

Mysterious Shipwrecks

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,777

Connections

Writing and Art

Investigate more about a ship from the book. Draw a diagram of the ship. Write an essay about it, including when it was used, what it was used for, and your ideas about what happened to it.

Social Studies

Choose at least four ships from the book. On a map, locate their starting points and intended destinations, tracing the route each one may have taken. If it is known, identify where the ships wrecked.

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Mysterious Shipwrecks

**Multi
level
V•Y•Z^o**

Written by Sean McCollum

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Focus Question

What makes shipwrecks interesting?

Words to Know

aground	maritime
artifacts	navigation
capsized	salvage
fleet	seaworthy
hull	shipwrecks
investigators	supernatural

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Level Z1 Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL Z1

Fountas & Pinnell	W-X
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	60

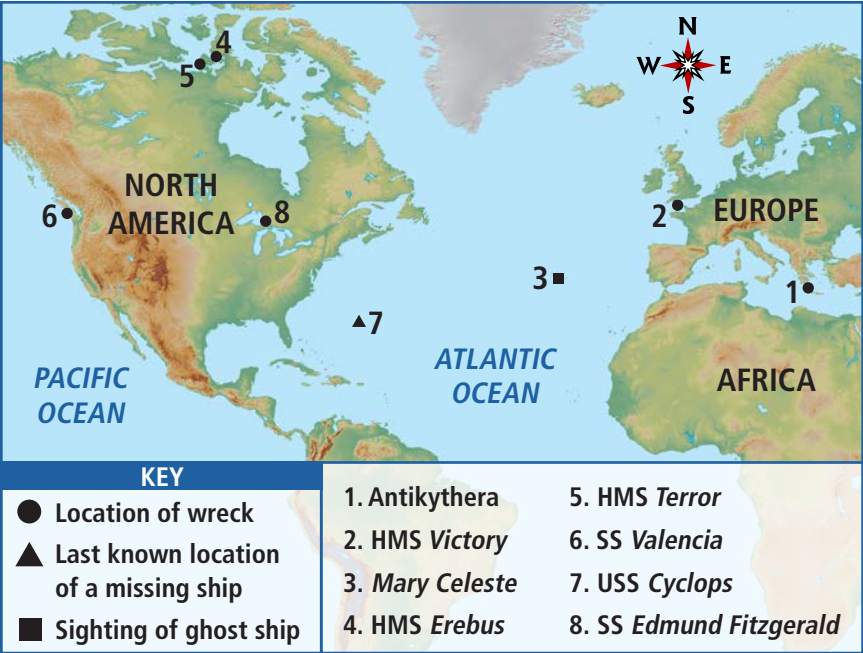


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Marine Mysteries, Lost and Found

The United Nations estimates the world’s coastlines and seafloors are littered with more than three million **shipwrecks**. Marine archaeologists study some wrecks that date back hundreds, even thousands, of years. Treasure hunters search for other wrecks because of the riches rumored to have sunk with them. In some cases, however, ships have simply disappeared without a trace, leaving no clues that might suggest their fate.



A wreck at the bottom of the Red Sea in Jordan

Every shipwreck holds some kind of mystery. What was the ship carrying, and where did its wreck end up? What happened to the people on board? The mystery that seizes people’s curiosity the most, however, is this: what really sent the ship to its doom?

Stories of shipwrecks are often dramatic tales of danger, death, sunken treasure, and intrigue. Clues can help us solve mysteries, but in most cases, the sea hides the clues to a ship’s fate for years—and sometimes forever.

Mystery of Antiquity

In 1900, divers found a shipwreck they were not even looking for near the Greek island of Antikythera (an-ti-ki-THEER-uh). The wreck



was partially buried under shifting sands 55 meters (180 ft.) beneath the sea's surface. No one knew how it got there, but Greek archaeologists soon realized the more interesting question was *when* it got there.

A diver recovers a bronze spear from the Antikythera wreck. It is thought to have been part of a large statue.

The Richest Wreck

In 1708, a British warship sent the Spanish galleon *San José* to the bottom of the sea, along with gold and emeralds intended to fund Spain's war against Great Britain. For three hundred years, the wreck's whereabouts remained a mystery—until recently. A salvage company and several countries have battled for the right to the ship's treasure since its discovery. In 2015, it was estimated to be worth as much as \$16 billion, making it the most valuable shipwreck in the world.



A piece of the world's oldest computer, known as the Antikythera Mechanism, is displayed in a museum in Athens.

As divers brought **artifacts** to the surface, researchers began piecing together a historical puzzle. The ship was ancient, more than two thousand years old, and had been loaded with an amazing hoard of art and luxury goods. One of these items has been described as the earliest known computer—a mechanical device that used gears to calculate the precise positions of the stars and planets, possibly for **navigation**. More than 115 years after the wreck's discovery, research teams are still diving and studying it.



HMS *Victory* sails through turbulent seas in a painting by Thomas Butterworth.

Long Lost *Victory*

HMS *Victory* was the finest ship in Great Britain's formidable navy. Launched in 1737, the *Victory* was armed with 110 cannons, making it the biggest military monster of its time. In early October 1744, the *Victory* was leading its **fleet** back to Britain. They were caught in a fierce storm in the English Channel, and the *Victory* became separated from the other ships. The great warship disappeared along with some 1,150 men.

On that fateful night, locals on nearby islands heard the steady booming of cannons—a **maritime** cry for help. Unfortunately, the seas were far too treacherous for any attempt at rescue.



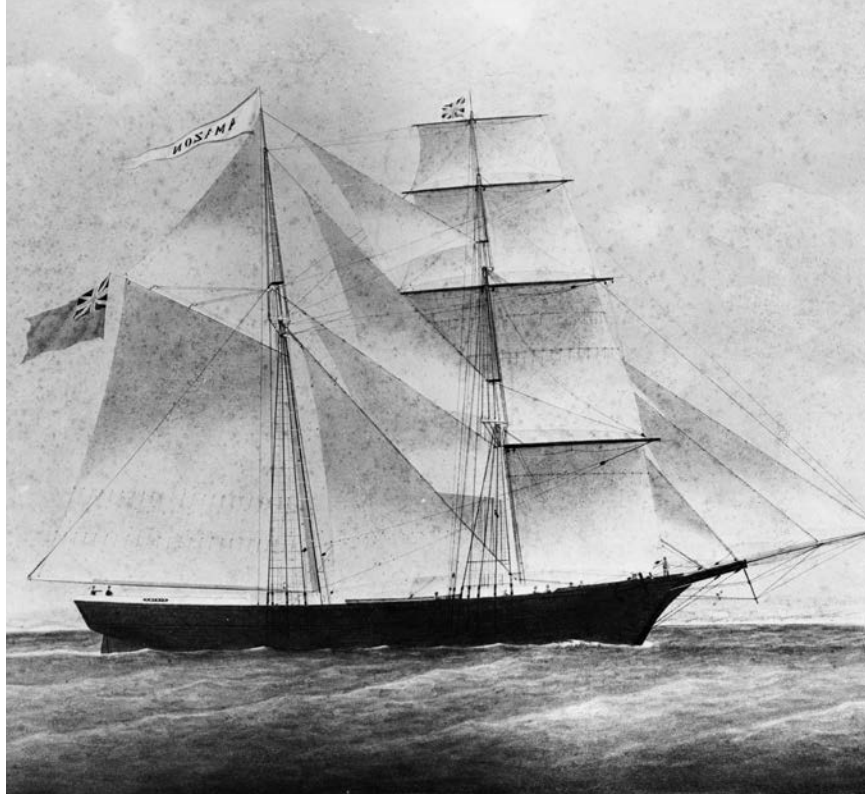
Artifacts from HMS *Victory* such as this bronze cannon were discovered by a salvage company.

Days later, some wreckage from the vessel washed up on the rocky shores of the islands where the distress signals had been heard. However, the ship's main body—its **hull** and decking—was nowhere to be found. It was as though the storm had swallowed it. The disappearance of such a massive ship baffled **investigators** for more than 250 years.

Modern technology helped solve the mystery of the *Victory*'s final resting place. In 2008, a marine **salvage** company searched a wide area using sonar and other advanced equipment. The remains of the ship lay 100 kilometers (62 mi.) from where it was originally believed to have sunk. The salvage company and British government worked together to retrieve valuables from the wreck. Today, the world's oldest naval ship still in commission bears the name of HMS *Victory*.

Ghost Ship: *Mary Celeste*

Not all lost ships end up at the bottom of the sea. Some experience a fate even more mysterious, and perhaps none more so than *Mary Celeste*'s. On November 7, 1872, the cargo ship set sail from New York City in the United States, bound for Genoa, Italy. The 30.1-meter (100 ft.) vessel had a crew of seven, plus Captain Benjamin Briggs, his wife, Sarah, and their two-year-old daughter, Sophia.



An 1861 illustration of *Mary Celeste* entering the port of Marseille, France

One month later, the British ship *Dei Gratia* spotted a vessel drifting in the Atlantic Ocean. It was the *Mary Celeste*, but a boarding party found no one on the ship. A lifeboat was missing, as was the ship's navigational equipment, but there were no signs of violence, the crew's personal gear was stowed, and all the cargo was still in the hold. The last entry in the captain's log indicated nothing amiss. However, Captain Briggs, his family, and the crew were neither seen nor heard from again. Investigators later examined the *Mary Celeste* but found few clues about why a seasoned crew would abandon a **seaworthy** ship. Something, though, seemed to have driven them off the *Mary Celeste*. The intrigue has led to many fictionalized accounts of the mystery of the *Mary Celeste*, usually featuring rebel crew members, murder, and even sea monsters.

The Fraidy-Cat of *Empress of Ireland*

Emmy was considered the ship's cat on the *Empress of Ireland*. The day before the passenger ship sailed from Canada, Emmy fled the vessel. When carried back aboard, she escaped again. Her behavior was viewed as a bad omen. The next day, the *Empress of Ireland* struck another ship and sank in just fourteen minutes. More than one thousand people died, making it the deadliest wreck in Canadian history.





A painting of HMS *Erebus* stuck in the ice by François Etienne Musin

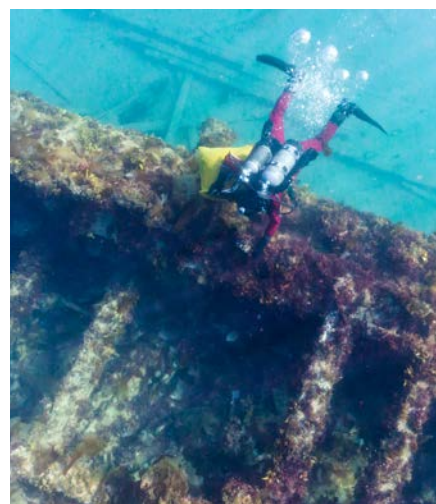
The Long Hunt for HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*

In 1845, the British navy mounted the Franklin Expedition to search for the Northwest Passage. It was hoped this new route across the Arctic Ocean would prove a shortcut for shipping between Europe and Asia.

Named for its commander, Sir John Franklin, the expedition included 129 men and three years' worth of supplies on two ships—HMS *Terror* and HMS *Erebus*. The pair were designed as sturdy warships but had been refitted to face the fearsome conditions of Arctic exploration. On July 26, 1845, two whaling ships spotted *Terror* and *Erebus* in Canada's Baffin Bay. A year passed with no word from Franklin—then two years. Officials and the public feared for the safety of the explorers. The truth was worse than they imagined.

Search and rescue ships gradually discovered abandoned gear, graves, and notes left by desperate crew members on uninhabited islands. The two ships had been trapped in pack ice in September 1846, and Sir Franklin died the following June. For two years, the men—sick and dying—waited in vain for the ice to release their ships. Finally, in April 1848, the survivors attempted a desperate hike southward to reach the Canadian mainland. In 1855, local Inuit told investigators about a group of Europeans who had starved to death along the coast. Evidence showed that the men had resorted to cannibalism to try to survive.

The doomed expedition has never ceased to fascinate adventurers. In 2014, a ship equipped with sonar found the wreck of *Erebus*, well preserved in 12 meters (40 ft.) of frigid Arctic



waters. Its partner ship remained missing until September 2016, when the preserved remains of the HMS *Terror* were found at the bottom of a bay off King William Island.

A diver explores the remains of the *Erebus*.

Terror on the Rocks: SS *Valencia*

The SS *Valencia* was one of the most terrifying shipwrecks of all. In January 1906, the passenger steamer was on its way from San Francisco to Seattle with 173 people on board. Near midnight on January 22, its iron hull ran **aground** near Vancouver Island. Pounding waves trapped the ship, making it nearly impossible for anyone to escape. The crew lowered lifeboats, but most boats flipped, or **capsized**, in the churning seas, tossing people into freezing water where they drowned. High winds and waves hampered rescue efforts. About thirty-six hours after the stranding, witnesses onshore watched in horror as a huge wave swept over the upper deck, where dozens of passengers were holding on for their lives. In total, only 37 out of 136 passengers survived.



A *Valencia* lifeboat escapes the violent seas, bearing some of the few survivors of the wreck.



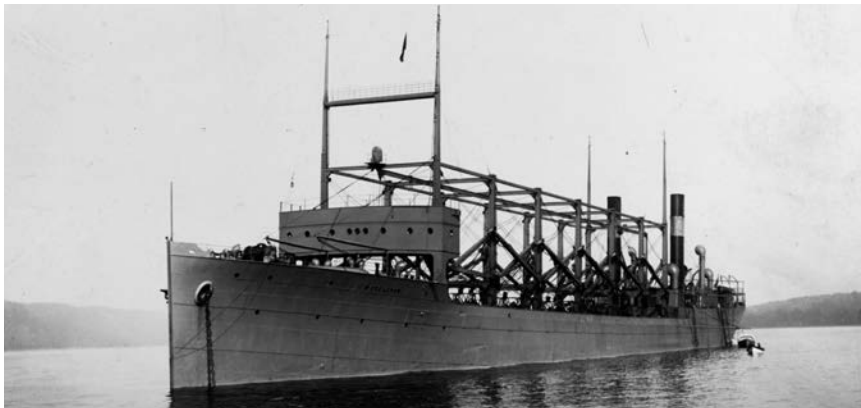
Valencia leaves San Francisco eight years before the ship's tragic sinking.

How, why, and where were not the mysteries of the *Valencia* wreck. Investigations concluded the captain and crew had made bad decisions that endangered the ship and its passengers. Most of the mysteries came later and inspired **supernatural** tales. In 1910, for example, newspapers reported that sailors had seen a ghostly *Valencia* sailing near the site of the wreck. A rumor also spread that a lifeboat containing eight skeletons had been found in a nearby cave, though the story was never confirmed. Then in 1933—twenty-seven years after the disaster—one of *Valencia*'s lifeboats seemed to float out of the past and was discovered in a nearby bay. Its nameplate is now displayed in the Maritime Museum of British Columbia.

Gone without a Trace: USS *Cyclops*

The USS *Cyclops* was a U.S. Navy supply ship. During World War I, the *Cyclops* crew picked up a load of heavy ore in Brazil. While there, Captain W. Worley reported to his superiors that one of the engines needed repairs and was not operational. He was told to get it fixed once he reached the United States. On February 22, 1918, the ship left Brazil with a crew of 309.

The *Cyclops* disappeared somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, and not one piece of wreckage has ever been found. At the time, people speculated that a German submarine had sunk the ship. Some naval officials wondered if Captain Worley, who had been born in Germany, might have secretly handed the ship over to the enemy, though there was no proof of that.



The disappearance of USS *Cyclops*, pictured above, remains the largest loss of life in U.S. naval history in an event not directly related to combat.



Some ships have been sunk intentionally in the Bermuda Triangle to create artificial reefs, promoting sea life in the area.

Another theory notes the ship disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle, an area in the Atlantic Ocean with a reputation for swallowing ships. Most naval experts think that in addition to lacking full engine power, the ship was overloaded and unstable. They say it may have been caught in a violent storm that occurred on March 10, which could have sent the ship to the ocean floor.

The Bermuda Triangle

The Bermuda Triangle is an area of the Atlantic Ocean. Its corners are marked approximately by Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and the tip of Florida. According to legend, a high number of unexplained disappearances of ships and aircraft occur there, leading to rumors of supernatural powers sinking or snatching ships. However, researchers have determined that ships are no more likely to disappear there than in other busy shipping areas.



There and Gone: SS *Edmund Fitzgerald*

The SS *Edmund Fitzgerald* was a huge freighter. On November 9, 1975, the ship left Superior, Wisconsin, fully loaded with iron ore and captained by Ernest McSorley. A storm was forecast, but the veteran captain was not concerned.

On the afternoon of November 10, though, the U.S. Coast Guard warned all ships to seek shelter. The *Edmund Fitzgerald* headed for Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin. At about 7:00 p.m., McSorley reported that the ship was taking on water but radioed, "We are holding our own."



The *Edmund Fitzgerald* was over 213 meters (700 ft.) long, bow to stern. It was the largest and longest vessel ever built on the Great Lakes.



Coast Guard officers inspect life rings recovered from the wreck of *Edmund Fitzgerald*.

Moments later, the ship was gone. It no longer appeared on radar. No lifeboats were launched. None of the twenty-nine crew members were found. The Coast Guard located the wreck on the lake floor within days. The ship had been snapped in half. Investigators suspect a series of three rogue waves may have sunk the ship so suddenly there was no time even to make a distress call.

Freak Waves

Researchers suspect "rogue waves" for some unexplained shipping disasters. What makes these waves so dangerous is their unpredictability, size, and power. A rogue wave comes out of nowhere and is much bigger than the waves around it. It is created by a powerful combination of strong water currents and high winds, usually far out at sea. The sudden jump in wave size can flip large freighters.





Divers measure a shipwreck discovered in 2011 that dates back to the seventeenth century.

The Sea Keeps Many Secrets

Sailing the seas has always been a great adventure, one that has inspired thousands of novels and movies. Part of any true adventure, though, is the element of danger—and the sea has plenty of it. The oceans stretch vast distances, weather can turn suddenly savage, and threatening reefs and rocks hide along coastlines.

Modern equipment makes shipping safer than ever, but dozens of shipwrecks still claim the lives of about two thousand people every year. Working on a ship remains one of the world's most dangerous jobs. Sailors entrust their lives to their knowledge, skills, and the ships they serve on—but sometimes, they are left to depend on only their luck.

Every shipwreck leaves behind mysteries. Some of these mysteries can be explored and eventually explained, and older wrecks may provide us with a glimpse into the past. Much of the time, though, the sea keeps these secrets to itself.

Glossary

aground (<i>adv.</i>)	on or onto the shore or bottom of a body of water (p. 13)
artifacts (<i>n.</i>)	objects made or used by humans long ago (p. 6)
capsized (<i>v.</i>)	turned over in the water so that an object's bottom or side was facing up (p. 13)
fleet (<i>n.</i>)	a group of ships or vehicles traveling together that are under the same command (p. 7)
hull (<i>n.</i>)	the main body of a ship or boat including the bottom, sides, and deck (p. 8)
investigators (<i>n.</i>)	people who carry out detailed examinations in order to determine the facts about something (p. 8)
maritime (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to the sea, sailing, or activities done on the sea (p. 7)
navigation (<i>n.</i>)	the act of steering a course toward a destination (p. 6)
salvage (<i>n.</i>)	property that is saved from damage or destruction; the recovery of a wrecked ship or its cargo (p. 8)
seaworthy (<i>adj.</i>)	safe or ready for traveling on the sea (p. 10)
shipwrecks (<i>n.</i>)	sunken or destroyed ships (p. 4)
supernatural (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to something that can't be explained by science or the laws of nature (p. 14)