect on the personal, moral, and practical challenges faced by people during the early age of exploration.
- Listen to and engage with the perspectives of teammates and other player groups.
- Consider the historical legacy of European expansion and its effects on global trade, culture, and colonialism.





### **Learners should have already covered:**

- European Explorers in Asia at the time of Mapungubwe: Marco Polo (Term 1)
- The European Renaissance (15th and 16th centuries) as a turning point in European history
- The contributions of Leonardo da Vinci and Galileo
- New ideas and knowledge (including influence on Europe from elsewhere)
  - The printing press

### **Content Targeted in Activity:**

- Technological developments in the Renaissance that made long sea voyages possible, with particular focus on the printing press, magnetic compass, caravel and gunpowder.
- Exploration by sea: trade and new sea routes
- Reasons for European explorers along the African coast

### **Key Knowledge & Skills Covered:**

- Understanding and explaining the role of technological innovation in the Renaissance
- Describing motivations for European exploration in the Renaissance
- Using narratives to understand historical events, causes and effects, and ethical challenges
- Critical thinking: weighing consequences, debating moral choices
- Collaboration: team discussions and shared problem-solving
- Empathy & ethics: understanding the impact of actions on others
- Historical reasoning: connecting inventions to broader global changes

### **Themes Addressed:**

- Developing values such as fairness, responsibility, and empathy
- Understanding and reflecting on decision-making
- Teamwork and resolving conflict in group settings
- Moral reasoning about the use of power and consequences of actions

### **Cross-Curricular Integration:**

- English: reading comprehension, vocabulary development, discussion and presentation skills
- Geography: interpreting routes, coastal landmarks, and environmental factors affecting exploration
- Life Skills (PSW): Development of the self in society / Social responsibility





# OUTLINE

*The activity should take about 1 hour, with a further 30 minutes for reflection and discussion. More time can be given for learners to explore alternative choice options.*



## Starting the activity

- Learners need to be divided into groups of 3.
- It is possible to be a group of two. Be aware that groups of 2 will need to investigate a second topic, so they will need to either have more time or be faster learners.
- Get learners to access the activity by providing the link via an LMS or Google Classroom, or by putting the QR code on the board and having them scan it.
- Each learner must be on their own device, even though there will be team-work.



## Prologue

The activity will guide the learners and give all context and explanation. They will be asked to input their names, select the number of people in their team and input their team members' names.

Investigation topics: They will be prompted to divide the three investigation topics between themselves so each investigates ONE topic before returning to the group for the voyage.

Groups of 2 will each choose ONE topic. Once that topic is complete, they will be asked if their team still needs to investigate a topic. They can both investigate the last topic, or just one can. This is up to them.

## Chapter 1: Investigation

In all three investigation paths, learners will navigate between the docks (where they can talk to sailors) and the printing press (where they can read information). Their actions will unlock conversation options and make new texts available to read. They will discover what the 'current' norm is, as well as what the 'new' invention is before they are able to make a choice for their voyage. The correct choice will unlock the secret key.

- Investigate Ships: learn about the cog and the caravel
  - Secret key: speed
- Investigate Safety: learn about ranged weapons and about gunpowder
  - Secret key: powder
- Investigate Navigation: learn about traditional nautical navigation and the magnetic compass
  - Secret key: direction

Once all topics are investigated, the learners will be directed to the TEAM GATE, where they will need to input all three keys in order to continue and launch their voyage.







## Chapter 2 - Chapter 8

Once the learners have launched on their voyage, teams should sit together in order to discuss and share knowledge. The voyage contains challenges for the teams to overcome, each prompting learners to discuss the options within their team so that the 'expert' in that area (the learner who investigated that topic) shares their knowledge. In this way, by the end of the activity all the learners will have an understanding of all the inventions and their impact on trade and sea voyages.

- Learners should sit together in their groups so that discussion can take place, but each should be continuing the journey on their own tablet.
- It is possible for learners within a group to disagree on choices, and make different decisions within their own device's game-play - this will lead them to have different outcomes which can prompt interesting discussions.
- Throughout the activity, the learner's actions will change affect the outcomes. It is possible for the crew to mutiny under bad leadership. In such cases, the learner will be directed to restart their voyage.

### Ending

The outcome at the end of the voyage depends on the choices made by the learners. They will be given a voyage summary and prompted to take a screenshot to save this information. This can aid in valuable discussions as learners realise that different decisions resulted in different outcomes.

*You can task learners to submit this screenshot to you via your LMS, Google Classroom or email.*

### Reflection

Upon completion, learners will unlock information about life in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, as well as a list of discussion questions to prompt reflection and further thinking.

\*\*\*

### Extension

Learners will be offered the opportunity to replay either the entire activity, or just the voyage. It is recommended that, if they have time, they try replay the voyage and see how different decisions can affect the voyage outcome. This can deepen understanding and lead to richer reflection discussions. *NB: ensure that they have taken a screenshot of their original results before replaying, as all progress will be overwritten.*



- INFORMATION -

# Life & Trade in the 14th Century: What Was It Really Like?

## **Were there women sailors?**

In Europe, women weren't usually allowed to work as sailors in the 14th century, but there are records of women disguising themselves as men to join crews aboard ships. Most sailing roles were considered men's work. However, women were part of port communities or managed trade from the shore. In other parts of the world, including Africa and Asia, women played key roles in local trade networks.

## **Were all the sailors white?**

No. European ships, especially those from Spain and Portugal, often had diverse crews from North Africa, the Middle East, and even further abroad. As voyages stretched further from home, ships picked up local sailors, guides, translators, and skilled workers along the African and Mediterranean coasts. Muslim sailors, North Africans, and people of African and Arab descent were especially common where trade routes mixed across cultures.

## **What was the hardest part of life on board?**

Life at sea was rough. Sailors faced storms that could sink the ship; hunger and bad food; the hot, crowded - and often smelly - shared spaces; and long stretches without seeing land. Disease spread easily, fresh water ran out quickly, and many sailors missed their families while facing dangerous work every day. Navigating without landmarks or stars was risky, despite the magnetic compass. But perhaps the hardest part was not knowing what lay ahead - whether the next shore would bring trade, danger, or nothing at all.

## **What happened if pirates attacked?**

Pirates were a real threat. If a ship was slow, lightly armed, or far from help, pirates could board it, steal goods, and even take prisoners. Some ships tried to outrun them; others fought back with cannons or crossbows. Pirate attacks were terrifying - and could end a voyage instantly.

## **Did traders often use force to get goods?**

Some did. While many trading relationships were peaceful and based on negotiation, some ships carried weapons and threatened or attacked local communities if they couldn't get what they wanted. This often damaged trust and hurt future trade relationships - and in some places, Europeans were banned from trading again because of past violence.



### Why did some traders take slaves?

Slavery existed long before the 14th century. In many parts of the world, including Europe and Africa, people were captured in wars, raids, or sold to settle debts. European traders began to see enslaved people as “valuable cargo” - just like spices, salt, or ivory - especially when trade with African kingdoms made it easier to acquire them. While many considered it normal at the time, others were uncomfortable or morally opposed to it. You may have felt that tension during your voyage.

### Did sailors really mutiny - and why?

Yes, mutinies happened when the crew lost trust in their captain or leader. Long voyages, poor conditions, unfair treatment, or hopeless journeys could cause tensions to boil over. If the crew felt ignored or mistreated, they sometimes took control of the ship.

### What happened if a crew mutinied?

Mutiny was dangerous - for everyone. If the crew took control, they might throw the captain overboard, lock them up, or vote on a new course. If the mutiny failed, mutineers could be punished severely - even executed. But sometimes, mutinies were the only way sailors felt they could survive or be heard.

### Why does this history matter?

Because it shows us how power, ambition, and survival shaped the world. The choices of leaders, sailors, merchants - and even mutineers - left lasting impacts. By exploring these stories, we can better understand how trade, culture, and colonisation began to change the world.

Many of the inventions you explored - like the magnetic compass, the caravel, printed maps, and gunpowder weapons - played a key role in expanding shipping routes. These innovations made it possible for European ships to travel farther, stay out at sea longer, and eventually sail around the tip of Africa on their quest to reach trade in India.

It was these very voyages that led to the founding of a European colony at Cape Town in 1652. What began as exploration and trade became a turning point in South African history - one whose effects are still felt today.

RENAISSANCE: TRADE & EXPLORATION THROUGH INVENTIONS

AK Learning Design

In a time of bold ideas and distant dreams, one mission could change the course of history. Gather your team, unlock powerful inventions, and set sail into the unknown...

MISSION STATUS

GLOSSARY

SHIP CREW

SAVES

SETTINGS

RESTART

Chapter 7: Choices

At Chief Kaila's signal, baskets of ivory and gold nuggets are brought forward and laid before you.

"We trade!" the chief bellows joyfully. "What goods do you want to give me?"

You consider what items you still have available.

71 crates

28 gold pieces

10 ivory tusks

Do you:

Trade with CRATES for ivory and gold

Trade with GOLD for ivory

Trade with IVORY for gold

DECLINE TRADING AND RETURN TO THE SHIP

MISSION STATUS

Prologue: Complete

Chapter 1: Complete

Chapter 2: Complete

Chapter 3: Complete

Chapter 4: Complete

Chapter 5: Complete

Chapter 6: Complete

Chapter 7: Complete

Chapter 8: Complete

Achievement: Successfully Navigated Away From The Coast

Achievement: Successfully Defended Against Pirates

Reputation Log:

Ship Designs Expert | Poor Negotiator | Fair Trader | Poor Negotiator | Excellent Negotiator | Efficient, Successful, Reliable

Reputation: Efficient, Successful, Reliable

Future Trade Connections Fostered: 3



## - REFLECTION -

# Post-Voyage Reflection Questions

### Decisions & Consequences

1. What was the hardest decision your team had to make during the voyage? Do you think you made the right choice? Why or why not?
2. Were there any decisions that your team disagreed on that resulted in you choosing different paths? What was the consequence of this?
3. Were there any choices you regret? Why?
4. How do you think your choices affected the people you encountered - and your crew?
5. Did you ever put your crew or your mission at risk? What happened as a result?

### Exploration & Navigation

1. What did you learn about how ships navigated in the 14th century?
2. How did inventions like the compass and caravel change what was possible for explorers?
3. Why do you think Europeans were so eager to sail into unknown waters?

### Trade & Ethics

1. How did it feel to trade with different villages? Did you treat each one the same?
2. What role did force or weapons play in your trade decisions? Were they ever necessary?
3. Were there moments when power influenced trade more than fairness?
4. How did your team handle the offer to trade for slaves? What influenced your choice?

### Crew & Leadership

1. How well did your crew trust you by the end of the voyage? Why do you think that was?
2. What decisions affected crew morale the most?
3. If you could go back and change one leadership choice, what would it be?

### Connecting Past & Present

1. What surprised you most about life in the 14th century?
2. How did inventions from the Renaissance lead to global changes - including the founding of Cape Town?
3. What lessons from this voyage could help you think more critically about leadership, fairness, or history today?
4. How have your ideas about exploration, trade, and leadership changed since the beginning of the voyage? What lessons will you carry with you?

### Interesting Points (not included in learner-view)

- If trading while unarmed or with weapons hidden, local villages would give gifts of friendship.
- If trading with weapons visible, locals would agree to a better deal for the traders.
- If crew morale drops too low, learners can buy loyalty back. If they don't, the crew will mutiny.
- Learners can choose to sail south at the end, but the crew will mutiny and head home.