

Pirates and Privateers

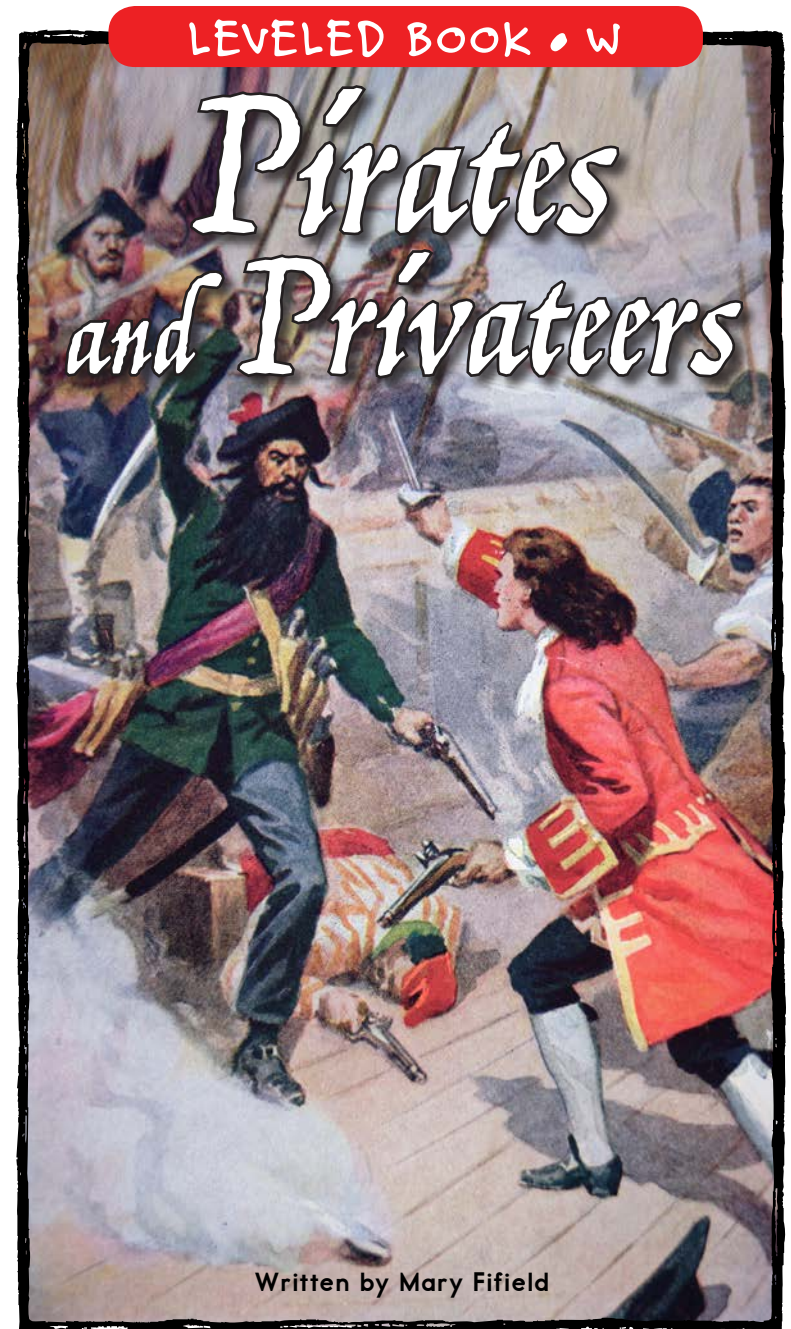
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Pirates and Privateers



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Bartholomew Roberts's ships off the African coast (including eleven captured merchant ships)

Introduction

What do you think of when you think of pirates? Buried treasure? Ships with mighty sails? Black flags with a skull and crossbones?

Have you ever wondered what it was like to be a pirate? Pirates seemed to love adventure. They were often vicious men and women who were robbers and murderers. Pirates sometimes are **glamorized** in movies and books. But they were scoundrels, and the lives they lived were not that pleasant. Their lifestyles often resulted in great discomfort and even death.

The “Golden Age” of Pirates

Throughout history, pirates have sailed the seas all over the world. From the 1500s to the 1700s, many famous pirates raided ships and ports in the Caribbean Sea. This was called the “Golden Age” of pirates.



The Caribbean Sea and surrounding area



Privateer Henry Morgan makes an assault on the Venezuelan settlement of Gibraltar with his crew of buccaneers in 1669.

During the “Golden Age,” Spain colonized large parts of Central and South America. The Spaniards were very interested in the spices, gold, and silver found in the Americas. In order to get these treasures, they forced the native people to work in mines and to gather spices. They also stole gold and silver from the native people.

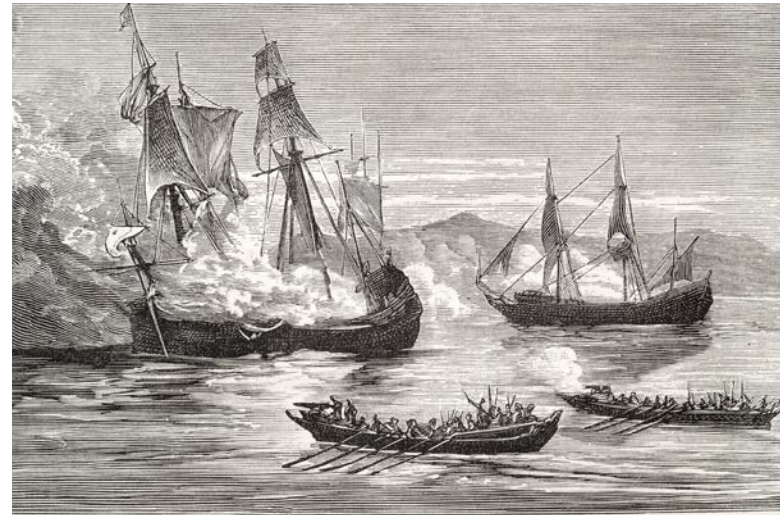
The English and French royalty learned that Spain was getting rich from gold, silver, and spices from the Americas. They wanted gold for their empires, too. At the same time, there were a lot of unemployed sailors. The sailors were looking for adventure and a chance to get rich.

The Queen of England developed a plan to get some of the wealth the Spanish were bringing across the Atlantic Ocean on their ships. Her plan called for hiring unemployed sailors and providing them with ships to attack the Spanish ships. In England, these sailors were called **privateers**. In Spain, they were called pirates.

Many of the ships leaving the Americas loaded with riches passed through the Caribbean Sea. Since the Caribbean was full of small islands, it was a perfect place for pirates to hang out. It was also a perfect place from which to **launch** attacks on Spanish ships passing among the islands.



Sir Francis Drake, privateer for the Queen of England, captures Spanish treasure ships.



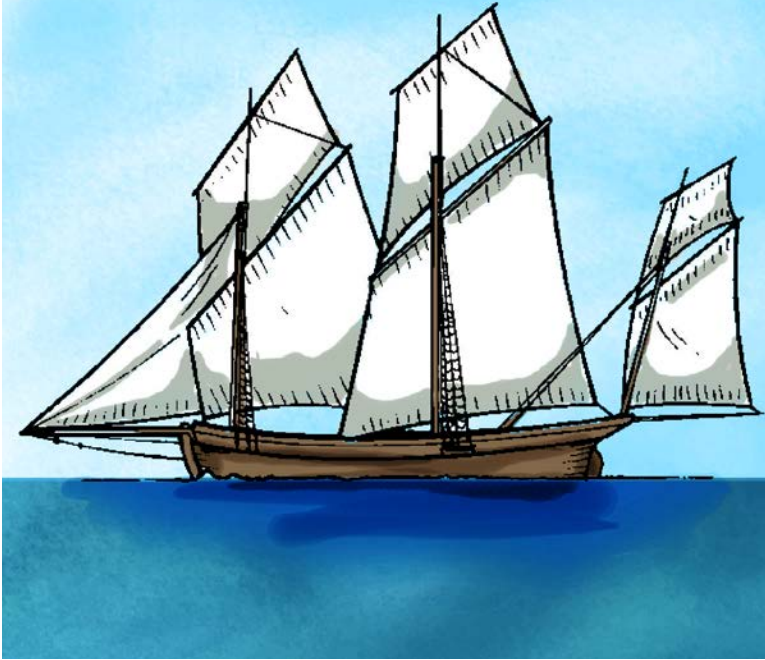
Henry Morgan attacks a ship.

Pirates Attack!

Pirates quickly gained a reputation of being ruthless villains. Sailors on other ships were filled with fear when they saw a pirate ship approaching. They had heard tales of pirates and their nasty deeds. Most of the ships being attacked were cargo ships that lacked weapons for fighting off the pirates. The sailors knew there was little they could do to stop the pirates.

Some pirates used smaller and swifter boats for night attacks. They would come alongside a cargo ship in the darkness of night. Then they would quickly seize the ship and kill many of the unsuspecting crew.

Pirates favored small, fast ships such as sloops, which could easily overtake any ship they wanted to capture.



Before they boarded a ship, pirates fired a warning shot from a cannon. They hoped that the captain and crew of the ship would simply give up their cargo without a fight. Cannon shots were also used to destroy masts and rigging on the other ship. Pirates then threw smoke bombs onto the ship's deck to confuse and frighten the crew. The pirates then used **grappling hooks** to climb aboard the ship.



Roche Brasiliano holds a cutlass.

Once on board, pirates used many kinds of weapons to take over a ship. One of the most common weapons was a **cutlass**. A cutlass is similar to a small sword. It was used for close-up, hand-to-hand fighting. Pirates also used guns, such as flintlock pistols

and flintlock muskets. The muskets fired balls made of lead. The balls were loaded into the barrel one at a time and shot out with exploding gunpowder. Sometimes pirates made crude grenades that they used in their attacks.

Many people were wounded or killed in pirate battles. Sometimes, pirates would take hostages. They might even force members of a ship's crew to join the pirate crew. Usually, pirates would simply tie up crew and passengers and then take anything of value to their ship. On occasion, pirates attacking in small boats would hijack the entire ship. These ships were then used to attack other ships.

Life on a Pirate Ship

To some people, a pirate's life may seem exciting. But a pirate's life was not very glamorous. They were criminals who were hated as much as they were feared. They had to constantly be on guard and often couldn't even trust their fellow crew members. The work was hard and dangerous. Many pirates lost legs, arms, fingers, eyes, and even their lives in fierce battles. Living conditions were not very pleasant, either. They often lived in dirty, smelly quarters.



During a violent storm in the Caribbean, the mast of a ship would sometimes snap. The crew would have to climb into the dangerous rigging to cut the broken masts free so they would not capsize the ship.



A drawing of Captain Kidd hiding his treasure.

It was the love of gold that caused most pirates—and the queens and kings who hired them—to steal. But pirates stole many other items of value. The ships that were attacked often carried silver and precious gems, such as emeralds and pearls. They also carried tobacco, wine, brandy, coffee, tea, spices, and expensive fabrics such as velvet and linen. Pirates sold or traded most of these goods. They also kept some for their personal use.

One of the many specialized jobs on a pirate ship was making and mending sails. The sailmaker also made and mended flags.



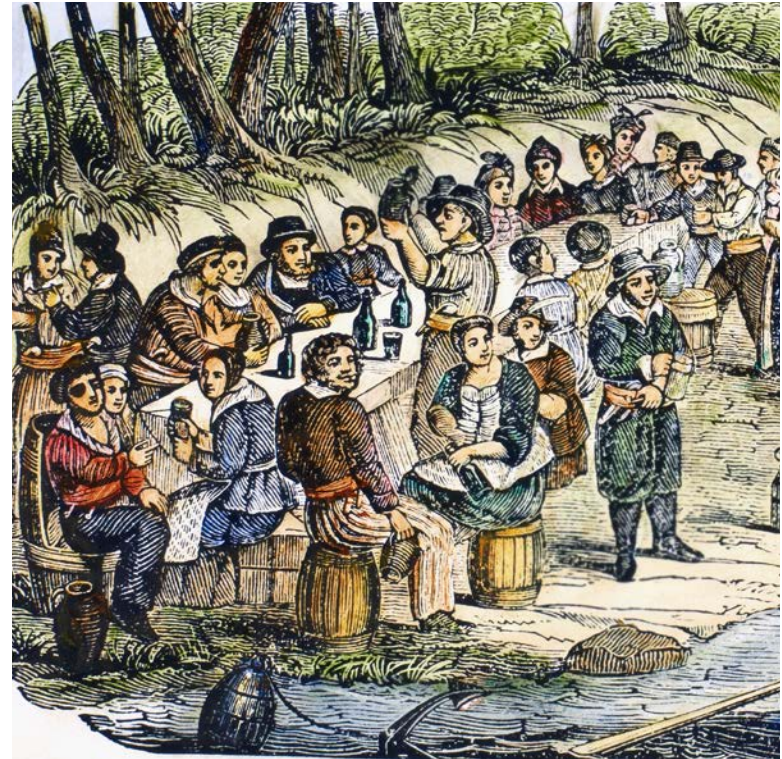
Pirates on a ship were assigned different jobs. One person was always assigned to stand watch. This person would cling to rope ladders high above the deck to look for enemies or ships to raid. Another person, called a **helmsman**, steered the ship with a lever called a *tiller*.

The **cooper** was the person who made, repaired, and sealed all of the barrels on the ship. Most of the food and drink was stored in barrels. The cooper had to make sure the barrels were well-made and sealed. Otherwise, the food or drink might go bad.

There were other jobs, too, such as mending the sails, cooking for the crew, **caulking** the wooden deck planks, and pumping water from the bottom of the ship.

But when the work was done, pirates had time for eating, drinking, and entertainment. They ate meals together and drank liquor or wine. They played games such as dice or cards. They also played musical instruments, sang, and danced. Pirates were often lively and **rowdy** at mealtimes.

Like all sailors, pirates lived in close spaces with little privacy. They slept in hammocks. Their personal belongings, such as shaving kits and clothing, were stored in sea chests.



Pirates celebrating



Captain Edward England

Pirates often stole clothes from people on other ships. The crew dressed differently than the captain. They needed comfortable and practical clothes. A typical pirate wore simple shoes and pants, plus a waist sash and a jacket with wood or bone buttons. Crew members often wore scarves over their heads.

The captain usually wore much fancier clothing. Some captains liked to wear silk pants and shirts with lace cuffs and gold buttons. They often wore shoes with silver buckles. Many pirate captains grew their hair long. They liked to tie it with ribbon to make it look like a gentleman's wig.

Not all pirates were men. There were a few women pirates, as well. Most pirate ships did not allow women on board, so women pirates had to disguise themselves by dressing like men.

Many pirate ship crews had a voice in the running of their ship. They voted on rules and helped decide how the treasure from raids would be divided. Of course, the captain always got the biggest share. Other shares were divided by the importance of a crew member's responsibilities. In some cases, crew members even elected the captain of their ship.



Mary Reade fights an opponent.

Well-Known Pirates

Many pirates became well known. And many stories of these pirates have been passed down over the years. Let's look at some of the better-known pirates and the lives they led.

Blackbeard, whose real name was Edward Teach, was a notorious pirate born in England. He first served as a crew member on a pirate ship captained by a pirate named Benjamin Hornigold. They attacked ships and port towns in the Caribbean. During that time, Blackbeard gained a reputation as a fierce fighter. Eventually Blackbeard went on to captain his own ship.

Blackbeard became one of the most feared pirate captains sailing the Caribbean. Rather than wait for his victims to take off their rings and give them to him, Blackbeard would cut off their fingers. He would place burning, smoking cord in his beard. Black smoke would rise around his face, causing people to think he was mad or crazy. That made him even scarier.



Blackbeard

In 1718, Blackbeard and his crew sailed up the Atlantic coast of America and into North Carolina. At that time, North Carolina was part of the British colony. Blackbeard sailed up coastal rivers and raided wealthy plantations.

People were scared and angry. They wanted to get rid of Blackbeard and his pirates. They asked the British Navy for help. A British Navy captain and his crew fought a fierce battle with Blackbeard and his crew. Blackbeard lost his life in that battle. According to legend, it took twenty cutlass wounds and five shots to kill him.



Robert Maynard fighting Blackbeard

Anne Bonny was one of a few women pirates. She was born in Ireland. She moved to South Carolina with her family when she was a young girl. Her father was a lawyer, and her mother was a **maidservant**. Anne fell in love with a sailor and ran away with him to New Providence, in the Bahamas. Then she met the pirate Calico Jack and joined his pirate crew.

She disguised herself as a man and was a tough fighter. Most people did not know she was a woman. She raided ships with Calico Jack until 1720. They were eventually captured by the British Navy and were tried in a court in Jamaica. The judge first sentenced Anne to death by hanging. But before the hanging, the Navy learned that she was pregnant. Her sentence was then changed to life in prison.



Anne Bonny

Pegleg is another well-known pirate. He worked as a privateer for a French king. He is best known for his “wooden leg.” But Pegleg, whose real name was François le Clerc, did not have a wooden leg. Instead, he used a wooden crutch after losing his leg in a battle. Pirates with wooden legs are often popularized in movies and books, such as *Treasure Island*, probably because of Pegleg.



Captain Kidd's corpse on display as a warning to others

Do You Know?

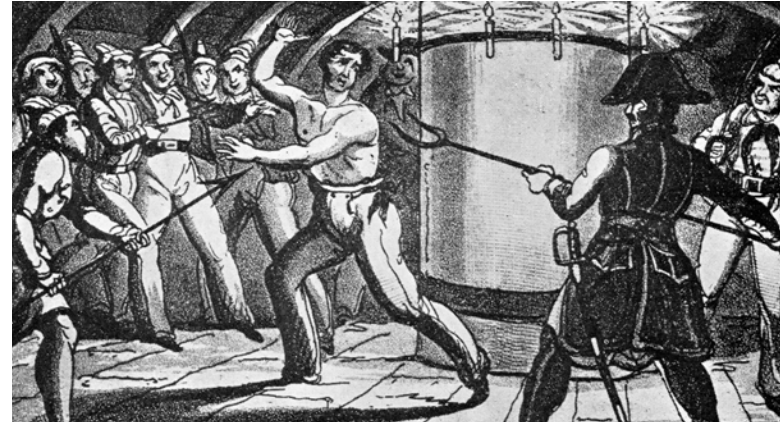
Captain Kidd was another famous English pirate. When he was finally captured and put to death, the authorities ordered his body to be hung by the harbor for all to see. This was done to discourage others from becoming pirates.

Another privateer was Sir Francis Drake, an Englishman. He started sailing when he was just 14. He first sailed with his cousin John Hawkins, who took slaves from Africa to the Americas. Sir Francis began to captain his own ship in 1570. He attacked Spanish ships, stealing large amounts of treasure for Queen Elizabeth of England.



Sir Francis Drake

Sir Francis did not limit his pirating activity to the sea. When he learned that the Spanish were taking more riches from mines in Panama by mule train, he went inland and attacked the mule trains. He even captured the town in the center of the mining region. Sir Francis Drake became a rich and successful pirate by attacking ships and mule trains. Queen Elizabeth rewarded Drake for capturing so much treasure for England by making him a knight.



The captain of a ship taken by pirates often met a cruel fate.

Conclusion

During the Golden Age of piracy, no ship was safe on the sea. The Caribbean Sea was one of the most notorious hangouts for pirates. But pirates sailed the seas in other parts of the world as well.

Pirates were often lawless, vicious men and women who made their living by stealing and robbing. Other pirates were ex-sailors hired by kings and queens who were greedy and wanted more wealth.

Modern-day pirates still roam the seas of the world. But rather than sailing slow wooden sailboats, they have high-powered speedboats. They attack small pleasure boats and ships. They steal valuables that they can then sell on the **black market**.

Explore More

On the Web:

- 1 In the address window, type: *www.google.com*
- 2 Then type: *pirates*. Click on “Google Search.”
 - Read the colored links. Click on one that looks interesting.
 - When you want to explore other links, click the “back” arrow on the top left until you get back to the page with the links that Google found.
 - Then try a search using other words from this Leveled Reader, such as *privateers*, *pirate ships*, *pirate flags*, and *Blackbeard*.

In searching for pirates on the Web, you will quickly discover that there are many links to the Pittsburgh Pirates, an American baseball team.

To avoid these links, do the following:

- 1 In the address window, type: *www.google.com*
- 2 Click on Google’s “Advanced Search” link.
 - After “With all of the words,” type *pirates*.
 - After “Without the words,” type *baseball* and *Pittsburgh*. Then click “Google Search.”

This will help you to access links that are about the kind of pirates in this Leveled Book.

Glossary

black market	an illegal trade network (p. 22)
caulking	filling gaps and cracks with a watertight sealant (p. 13)
cooper	a barrelmaker (p. 13)
cutlass	a short, curved sword (p. 10)
glamorized	artificially made more fascinating and attractive (p. 4)
grappling hooks	anchors with several hooks attached to a sturdy rope (p. 9)
helmsman	the person who steers the ship (p. 13)
launch	to start or set in operation (p. 7)
maidservant	a female who does household work (p. 19)
privateers	independent pirates operating with a license from a king or queen (p. 7)
rowdy	rough, loud, excitable, quarrelsome, or aggressive (p. 14)