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Blackbeard the Pirate



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Written by Kate Follett • Illustrated by John Walker

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One of the pirate ships recreated for the Disney movie *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*.

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Movie and cartoon pirates may look funny, but real pirates like Blackbeard (right) were colorful characters, too.

The Man Behind the Stories

Picture a **pirate** in your mind. Do you think of a cartoon pirate with a beard, an eye patch, and a parrot?

Three hundred years ago, real pirates did **sail** the seas. One pirate had a name that scared everyone. He was known as Blackbeard.

Becoming Blackbeard

Blackbeard's real name was Edward Teach. He was born in England about 1680. When he was old enough, Edward learned to sail a ship.

England was at war. Edward joined the **crew** of a ship that **attacked** enemy ships to help the English navy. Soon, he decided it would be better to join a pirate crew, instead!



Three hundred years ago, pirates were very busy robbing ships along the coast and islands of the New World.

The leader of the pirate crew put Edward in charge of a pirate ship. They attacked so many other ships that everyone was afraid of them.



Why did sailors become pirates?

In those days, sailors worked very hard but made very little money. When a country was at war, any ship might be hired to attack and steal enemy ships. It was dangerous work. The hired sailors were paid a small reward for the ships or treasure they took.

Pirates could attack any ship—even one from their own country! Pirates could keep all the ships and treasure for themselves!

One day, Edward and his pirate crew took over a large, fast, French ship that they had **captured**.

The pirate leader gave the ship to Edward as a reward. Edward added more cannons to make it a very dangerous ship. Then he gave his ship a new name—the *Queen Anne's Revenge*.

The *Queen Anne's Revenge* and Edward soon became very famous. No ship wanted to see the fast ship and its black pirate flag chasing them. Edward was now Blackbeard, the pirate.

The Golden Age of Piracy

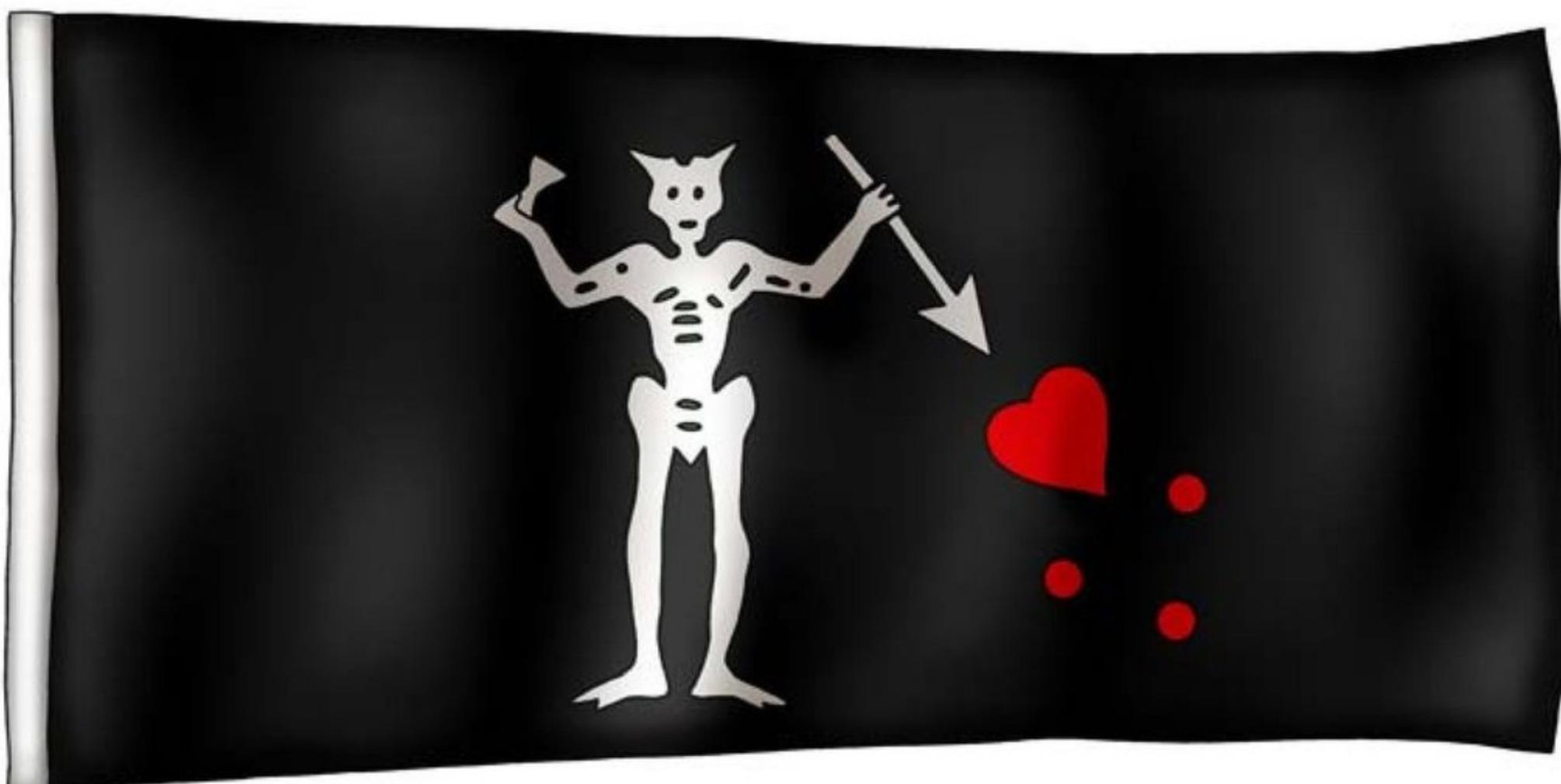
During the 1700s, European countries set up new towns in the Caribbean and North and South America.

English, French, Dutch, and Spanish cargo ships sailed back and forth. They were easy targets for pirates.

Blackbeard Ruled the Sea

Blackbeard scared everyone who saw him. He was a huge man with a thick, braided, black beard. He stuck burning fuses in his beard so it looked as if his beard was on fire.





Blackbeard's black flag showed a skeleton stabbing a heart and holding an hourglass. The hourglass showed that the victim only had a short time to give up or Blackbeard would attack.

Blackbeard soon had four fast ships and a crew of over 350 men. One time, his four ships sailed to Charleston, South Carolina. They robbed every ship sailing in or out of Charleston.

Pirate's Life for Me?

How did Blackbeard get such a big crew? Most sailors got little pay. If a pirate attacked their ship, sailors often chose to join the pirates! Former slaves also gladly became pirates to escape slavery. Pirates often shared treasure with their crews.



Sailing a large ship close to the land is hard to do. The water isn't very deep.

One day, Blackbeard, his four ships, and all of his men were sailing home with their **treasure**. Blackbeard sailed the *Queen Anne's Revenge* too close to the land. His ship got stuck in the sand near a coastal town called Beaufort.

Blackbeard told his men to move the treasure onto the other ships. He sent one of his captains away and dropped off many of his men on a nearby island.

Then, Blackbeard sailed away, taking the loot with him. Had he wrecked his ship on purpose so he could keep the treasure for himself?



The wreck of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* was found near the Beaufort Inlet, off the coast of North Carolina, in 1996.

Blackbeard's Capture

For a time, it seemed that Blackbeard had stopped being a pirate. He got married and bought a house. People stopped worrying about him.

Blackbeard soon went back to his old life, though. He went to sea in his last ship, the *Adventure*. Blackbeard began attacking other ships again.

The governor of Virginia was tired of Blackbeard's attacks. He sent a fighting ship called the *Ranger* to find and capture Blackbeard. One morning, the crew of the *Ranger* saw the *Adventure* near the island of Ocracoke.



Blackbeard's last battle at Ocracoke became famous. Writers and poets made Blackbeard's life and death into a colorful tale.

The two ships fought, firing their cannons for many hours. In the heavy smoke from the cannon fight, the *Ranger*'s crew hid so it seemed as though they had been killed.



Blackbeard thought he had won, so he climbed onto the *Ranger*. The *Ranger*'s crew jumped out from their hiding places and the fight began again.

Blackbeard fought hard, but the *Ranger* had too many men. He was shot five times before he finally died. The *Ranger*'s crew threw Blackbeard's body into the sea.



Blackbeard Sailed Into History

Blackbeard's true story may be behind the colorful pirates in many books and movies. The next time you hear a pirate story, remember one of the real pirates in history: Blackbeard!

Glossary

attacked (<i>v.</i>)	acted aggressively against an opponent, often with weapons in a battle; acted harmfully toward (p. 5)
captured (<i>v.</i>)	caught or took control of by force (p. 7)
crew (<i>n.</i>)	a group of people who work together, especially those who operate a vehicle or machine (p. 5)
pirate (<i>n.</i>)	a person who attacks and robs ships at sea (p. 4)
sail (<i>v.</i>)	to travel across water in a boat or ship (p. 4)
treasure (<i>n.</i>)	something that is very special or valuable (p. 11)

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Back cover: a heavy cannon being lifted from the recently-found wreck of Blackbeard's ship, *Queen Anne's Revenge*. Thousands of items, including coins, swords, cannons, pottery, and an anchor have been found in the underwater site off Beaufort Inlet, North Carolina.

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