

AF2: Understand, select and retrieve information:

Life onboard Columbus' Ships.

An average day aboard the *Santa María* had the crew split into two shifts or watches called the “Cuartos” and “Guardias.” The master, de la Cosa, had the starboard watch and the pilot, Pinzón, had the larboard (port) watch.

The men did everything according to their watch. They worked, slept, and ate with the same companions. The only time the crews came together were during emergencies or foul weather.

Columbus organized the watches the night they left Spain: 3 am, 7 am, 11 am, 3 pm, 7 pm, and 11 pm. Between 5 pm and 7 pm was called the dogwatch; this allowed the two different watches to change so that the same watch would not have to work every night.

A ship's boy would be in charge of turning the ship's glass, shaped like a modern hourglass or egg timer, every 30 minutes. As he turned it, he would sing out a prayer to let everyone know what time it was.

Nowadays, ships have a bell but the *Santa María* did not have a ship's bell as these were not common in the 1490s.

The 7 am watch would get up and have a cold breakfast: it most likely included a biscuit, some cheese, and some salted fish. They would also roll up any bedding they might have used and stow it away.

A sailor was posted on the bow as a lookout and one was in the round-top on the main mast. They were looking for any signs of land such as seagulls.

The pilot or the master used a slate to write down compass direction and ship's speed, which was recorded in the logbook and then wiped off the slate by a grumete sailor for the new watch.

Because the crew was all Roman Catholic, prayer was an important part of the daily routine. When the watch came on they said a set prayer. Every time the ship's boy turned the sand glass, he said a specific prayer. A prayer was said before the hot meal, and prayers

and songs were sung at day's end. The sailors would have all the prayers and songs memorized since most of them could not read or write. Columbus wrote in his journal one song sung at sunset, "Salve Regina."

Each watch was responsible for the entire workings of the ship while they were on duty. These responsibilities included:

- Keeping the decks clean and clear of debris;
- Raising, lowering, and setting the sails;
- Using the line (ropes) to tighten or loosen the sails as needed;
- Scrubbing the deck and rails of the ship;
- Maintaining the ropes, sails, and other things deemed important by the officer of the watch.

The sailors sang songs while they were winding up the anchor, hoisting a yard, or manning the pump. The rhythm of the song helped everyone work together better and faster.

When their watch was over the sailors had close to four hours of free time. Many would sleep. They would have a cold meal or spend time telling stories and tales to each other. They would use the fishing tackle to fish off the side of the ship. Fresh fish would always be a welcome change for the afternoon.

The watch would sing together and if someone had brought a flute or a drum, they would dance.

1. Why did the sailors sing together?
2. Use a dictionary to look up the word debris. What does it mean?
3. What item did the Santa Maria lack that modern day ships possess?
4. Whose job was it to keep time on ship?
5. With a partner, make up five questions that can be answered from this text.