

Sir Francis Drake



By Jody Payne & LeAnn Leyden

Sir Francis Drake was many things. He was both a knight and a thief, a religious man and a pirate, a friend to strangers and an executioner to a friend. He thought nothing of jumping overboard to save a cat from drowning, yet he also participated in the slave trade. The English called him a hero; the Spanish called him "El Draco," the dragon. One thing we know for sure, he was one of the greatest explorers who ever lived.

Drake was born between 1540 and 1544 on a farm in England, the first of twelve sons. As a child, his family moved to the seaside town of Kent where they lived in an old warship anchored in the river. What could be more fun for an adventurous boy?



Around the age of 10, Francis was apprenticed to a captain of a small ship. The boy worked hard and showed talent in seamanship. The captain loved Francis like the son he never had and left him the ship when he died.



In 1567 Francis Drake was made captain of a ship owned by his cousin. Together they would raid slave ships off the coast of Africa, steal the slaves, and sell them in South America. While docked in what is now Mexico, Drake, his cousin and their crews were attacked by the Spanish. They escaped, but Drake promised one day he would get revenge. (Many years later Drake would steal or sink 38 Spanish ships in only two days. That's payback!)

Queen Elizabeth was not too happy with the Spanish and their growing empire either. Spain was taking tons of treasure from the New World and England wanted it too. Whoever controlled these undiscovered lands would control the treasure and trade. So when Drake vowed to steal from the Spanish, the Queen secretly approved and contributed to his expedition.

By 1577, Drake was ready to set off with five fine ships and 168 men. There were problems. One ship was lost in a storm with no survivors. Two were damaged and abandoned. The fourth had to turn back to England. That left Drake with only one ship which he renamed "The Golden Hind."



The mission was top secret. Everyone thought they were on a trading mission to the Nile River in Alexandria. Once at sea, he told his men about their true goals:

1. to develop trade in Central, South, and North America
2. to find a northwest passage linking the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans with a water route
3. to steal as much gold, silver, and treasure from Spanish ships and towns as possible



It is not known how happy the crew was with this new turn of events; but they agreed that Drake was a fair and honest captain, and Spanish gold would make it into their pockets as well, so they set sail for the New World.

As they traveled around Central and South America, they did not look for fights, but neither did they run away. Drake never killed people or harmed them on purpose. He went out of his way to act like a gentleman with captured prisoners and native people. That doesn't mean he had any problem at all taking their riches! He might confiscate a ship loaded with treasure, invite the captured captain to a fine dinner, then drop him off on shore with a lovely gift!



But Drake ran a tight ship. That was the only way to be efficient, fast, and to survive. The ship was kept in top shape and the crew was extremely loyal. When friend and investor Thomas Doughty was charged with mutiny, Drake's crew condemned the man to death and Drake made sure the order was carried out.

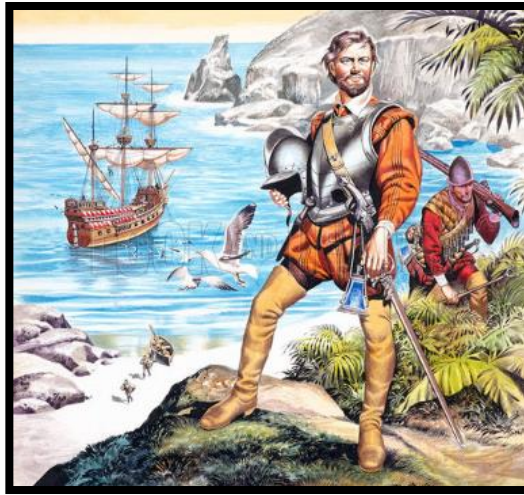
As he sailed up the coast of North America, Drake searched for the rumored Northwest Passage that would connect the Pacific and Atlantic with a nice “shortcut” for trading. He got as far as what is now Washington State before he was forced to turn south. His ship was too badly damaged to go any further safely.



For five weeks, Drake and his crew stayed in a harbor in Northern California. Drake said he left a very nice brass plaque that claimed the area for England. The plaque was nailed to a study post and has never been found...yet! If you find the plaque , it will say that Drake named the area New Albion.

While completing repairs, he visited with local Coastal Miwok tribes and exchanged gifts, and even received a crown of feathers. It was a sign of honor and respect from the tribe. Before long, it was time to head back to England.

Getting home was no easy task. At one point, the Golden Hind got stuck on a reef. Drake had to throw priceless loot overboard to lighten the load. Before they got to England, Francis made a quick and secret stop in France where he unloaded and hid part of his cargo. He then continued on to England. He wasn't sure if Queen Elizabeth would be thrilled with the riches he brought or enraged over Spain's complaints of piracy.



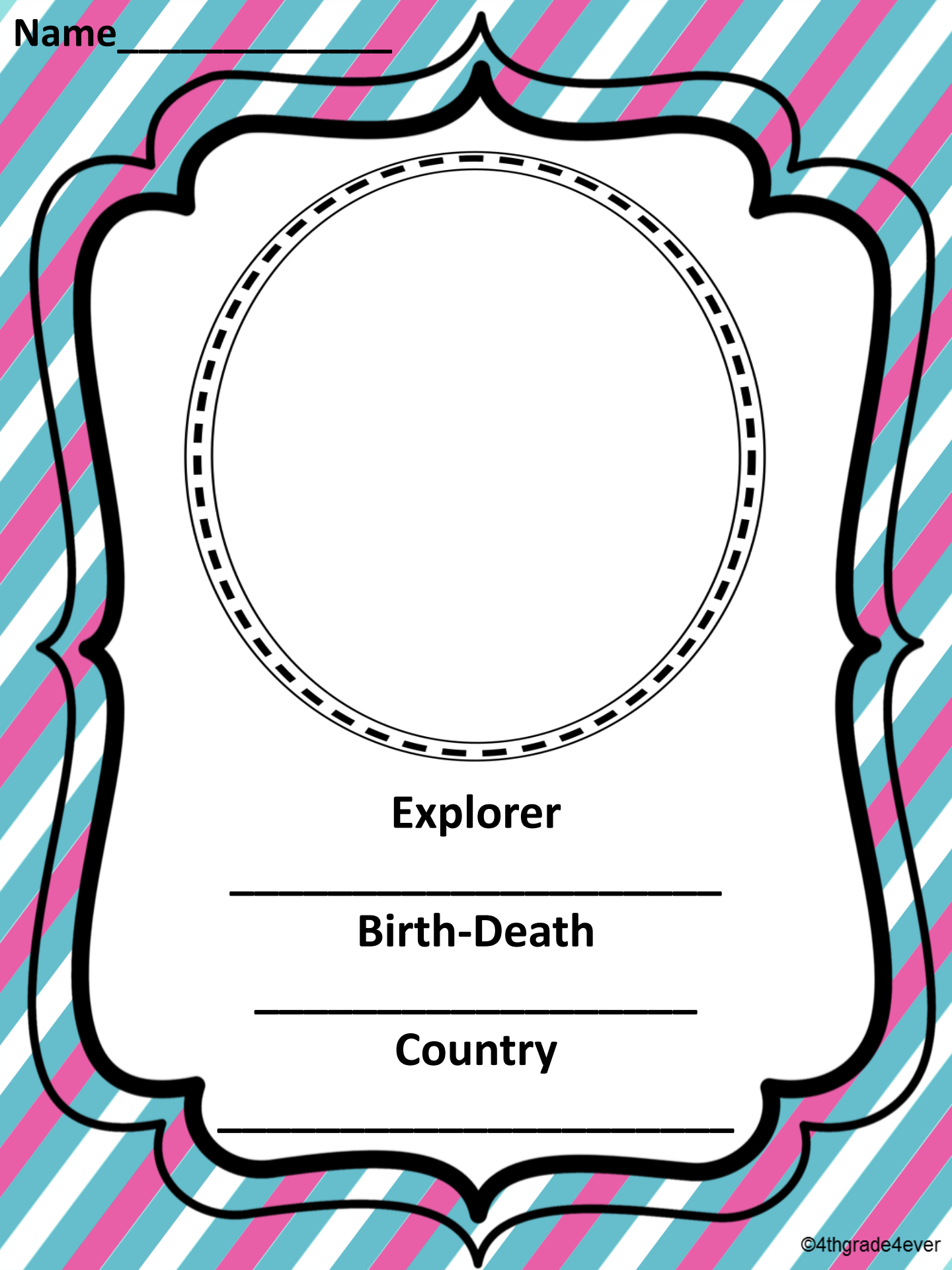
It turned out that secretly Elizabeth was thrilled. Drake had brought her more gold than the crown had earned that entire year. While she had invested 1000 pounds (English money) on the expedition, she received 47,000 pounds in return. That's a pretty nice profit!

If the queen couldn't tell the world about the stolen Spanish riches, she could publically praise Drake for his amazing feat of circumnavigating or sailing around the world. He was only the second person to accomplish such a deed and the very first Englishman.

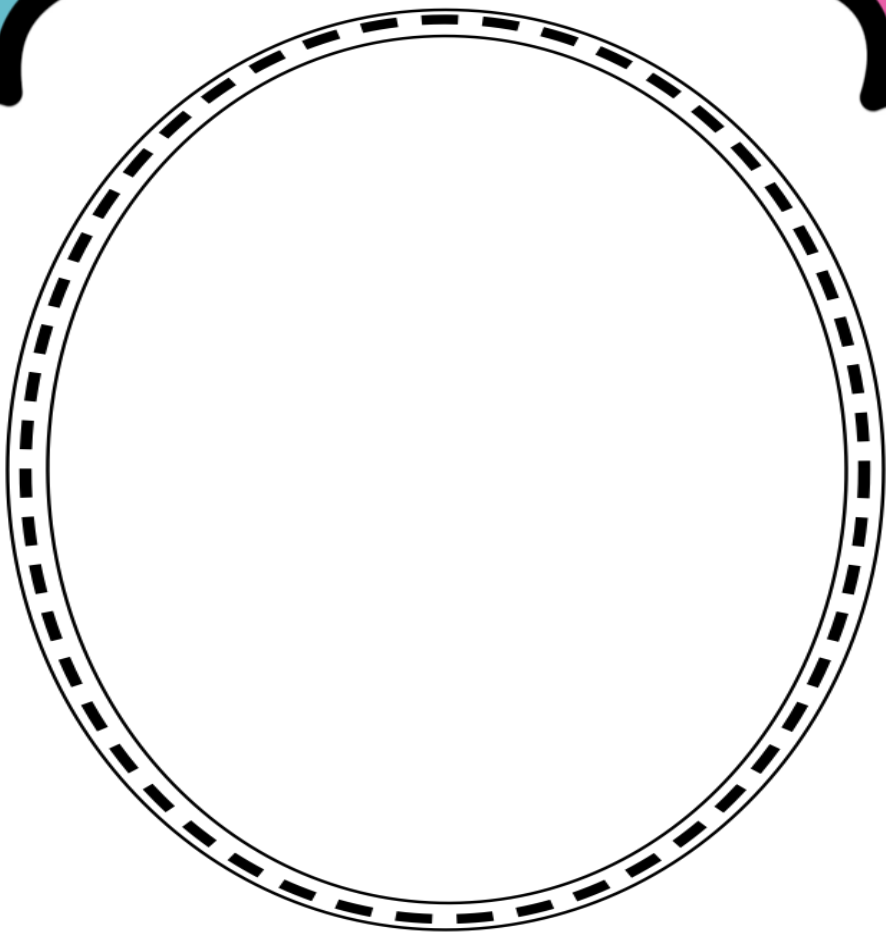
In order to keep distance from the accusations of piracy and privateering (piracy approved by the monarch) Queen Elizabeth had a French ambassador knight him "Sir Francis Drake." All of England proclaimed him a hero. Still, Elizabeth took no chances. She took all of Drake's logbooks, maps, and charts for "safe keeping" and they were never seen again.



Sir Francis Drake continued to fight the Spanish on the high seas. At the age of 54, Sir Francis Drake became ill aboard his ship near Panama. He died and was buried at sea.



Name _____



Explorer

Birth-Death

Country



Name _____

Explorer Name: _____

Goals _____

Accomplishments: _____

Interesting Facts:

One word that describes this explorer:
