

Vikings & European Explorers Amerigo Vespucci

America is named after Amerigo Vespucci, an explorer from Italy who was born in 1454. A German mapmaker gave Vespucci this honor. The mapmaker didn't believe Christopher Columbus was the first European to reach the "New World" in 1492. At the time, Columbus himself wasn't even sure. He thought he had arrived at islands off the coast of Asia, not the New World. Meanwhile, Vespucci **claimed**¹ to have reached the continent of South America in 1497. Because of his claim, the mapmaker named the new lands America after Vespucci in 1507. The name spread throughout Europe and stuck. People started using it for South America, North America, and later the United States of America.

Today, many **scholars**² doubt whether Vespucci explored America before Columbus. They believe that Vespucci was wrongly given the honor. He explored South America, but it was probably years after Columbus already had. Perhaps, if the mapmaker favored Columbus, America would have been called *Columbia*. Better yet, if the Vikings had been **acknowledged**³ as the first Europeans to reach the New World (which they were), the land could have been named after them.

Vespucci claimed to have reached South America four times. After his death, scholars looked into his records and found little **evidence**⁴ to support some of his claims. They also found out that Vespucci lied about leading the voyages. He was never the captain on any of his trips.

¹ **claimed** – declared as fact

² **scholars** – people who have a great deal of knowledge

³ **acknowledged** – recognized

⁴ **evidence** – facts that show something is true

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Who was/were the first European(s) to reach “The New World?”
 - a. Christopher Columbus
 - b. the Vikings
 - c. the Scholars
 - d. Amerigo Vespucci

2. Which of the following is an opinion and NOT a fact?
 - a. America is named after Amerigo Vespucci, an explorer from Italy who was born in 1454.
 - b. Today, many scholars doubt Vespucci actually explored America.
 - c. Perhaps, if the mapmaker favored Columbus, America would have been called *Columbia* or *Christos*.
 - d. Vespucci claimed to have reached South America four times.

3. In the fourth sentence, the passage says: “He thought he had arrived at islands off the coast of Asia, not the New World.” Who does the word “he” refer to?
 - a. Amerigo Vespucci
 - b. the mapmaker
 - c. a Viking
 - d. Christopher Columbus

4. Vespucci could be best described as
 - a. honorable.
 - b. untrustworthy.
 - c. dumb.
 - d. a leader.

5. It can be inferred from the passage that America could have received a different name if
 - a. a different mapmaker believed Amerigo Vespucci was correct
 - b. a different mapmaker created the map of the country
 - c. the mapmaker didn’t believe the explorers found a new land
 - d. the mapmaker liked Amerigo Vespucci the best

6. How does the author feel about America being named after Vespucci? How do you know?

7. Why was America named after Amerigo Vespucci instead of Christopher Columbus?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

The USA could have been called Vikingland _____ the Vikings were the first Europeans to actually reach the New World.

- a. before
- b. after
- c. because
- d. so

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

In 1507, a mapmaker named America after Amerigo Vespucci because he was the first person to explore it.

When? in 1507

Who? _____

(did) What? _____

Why? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** evidence: facts that show something is true.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
