

Life of a Pirate

Pirates are sailors who rob from other ships at sea. While there are still pirates today, the most famous pirates sailed the seas about 400 years ago. They attacked other ships, stealing gold, silver, jewels, cloth and any other items the pirates could sell or use. The ships that pirates attacked were usually merchant ships, which carried valuable items ready to sell or trade. Pirates were dangerous and ruthless, and were feared by many people, especially sailors.

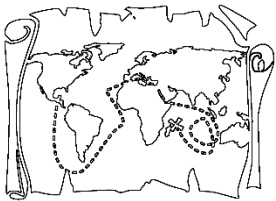


Crew

The crew of a pirate ship was often quite large. This was because the pirates wanted to make sure they had enough people on board to be able to overpower the crew of merchant ships. Some pirate ships had crews as big as 100! The crew of a pirate ship included a captain, a quartermaster, a cooper and a cook.

The **captain** was chosen by the rest of the crew. They had to be good at fighting but also very skilled at sailing.

The **quartermaster** was in charge of sharing out the treasure as well as food and water supplies. The role of quartermaster was very important in stopping fights between crew members.

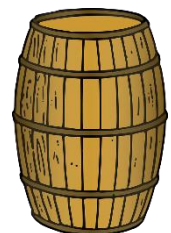


The **sailing master** was in charge of sailing the ship, including navigation. They had to be very skilled at reading maps and using the compass.

The **cook** was responsible for making food for the whole crew. A pirate sometimes became a cook because he had been injured in battle and was no longer able to fight.

A **gunner** was a pirate in charge of operating the cannons. This was a very difficult job because pirates often wanted to avoid sinking the other ship. This meant the aim had to be just right.

The **cooper** had that job of making and fixing wooden barrels. Wooden barrels were very important to pirates as they were used to store food, water and any other items that were needed on board.



Life on a Pirate Ship

Many pirate ships were small and fast so they could chase and catch other ships. While their ships were small, their crews were quite large, so it could be very crowded on board! Many merchant ships were larger and slower than pirate ships and had much smaller crews. They did not stand a chance against a fierce pirate crew.

Life as a pirate wasn't easy. The work was dangerous and the conditions on board a pirate ship were tough. Pirates were often cold and wet and didn't sleep in comfortable conditions. Pirates often got injured or sick. One of the reasons pirates were often sick was because of the food they ate. Pirates didn't have much fresh food on board. The meats they ate were salted so they could last a long time at sea. Pirates also ate hard biscuits, bone soups and anything else they could steal from other ships.

Rules

Pirates had rules they had to follow. The crew were expected to keep their cutlass and pistol clean and ready to use. It was forbidden for pirates to play dice or card games for money. Pirates were not allowed to steal from one another, nor could they solve disagreements by fighting one another. Attempting to escape the ship was strictly forbidden.



Punishments

There was a long list of punishments at the ready to make sure the crew obeyed the rules. **Mast heading** was a punishment for more minor crimes. The pirate was tied to the top of the mast and had to endure the cold, uncomfortable conditions. **Flogging** was a very common form of punishment. Some pirates who refused to follow the rules were sold as slaves. For the most serious crimes, a pirate might have been **marooned**. This means that they were left to die on a deserted island with very little, or no, food or water.

Treasure

When people think of pirate treasure, they normally think about gold, silver and precious jewels. Pirates certainly considered these treasure, but they stole whatever they could sell or use themselves. This included threads, kettles, soap, wood, rope, sails. Pirates sometimes even stole the whole ship if it was better than the one they had!

