

Pirate Ships and Flags

A Reading A-Z Level U Leveled Book

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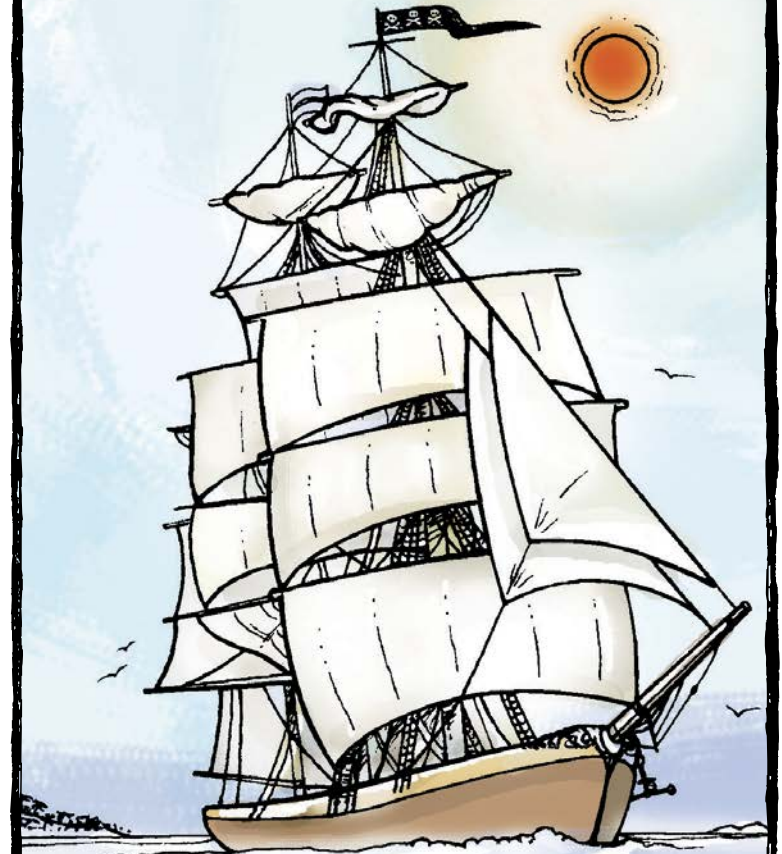


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PIRATE SHIPS AND FLAGS



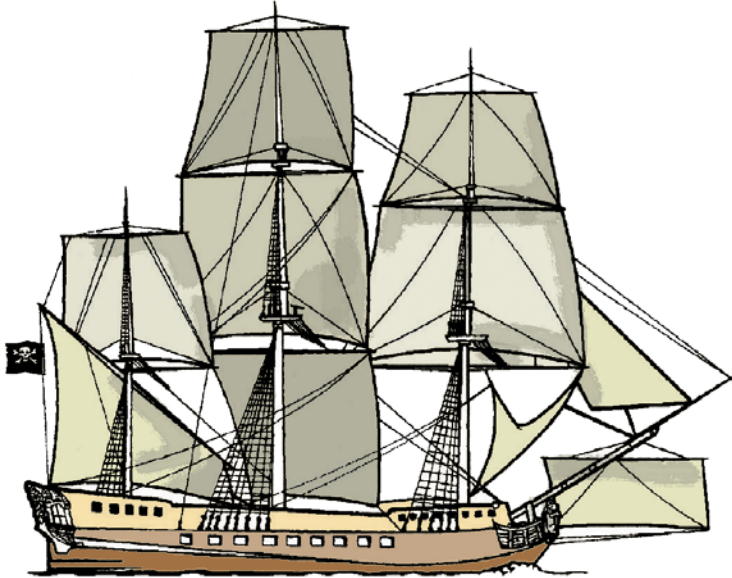
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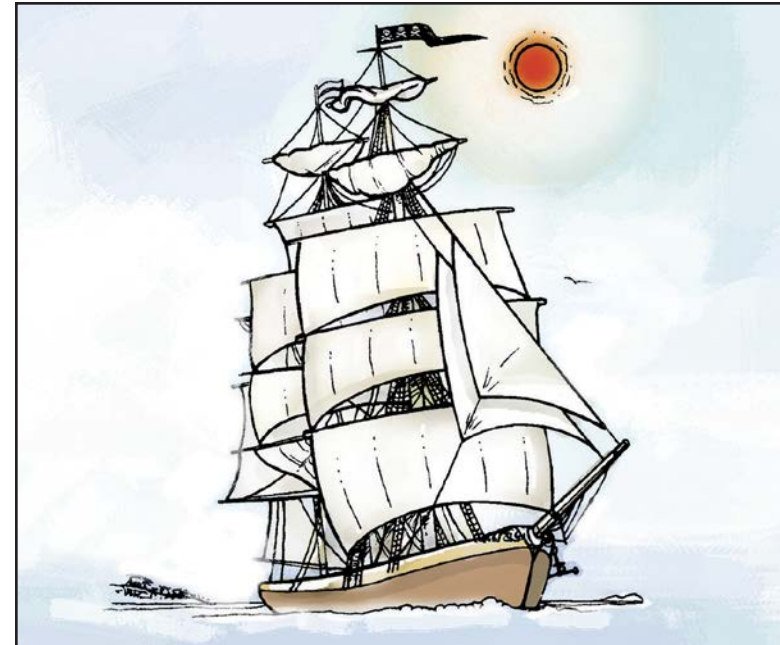
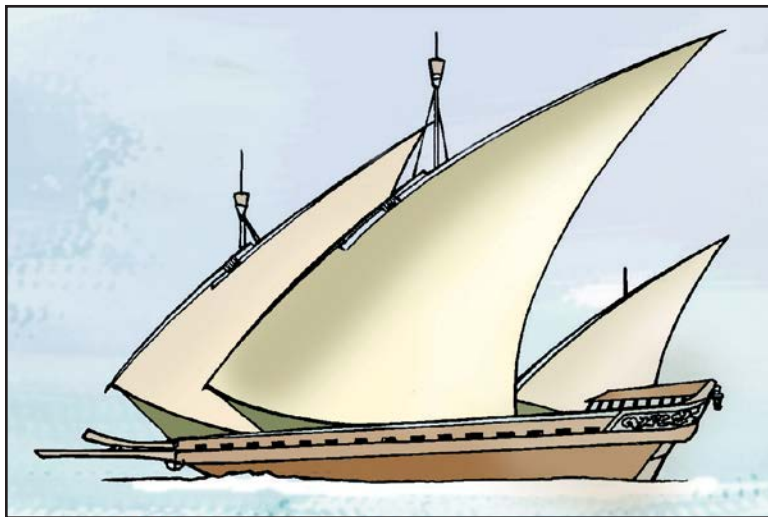
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Correlation

LEVEL U	
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A clipper

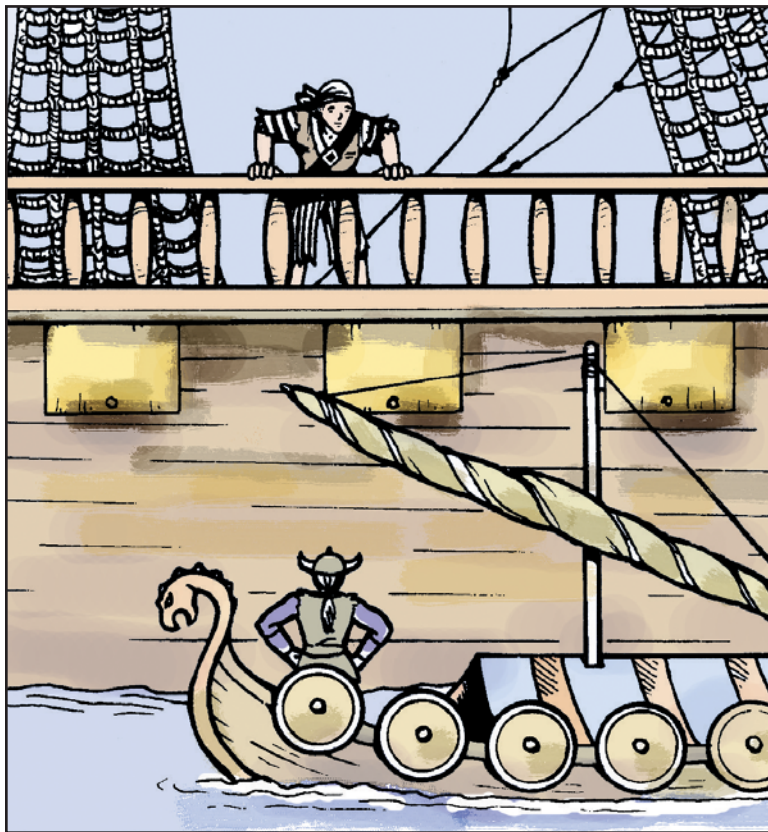
INTRODUCTION

Pirates were robbers. They did their dirty deeds at sea. They attacked ships carrying treasure. They even went ashore to attack villages. They took gold, silver, and jewels. They also took fine fabrics, spices, grain, coffee, and tea.

The success of a pirate attack often depended on the ship they used. Pirate ships came in many sizes and shapes. The type of ship used by pirates depended on the part of the world they came from. It also depended on the period of time that the pirates operated.

Early ships were not as large or as fast as most of the ships that were used in the 1700s. This was the Golden Age of piracy, and pirate ships were large and fast.

As you read, you will learn about different types of pirate ships. You will also learn about life on these ships. You will also read about pirate attacks.



To illustrate the difference in size of pirate ships, a pirate on a 1700s ship looks overboard at an 1100s Viking ship.

GREEK AND ROMAN PIRATE SHIPS

Some of the earliest pirates were from the ancient Greek and Roman empires. They did their pirating over 1,500 years ago. The sea around Greece was filled with many small islands. Ships carrying valuables sailed through the islands. They traveled close to the shore. This made it easy for the pirates who were hiding on the islands.



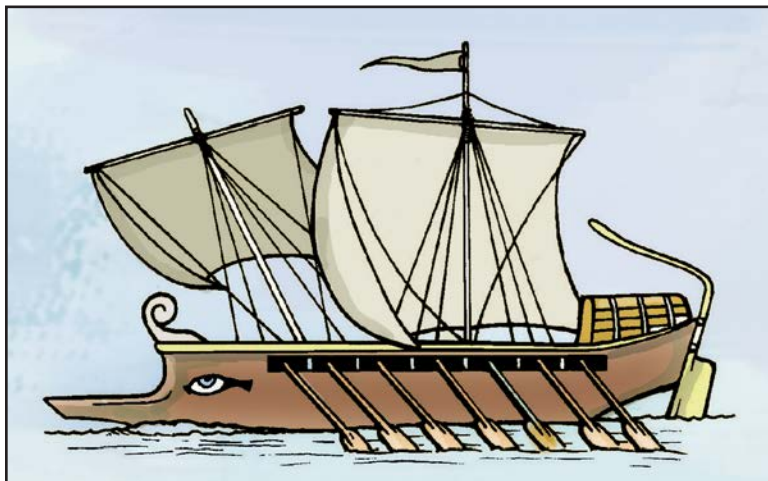
At its height, the Roman empire stretched around the entire Mediterranean Sea.

DO YOU KNOW?

In about 75 BC, when Julius Caesar was young, he was captured by pirates while on his way to Rhodes to study. He was held for five weeks until his ransom was paid. He later tracked down his captors and had them killed.

The Greek pirates used streamlined ships for their attacks. These ships were called **galleys**. These **sleek** ships were powered by oars. Some also had a single large sail. Depending on the size of the pirate ship, dozens of pirate crewmen rowed the ship. A galley under the power of many oars was much faster than the clumsy cargo ships that depended on wind power. A galley could quickly overtake a slower cargo ship.

Galleys were also shallow. This made them easier to steer. They could quickly change direction. It also meant that if the pirates were being chased, they could escape to shallow water. They could also go over rocks that large ships would get caught on.



A galley



Closeup of the bow of a galley with bronze armor to protect it from damage

These pirate ships often had sharp battering rams attached to the **bow** or front of the ship. They would ram the victim ship, trying to punch a hole in its side, or **hull**. If the ship being attacked took on water, it became even slower.

Romans were not natural seamen like the Greeks. So they built many of their ships to copy the Greeks. Roman pirates also used galleys powered by long oars. Some of these galleys had rowers at more than one level of the ship. The poor oarsmen who rowed below the deck were forced to row where it was hot and stinky.

Do You Know?

Roman pirate ships often had eyes painted on both sides of the bow. The pirates claimed the eyes helped them find their victims. The idea of painting eyes on ships probably came from Egypt. Egyptians thought the eyes brought good luck.

VIKING PIRATE SHIPS

While the Greek and Roman pirates threatened ships sailing around southern Europe, the Vikings ruled the seas of northern Europe. The Viking pirates were ruthless villains of the north. They attacked ships at sea as well as villages along the coast. These bearded men of the north gained a reputation for being very fierce **barbarians**.

Vikings were expert shipbuilders. The seas of northern Europe were often very rough, unlike the smoother waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The ships used by Viking pirates had to be strong so that they would not break up in the rugged sea. Their ships were known as **longboats**.



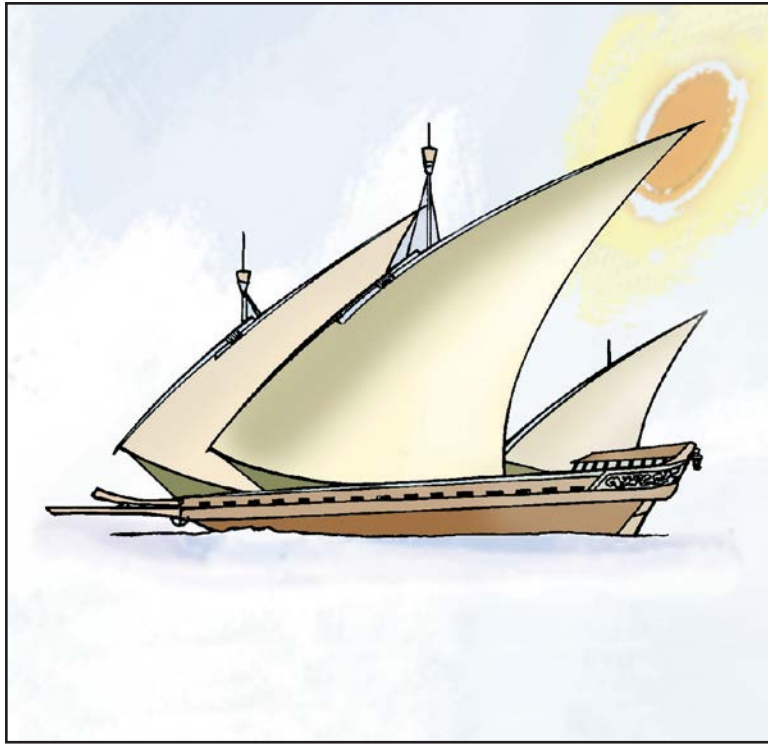
Longboats were long, as their name suggests. They were also narrow and sleek. This made them fast and easy to steer. They were powered by a large square sail when in the open sea. When near the shore or going up rivers, they were powered by oars. The longboats were shallow and could land almost anywhere. This made it easy for Viking pirates to sneak up on ships and villages and quickly attack.

Longboats were also unique for their design. The front and back of the longboat curved upward to a point. It was difficult to tell the front from the back. The point, or **prow**, was often decorated with a dragon's head. These boats were called dragon boats. Other prows were shaped like snake heads or the heads of other figures.

Longboats could hold over fifty Viking pirates. These pirates carried spears, axes, swords, and bows and arrows to use in their attacks.



The bow of a Viking ship was sometimes elaborately carved.



A corsair galley

PIRATE SHIPS OF NORTHERN AFRICA

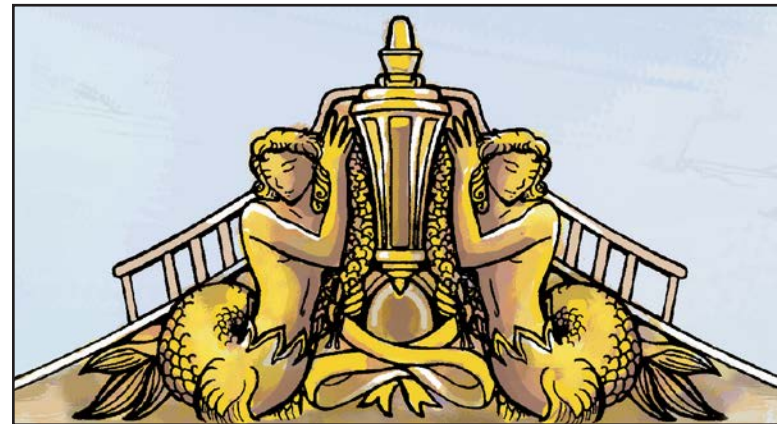
Another group of pirates did their pirating along the northern coast of Africa a little over 1,000 years ago. These pirates were known as Barbary corsairs.

Corsairs used sleek galleys much like the ones used by the Greek and Roman pirates. The oars were manned by slaves, which left the pirates free to do the fighting.

The corsairs' ships were sleek and fast. Slaves scraped and waxed the hull of their galley between trips at sea. This increased the ship's speed. The galleys were powered by both oars and sails. The oars were long and heavy. A single oar might have to be rowed by several men. A corsair galley could have two to three masts, each holding a sail of a different size.

A corsair galley often held over one hundred men. This meant that trips to sea had to be short, since the galley could not carry enough food and water for long trips.

Some corsair galleys were beautiful ships. They were often painted with gold decorations, and gold-painted human figures often extended from the back of the ship.



Because the stern of a ship was rarely attacked, it was often beautifully ornamented.

CHINESE PIRATE SHIPS

The seas and coastline of China and southeast Asia were perfect settings for pirates. Chinese pirates hid in mangrove swamps that lined the coast. Chinese pirate captains often led fleets of small pirate ships.

One pirate commander, Ching-Chi-ling, led a fleet of nearly 1,000 heavily armed ships.

Southeast Asia in the 1800s

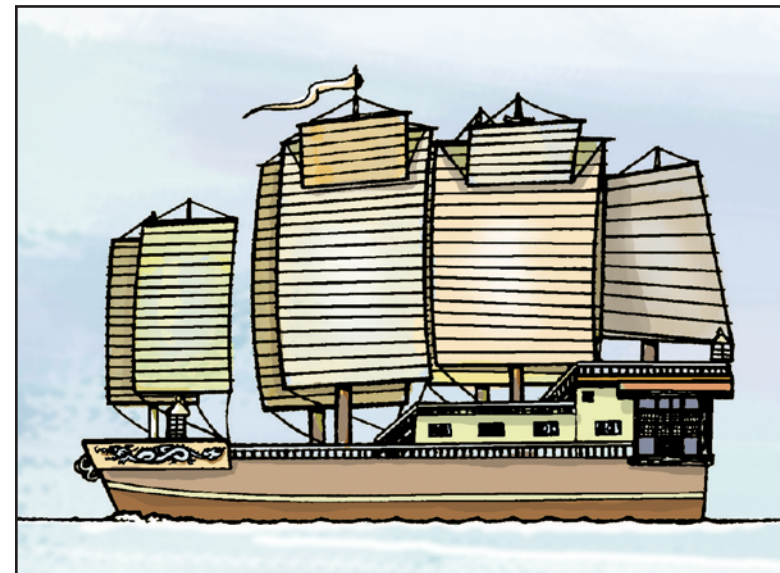


DO YOU KNOW?

Chinese pirates in the 1800s threatened coastal villages with destruction and slavery if the occupants did not pay the pirates large sums of money.

Larger Chinese pirate ships were called **junks**. These junks were often converted cargo ships. This meant that they were slower than most of the pirate ships you have been reading about. What these ships lacked in speed they made up in arms. They carried over a dozen large guns. They were such good fighting ships that the Chinese navy could not defeat them.

Pirate junks often had three **masts**. The sails were large and had four sides. They were made of silk reinforced with strips of bamboo. These ships were large enough to provide the captain with a nice place to stay. But the crew lived below in the crowded hold.



A Chinese junk



PIRATE SHIPS OF THE CARIBBEAN

Probably the pirates we know the most about are the pirates of the Caribbean Sea. The islands of the Caribbean were perfect hideouts for pirates looking to **plunder** ships carrying gold and silver. These unruly pirates attacked many Spanish ships passing through the islands.

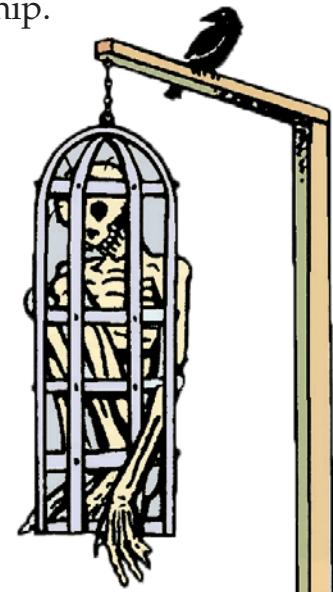
The pirates of the Caribbean did not sail the high seas. Instead, they stuck close to shore and sailed among the islands. Therefore, they did not need large ships. These pirates preferred to use **sloops** and **ketches** to attack other ships. These smaller boats were fast and easy to move around.

Ketches were equipped with two masts. A mainmast rose from the center of the deck. A smaller mast rose from the back section of the deck. Ketches also had a long pointed pole extending forward from the bow. It was called a **bowsprit**. The bowsprit on some ketches was as long as the main body of the ship. Triangular sails were rigged to the bowsprit. These sails increased the ketch's speed.

The mainmast held a large square mainsail. If the wind blew from behind the ship, the crew would raise the mainsail, and the wind would push the ship through the water. Sails rigged to the back mast were used to move the ketch in different directions. The ketch's **variety** of sails made it a **versatile** sailing ship.

DO YOU KNOW?

The bodies of executed pirates were placed in iron cages and hung from wooden frames where they could be easily seen. This was done to discourage others from becoming pirates.





"Calico" Jack Rackham's flag

PIRATE FLAGS

Pirate ships flew flags to warn other ships that they were about to be attacked and that they should **surrender**. Flags were used to strike fear in the crew of ships about to be attacked. Some flags carried scarier messages than others. For example, an all-red flag signaled certain death. However, sometimes pirates were sneakier. They would sail a friendly flag first. Then when they got close to the ship they were attacking, they would raise the pirate flag.

The best-known pirate flag was the Jolly Roger. It was decorated with a skull and two crossed swords, or crossbones. It told crew members on a ship being attacked to surrender without a fight or face death.

In addition to skulls, bones, and swords, pirate flags were decorated with hourglasses, skeletons, and blood. The hourglass signaled that time was running out and the crew should surrender.

One of the most **notorious** pirates of all time was Blackbeard. Blackbeard's flag was a skeleton that looked like a devil. The skeleton held a spear that pointed at a red heart. Drops of blood dripped from the heart.



Blackbeard and his flag

Try This

Make your own pirate flag!

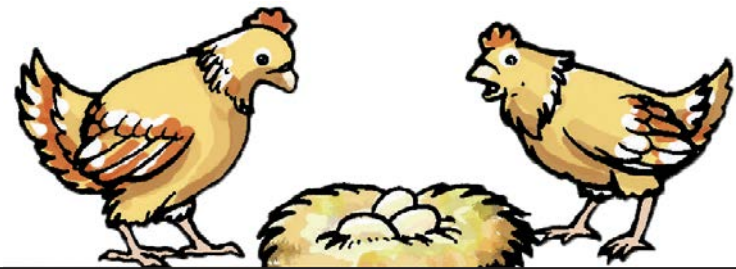


- 1 Draw your design on paper first. Use big, clearly defined shapes and symbols that can be seen from far away.
- 2 Get a large piece of colored construction paper or old fabric for the background of the flag.
- 3 Cut other colors of fabric or construction paper into the patterns and shapes you drew in your design.
- 4 Glue or paste the patterns to the background of your flag.
- 5 Finally, write an explanation of your flag's symbols and meaning.

LIFE ON A PIRATE SHIP

Life on a pirate ship was difficult and harsh. When not experiencing the excitement and danger of an attack, life was often boring. Much of the time spent between attacks was spent repairing sails and **riggings**. Sailing a ship also was hard work. Muscle power was all the pirates had to rely on to do the work. Sails had to be raised and lowered as conditions changed and to keep the ship moving fast. Teamwork was important.

Pirates slept below the deck in the ship's hold. **Quarters** were usually cramped, with each crewman having very little space. They kept their personal property in a sea chest. They slept in hammocks. When the weather was good, pirates would often sleep on deck.



DO YOU KNOW?

Sometimes chickens were kept aboard the ship. They provided a supply of eggs and fresh meat.



Do You Know?

Fresh fruit, especially limes, were taken on long voyages to prevent diseases such as scurvy. The fruit gave sailors much-needed vitamin C.

Pirate ships usually had a population of rats. The rats chewed sails and ropes and ate food supplies. Rats were even known to chew through a ship's hull and sink a ship.

Food aboard a pirate ship was nothing to get excited about. They had very little fresh meat. When they did, it was usually turtle meat. If the fish were biting, pirates ate fresh fish. Otherwise meals consisted of dry, salted meat and dry biscuits. All of this was usually washed down with beer, wine, or water. Ships usually had very poor cooking **facilities**.

Pirates ate off of metal plates. If they were lucky, they had a fork or spoon. Otherwise they just used their fingers. Pirates were not known for their good manners.

CONCLUSION

Most pirate ships were small and fast. Early ships were powered by oars. But by the 1700s most pirate ships were powered by the wind. But even these sailing ships were sleek, fast, and easy to steer. They were shallow so they could escape their enemies and enter shallow ports.

Life aboard a pirate ship was not very pleasant. Conditions were often dirty and crowded. The work had to be done by the pirates themselves, except in earlier times when slaves did the work.



A galleon

GLOSSARY

barbarians (<i>n.</i>)	a group of violent, uncivilized outsiders (p. 9)
bow (<i>n.</i>)	a ship's front end (p. 8)
bowsprit (<i>n.</i>)	a long, thin pole attached to the bow of some ships, which provided another anchor point for sails (p. 16)
corsairs (<i>n.</i>)	pirates, especially those from the Barbary Coast of Northern Africa (p. 11)
facilities (<i>n.</i>)	buildings or areas with equipment that makes certain tasks easier (p. 21)
galleys (<i>n.</i>)	small, shallow boats used by Greek pirates to overtake larger ships (p. 7)
hull (<i>n.</i>)	the main body of a ship (p. 8)
junks (<i>n.</i>)	large ships with three masts and advanced weaponry used by Chinese pirates (p. 14)
ketches (<i>n.</i>)	small two-masted ships with the first mast taller than the second, and the steering position behind the second mast (p. 15)

longboats (<i>n.</i>)	long, narrow boats with sails and oars used by Viking pirates (p. 9)
masts (<i>n.</i>)	tall, vertical poles on ships that are used to attach sails, flags, and to post lookouts (p. 14)
notorious (<i>adj.</i>)	widely known for something negative (p. 18)
plunder (<i>v.</i>)	to steal everything of value (p. 15)
prow (<i>n.</i>)	a ship's front end (synonymous with bow) (p. 10)
quarters (<i>n.</i>)	living space, especially on a ship (p. 20)
riggings (<i>n.</i>)	networks of ropes holding up and controlling the mast and sails (p. 20)
sleek (<i>adj.</i>)	smooth and lean; elegant (p. 7)
sloops (<i>n.</i>)	relatively small and fast single-masted ships (p. 15)
surrender (<i>v.</i>)	to give up; to stop fighting in order to preserve one's life (p. 17)
variety (<i>n.</i>)	an assortment of different things of the same general type (p. 16)
versatile (<i>adj.</i>)	usable in many different ways (p. 16)