

A pirate is a person who **attacks** and robs ships. Most pirates were men, but a few women also became

pirates. There are many adventure stories about pirates but **piracy** was **actually** a well-organized **business**. In the 19th and 20th **centuries piracy** was **wiped** **out** by many sea powers.

**How pirates lived**

People became pirates for **various** reasons. Sometimes **honest** sailors left their ships because life on them was so **miserable** and they couldn’t **bear** it. These seamen often turned to **piracy** in order to **survive**. Others were in search of **riches**, like gold, silver and **jewelry**. Some simply wanted

to have adventures. Stories and movies have created an **exciting image** of pirates as dangerous

men with **beards**. In **reality**, **however**, pirates led a **miserable** life. They were often drunk and **argued** a lot. Many pirates died of **injuries** and illnesses. Some were shot or left at sea, others were **captured** and

**sentenced** to death.

Most pirate ships had a captain who was **in command** during a **battle**. The most powerfulperson on board was the quartermaster,who **divided** the stolen **goods**,or loot, amongthe **crew**. He also had the **duty** of **punishing** pirates who did something wrong. Both thecaptain and the quartermaster were **elected** by the **crew** and they could be **removed** ifthey did not do their job well.

Most pirate **crews** had **rules** that every member had to **obey**. Pirates who stole other men’s things were often set **ashore** on a **deserted** island where they would die of **thirst**. Sometimes they were given a pistol and a bullet to kill themselves.

Because pirates were mostly interested in stolen **goods** they killed very few people and often

let their enemies free after they had **attacked** and robbed them. They also **attacked** towns

along coasts. Sometimes they took **prisoners** and **demanded** money for their freedom. The pirate flag became a well knownand **feared** symbol of the seas. It often showed a white **skull** and **crossbones** on a black background.

**History**

**Piracy** has **occurred** at all times in history. **Ancient** Roman and Greek ships that sailed in the **Mediterranean** were often in danger of being **attacked**. In the Middle Ages Viking pirates **attacked** ships and **settlements** in the **Baltic Sea** and **English Channel**. The countries of northern Africa allowed

and even organized pirate **attacks**. They gave Muslim **privateers** money and ships to **carry out attacks** on Christian ships from England, France and Spain. They had their **bases** in Tunis, Algiers and Morocco and from there they **raided** towns along the **Mediterranean** coast. **Piracy’s golden age** was between the 1500s and the 1800s when a great number of ships crossed the Atlantic Ocean carrying **valuable cargo** to and from colonies in the New World. This was the time of famous pirates. **Piracy declined** in the 19th and 20th **centuries**. On the one side **merchant** **vessels** became bigger and bigger , on the other side more and more countries started **patrolling** the oceans. **Even though piracy** is a crime in all countries modern pirates of today continue to be active, most of them in the South China Sea.

**Famous pirates**

Blackbeard was one of history’s **cruelest** pirates. He got his name for his long black **beard**

which he wore in **braids**. He terrorized the coasts of Carolina and Virginia for many years until a small **fleet** of ships hunted him down and killed him. The Englishmen Sir John Hawkins, Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Drake were some of the most famous so-called **privateers**, pirates who worked for a country. They had their own ships and were paid by a **government** to **hunt down** and **attack** ships from other countries. In the 1500s Queen Elizabeth I gave these **privateers** the **permission** to **attack** other ships and help England **dominate** the oceans. Buccaneers were pirates who terrorized the West Indies and the Central and South American coasts. They **originally** came from France, England and Holland. Some of them left their home countries because they were **criminals** and wanted to **escape** the **law**. They lived on small islands in the **Caribbean**, **attacked** Spanish ships and **captured** gold , silver and **jewels** that were transported home from the colonies.

**Now use a blank sheet of paper and answer each question with a complete sentence!**

Questions:

1. Why did people become pirates?
2. What kind of life did pirates lead?
3. Who was in command of a pirate ship during battles?
4. Who was the quartermaster **and** what was his job?
5. 5. How were pirates punished when they did something wrong?
6. What did the pirate flag look like?
7. Who did the Muslim pirates of Northern Africa attack?
8. When was the golden age of piracy? Why?
9. Why did piracy decline in the 19th and 20th centuries?
10. Who was Blackbeard?
11. What was a privateer?
12. Where did buccaneers live and what did they do?