

Birth of a Pirate – Sir Francis Drake Reading Comprehension

Sir Francis Drake was born sometime around 1540 as the son of a Puritan farmer. Drake taught himself navigation as the navigator of a small merchant vessel early in his career. He also served as an officer aboard a West African slave vessel. In 1567, Drake and his cousin, John Hawkins, were attacked by a Spanish ship in the Gulf of Mexico. The Spaniards took all of their sea vessels, though they allowed Drake and Hawkins to escape with their lives. At the time, the Spaniards had no idea that failing to kill Drake would prove so costly to the entire Spanish Empire. From that point on, Drake developed a hatred for Catholic Spaniards and devised plans to seek revenge.

Plundering Spanish Treasure Ships

In 1572, Queen Elizabeth commissioned Drake to work as a privateer in attacking Spanish ports and shipping. Drake left England for the Caribbean Sea with two ships and 73 sailors. After an unsuccessful attempt to attack the Spaniards in present-day Nicaragua, Drake formulated new plans to attack a Spanish vessel carrying hoards of gold brought back from Mexico. After successfully heisting the gold, he then sailed back to England and brought the spoils back to Queen Elizabeth. Queen Elizabeth promptly appointed Drake as the leader of an expedition to sail around (circumnavigate) the world. As part of the circumnavigation, Drake made further plans to plunder Spanish interests.

Circumnavigation

On December 17, 1577, Drake left England with three ships and two supply ships and started his circumnavigation. The voyage got off to a poor start. Terrible weather prompted some of the crew to stage a mutiny (to take over the ship). The mutiny was unsuccessful, and when Drake reached the west coast of South America, he had the leader of the mutiny, Thomas Doughty, beheaded.

After the mutiny, Drake's ship, now named the Golden Hind, sailed for Valparaiso, Chile. The ship encountered Spanish sea vessels carrying gold. The Spanish ships could not identify the Golden Hind as a pirate ship because of rainy weather and because the Golden Hind had been ravaged by bad weather. As a result, Drake plundered the Spanish vessel and proceeded to plunder the Spanish port at Callao. Drake also learned of the location of a huge Spanish galleon named Cacafuego that was sailing toward Panama. Drake made plans to attack Cacafuego.

Attack on Cacafuego

On March 3, 1579, the Golden Hind demolished Cacafuego with cannon fire off the coast of Panama. Drake confiscated an unbelievable amount of precious metals and jewels from Cacafuego—80 pounds of gold, two tons of silver, pearls, and precious stones. Afterward, Drake sailed to California to repair his ship. He claimed the area, thought to be near San Francisco, for the English crown. Drake's return trip to England took over a year. Not only did he become the first explorer to make the journey around the world, but upon his return, despite the demands of the Spanish crown to have him beheaded, Queen Elizabeth made him a knight. After the circumnavigation, Drake was made commander of a fleet of English ships that continued to plunder Spanish sea vessels and steal their gold. When Spain declared war on England in 1585, Francis Drake led a thunderous assault at the Spanish port of Cadiz and scored another major victory when the Spanish Armada attempted to invade the English Channel.

Legacy

Many believe Francis Drake was the main reason the English defeated the vaunted Spanish Armada. He died in 1596 from dysentery off the coast of Panama.

- 1. Why did Sir Francis Drake develop disdain for the Spanish?**
 - A. Because his ship was attacked and confiscated by the Spanish in the Gulf of Mexico
 - B. Because he planned to seek revenge on the Spanish
 - C. Because he served as an officer on a West Indies slave vessel
 - D. Because Spain declared war on England in 1585
- 2. How did the Spanish make a mistake in allowing Drake to live after capturing his ship in 1567?**
 - A. Because Sir Francis Drake would declare war on Spain
 - B. Because Sir Francis Drake would complete a circumnavigation
 - C. Because Sir Francis Drake would have a major impact on the future of the Spanish Empire
 - D. Because Drake would be knighted by Queen Elizabeth
- 3. Which word used in the second paragraph means the same as “stealing?”**
 - A. heisting
 - B. spoils
 - C. circumnavigation
 - D. privateer
- 4. When did Drake complete the circumnavigation?**
 - A. 1577
 - B. 1578
 - C. 1579
 - D. 1580
- 5. Which of the following is NOT true?**
 - A. Francis Drake served as a privateer for the Queen of England
 - B. Francis Drake frequently plundered Spanish treasure vessels
 - C. Francis Drake won several important battles against the Spanish military
 - D. Queen Elizabeth made Drake a knight before he completed the circumnavigation
- 6. For which of the following questions would “80 pounds of gold, two tons of silver, pearls, and precious stones,” be the answer?**
 - A. What did Sir Francis Drake plunder at Cadiz?
 - B. What did Sir Francis Drake plunder from Callo?
 - C. What did Sir Francis Drake find in California?
 - D. What did Sir Francis Drake plunder from Cacafuego?

7. Which of the following could be a description of Drake as published in a Spanish textbook?

- A. Sir Francis Drake was a national hero who helped the British Empire defeat the vaunted Spanish Armada
- B. Sir Francis Drake was a former privateer who rose to the level of a military commander and became a hero in both England and Spain
- C. Sir Francis Drake was a bloodthirsty, merciless privateer who made it his life's mission to destroy the world's greatest empire
- D. Drake was considered a hero to many and was the first explorer to complete a circumnavigation of the world