

AF2: Understand, select and retrieve information from a text.

What type of punishments did they have?

On board a merchant ship, the master had total control of the ship.

The men had to follow his orders even if they did not agree with them. If a sailor did not do his work in a timely fashion, did not do it properly, or made mutinous comments, he was punished.

Punishment usually consisted of flogging or whipping with a rope.

The boatswain usually administered the punishment, in front of the whole crew. The number of flogs depended on the master and the crime. Stealing extra rations was a major offense and many punishments had as many as 99 hits. The tool used was usually a rope that had been modified with smaller lines with a knot in the end. In later times it was referred to as a “cat-of-nine-tails.”



Fig 1: Cat o' Nine Tails

The knots at the end would cause cuts in the skin of the back and many times it took weeks to heal. On the *Santa María*, Columbus had little discipline problems until October 10, 1492.

The crewmembers of the *Santa María* from Basque and Galicia formed a tight group onboard the ship. These men began to worry that they had sailed too far out into the ocean to turn back and return home safely. These men also did not like or trust Columbus because he was an Italian sailing on a Spanish ship.

When the crew brought their concerns and the fact that they wanted to turn back to Columbus, Columbus was said to have pointed out that when they reached the Indies, they would be rich. He also told them that there was no way they were turning back. He did promise that if they had not sighted land after three days, they would turn back. The men agreed and on the third day, land was sighted.

The Pinzón brothers, who commanded the *Niña* and the *Piñta*, also did not like Columbus because he was Italian. So when the expedition returned, they started mentioning to friends and family that they were the ones who quelled the mutiny. In a lawsuit brought by the brothers and their family, which lasted from 1514 to 1536, there was a completely different story than the one Columbus told. The Pinzóns said that Columbus lost his confidence in the expedition, was scared of his men, and wanted to turn back. But the Pinzón brothers claimed they boarded the *Santa María* on October 10, 1492. One version of this visit was that the Pinzóns convinced Columbus to continue sailing and if land were not sighted in three days, they would turn back.

However, another former sailor on the expedition testified that the Pinzóns wanted to turn back and Columbus told them if they had not sighted land the next day, they could cut off his head and return home.

Historians have hotly debated who was right and who was telling a story to promote themselves. Some historians follow only the Pinzón court case, some only Columbus' accounts. A few modern historians have tried to take an investigative look at the evidence and put modern investigative techniques to use. One item they looked at was the meeting. Based on the logbooks from the three ships, the wind speed and direction would have kept them from lowering the small boats the Pinzóns would have used to get to the *Santa María*. They sailed 171 miles on October 10th, too fast for a small rowboat to keep up with. But on October 9th, they sailed 58 miles, much slower, and more conducive to lowering a boat for a meeting. Historians also question the testimonies during the court case. These men testified fifteen or more years after the actual incident. Historians also feel the Pinzón family members on board the expedition and the family at home began discussing the brothers' role in the mutiny. Maybe hearing these stories changed the memories of the crew. The Pinzón family was powerful in Palos; would anyone testify against them?

Were these men coached by lawyers on what to say? The debate will probably never be solved for the Columbus or Pinzón supporters.

Write a paragraph about what you think happened on the 10th October 1492.