

Name _____



Ocean Travel

By Sharon Fabian

Anyone thinking about moving to America had a big decision to make. For the early colonists, traveling across the Atlantic Ocean was a once-in-a-lifetime adventure. It must have been something like deciding to become an astronaut and travel to the moon today.

Colonial era sailing ships were built by hand out of lumber from large tree trunks. The mast for the main sail was about as tall as the ship was long. A medium sized ship was only about 100 feet long, a very small space for over one hundred people.

Below the main deck, the ship had an area known as 'tween decks where most of the passengers lived during the ocean crossing. Some of the wealthy passengers may have paid the ship's carpenter to build them a cabin in the 'tween decks, but most people lived in a large common area, maybe sleeping on bunks along the walls. Some people used the ship's small landing boat, called a shallop, for a bed. There was little or no privacy. Some families hung up a blanket to divide off a space for themselves.

At the beginning of the voyage, the passengers could enjoy fresh food. Their dinner might consist of a stew with meat and vegetables. Later in the trip, however, they would be eating only dried foods. The ships carried dried meat and fish, flour, hard biscuits, cheese, and beer. Everyone drank beer since fresh water soon went bad. When the seas were calm, food could be cooked for dinner, but when the seas were stormy, a cooking fire could not be chanced.

The ships had no running water or flush toilets. There were no bathtubs or showers. The bathroom facilities aboard ship consisted of chamber pots, to be emptied into the ocean when the weather was not stormy.

Each day, the ship's crew would be busy with their work, but the



passengers had little to do. The days at sea must have seemed long and tedious. Some passengers brought books, but most of those would have been packed away in the hold waiting to be unpacked in America. Children might have brought a bag of marbles and some other small toys.

Besides their books and toys, the settlers had to pack everything that they would need, not just for the voyage, but for their new life in America. The passengers did not expect to return to England; this was a one way trip. Before they left, they would have made arrangements to sell possessions that they weren't able to bring along.

When the weather was bad, many of the passengers became seasick. The crew usually did not have this problem. They were used to the ship pitching and rolling with the waves.

Near the end of the voyage, some passengers might begin to have more serious health problems. Sometimes there was not enough food left, and even if there was, many people began to suffer from malnutrition because of the poor quality of the remaining food. This could be especially hard on the children.

When the early settlers arrived in America, their life on the ship was not over yet. They continued to live on the ship until they could build a settlement. They continued eating the food that they had brought on the ship until they could grow and harvest their first crop.

When the settlers could finally leave the ship, it must have felt like they had been through the adventure of a lifetime, but even greater adventures were waiting for them in America.

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Questions

- _____ 1. The early settlers from Europe traveled to America by _____.
- A. kayak
 - B. steamship
 - C. oceanliner
 - D. sailing ship

