

PIRATES: ROMANCE AND REALITY

- 1 In many movies, a pirate's life is an exciting adventure. But what was life actually like for an 18th-century pirate? And which parts of the movie pirate are real and which are invented?

5 A PIRATE'S LIFE

- In reality, the **average** pirate was usually trying to escape from a difficult life. Some were ex-sailors who were treated poorly on their ships. Others were escaped slaves who wanted their **freedom**. They came from many different backgrounds. But on a pirate ship, **equality** was important. Men elected¹ their captain and created the ship's rules together. The men also **divided** the **income** from stolen goods, and they shared these earnings fairly.

PIRATE TREASURE

- 15 In popular culture, pirates are often shown with chests full of gold. It is true they took money from others. However, it was far more common for pirates to **steal** things like cloth, spices, and even medicine. Then they often sold these things. Of course, **purchasing** stolen goods from pirates was 20 **illegal**, but many people did it. Also, unlike movie pirates, real "pirates didn't bury their money," says Cori Convertito, who works at a maritime museum in the U.S. "They blew it as soon as they could on women and booze."²

PIRATE STYLE

- 25 Movie pirates often wear eye patches and have wooden legs. In reality, many pirates did look like this. Why? One **factor** was the poor living conditions. "Life at sea was hard and dangerous," says David Moore, a maritime museum employee in the U.S. **Disease** was also common. For these reasons, 30 some pirates lost eyes and legs. But many pirates did one thing for their health: they wore earrings—just as in the movies. They believed putting weight on the ears stopped seasickness.

¹ If you **elect** someone, you choose that person to lead.

² **Booze** is an informal word meaning *alcohol*.



▲ A chest of treasure from Black Sam Bellamy's pirate ship, the *Whydah*



▲ **Did you know?**
Around 1700, a French pirate was the first to use a black flag with a skull and crossbones (later known as "the Jolly Roger").