Several factors drove European exploration. Stories from Europeans who had traveled to the Far East made people curious about these exotic places. Marco Polo, who traveled the Silk Road, was the most famous of these traveling Europeans. The Crusades also contributed in at least two ways. First, the Crusaders pillaged and looted areas in the Middle East, bringing their goods back to Europe. This made Europeans want more of these Eastern goods, and they wanted a quicker trade route to get to them. Because they did not know about the Americas, they thought they could go across the Atlantic and eventually hit the other side of China and India. Second, the Crusades help bring around the decline of feudalism. When feudalism declined, so did the power of the nobles. Kings and Queens used this opportunity to expand their own power, supported by the new middle class of business people in recently developed towns. These monarchs wanted more wealth, power, and glory for themselves and their countries.

Soon, countries like Portugal began investing in technology to help them navigate the seas. Several famous Portuguese and Spanish explorers started to travel the seas. In addition to the Americas, they also were able to land on the coast of West Africa (below the Sahara desert) and encountered the people there for the first time. The societies where these explorers landed were often less technologically advanced than Europe, due to lack of interaction with most of the rest of the world. The Europeans considered them inferior and often treated them very poorly, seizing their resources and their labor. The Spanish explorers who were known for this are called *conquistadors,* or conquerors.

Columbus was actually Italian, from the city-state of Genoa. He was financed by the Spanish monarchy, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, after he was unable to find funding to travel in Italy. He hoped to reach India and find a more direct route for trading spices there. Instead, he landed in the Americas (specifically, the Bahamas). Thinking he had landed in India, he called the people there Indians. Only later did he realize his mistake. Although he didn’t meet his original goal, Europeans were excited by this “New World,” full of resources and possibilities.

**Based on the reading, list:**

* **3 factors that contributed to Columbus’ voyage.**
* **One place other than the Americas that was reached by Europeans for the first time.**
* **What is a conquistador?**
* **Who financed Columbus’ voyage?**
* **What was Columbus’ original goal? Did he meet it?**