



Shipwreck Center

Whydah Pirate Museum History Curriculum and Education Guide Overview

**311 Stony Brook Road
Brewster, MA 02631
shipwreckcenter.org
(508) 896-5110**

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Historic Shipwreck Preservation presents students and educators with a firsthand opportunity to discover the colonial world of the early 18th century—a turbulent yet formative period marked by sailing ships, European expansion, human exploitation, and of course, a surge of piratical activity known as the "Golden Age of Piracy."

Until recently, serious scholarship had largely ignored the "Golden Age," leaving the subject to be romanticized or demonized by storybook novels and fantasy movies. As Ken Kinkor, the museum's late project historian and director of research, argued in his essay, *Black Men under the Black Flag*:

"The portrayal of pirates as aberrant and predatory individuals prompted by greed, adventurism, and/or simple perversity also safely insulates audiences from the broader socioeconomic implications of piracy. That pirates and other social bandits might have been a logical byproduct of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European 'progress' is... less than edifying to juvenile readers."^[1]

One of the Center's primary goals is to transport visitors back to the pirate's world—to limit judgments about the pirates' character and instead examine the circumstances of their era.

For instance, the end of the War of Spanish Succession in 1714 led to a significant decline in both annual wages and available employment for European and colonial sailors. Those who could find work still risked life and limb at sea for a few meager pounds, while ship owners raked in massive profits from the comfort of a London office. Meanwhile, the slave trade continued to flourish, with thousands of Africans being sold into slavery and transported across the Atlantic in shackles. Many would be brutalized and worked to death on sugar plantations throughout the West Indies. The Caribbean also saw an influx of pro-Stuart supporters from the failed Jacobite rebellion of 1715-1716. Traitors to the crown, these Jacobite insurgents refused to recognize German-born George I as the King of Great Britain and sought to undermine, if not overthrow, his regime.

All of these factors—coupled with the vast nautical exchange of goods, resources and riches—led to what distinguished historian Eric Hobsbawm called, "a protest against oppression

and poverty; a cry for vengeance on the rich and oppressors."^[2] While flouting the law, this brotherhood of poor sailors, escaped slaves, and political exiles pursued freedom, fraternity, and fortune on the open ocean. Although they risked death for such a lifestyle, many of these men—along with a handful of women—enjoyed a more comfortable life under the "black flag" than their class and/or race would have allowed them in normal society.

Historians often refer to the 18th century as the "Age of Enlightenment"—a title that reflects the prevalence of social and political discussion concerning fairness, inclusion, freedom of expression, and individual rights and liberties. While most scholastic history programs highlight the role of Enlightenment ideals in sparking the American, French, and Haitian revolutions of the late 18th century, few mention accounts of liberty and equality that existed aboard some pirate vessels half a century before the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. To quote project historian Ken Kinkor again:

"Pirates and other social bandits adopted social mechanisms which can be summarized as libertarian, democratic, federal, egalitarian, fraternal and communal. It may well be argued that these 'floating commonwealths' are examples of a form of pre-Enlightenment radicalism."^[3]

While this swashbuckling socio-political rebellion was hardly destined to bring about the universal rights and advancements that resulted from the aforementioned movements, the pirates of the "Golden Age" are nonetheless noteworthy examples of an early democratic—albeit outlaw—society. Pirate crews split their loot equally amongst themselves. All members who pledged the *Articles* had a vote for their captain, their quartermaster, and on any major decisions regarding destinations and prizes. Some pirate articles even included statutes that provided financial compensation for those injured in service.

The *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework* includes an excerpt stating that, "the fate of real men and women, here and abroad, who have worked to bring democratic ideas to life deserves our whole attention and that of our students. It is a suspenseful, often tragic, drama that continues today, often amid poverty and social turmoil."^[4] In that regard, the maritime uprising of 1714-1730—for all its many faults and flaws—deserves the attention of students young and old. These imperfect sea rovers and the imperfect world in which they lived, can teach us much about mankind's march toward progress and the boundless resilience of the human spirit.

OVERVIEW & ORGANIZATION

The *Center* helps schools and teachers use museum resources to enhance their lesson plans and engage their students. The Educator's Guide was designed specifically to fit the current *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework*. The remainder of the guide is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Historical Themes
- ▶ Museum Philosophy
- ▶ Grade Level Concepts and Skills and Learning Standards
- ▶ Address, Contact and Planning Information

Please note that this guide has been designed for History and Social Science classes. The Center also has a *Science, Engineering, and Technology Curriculum Guide*, which is available on our website.

Also note that curriculum has not been created for Pre-K through Second grade. The *Center's* history and the museum exhibits are suited for higher grade levels. Educators of lower grade levels are welcome to discuss curriculum, lesson plans, and other opportunities with museum staff.

HISTORICAL THEMES

The Whydah Gally was a London-built, former slave ship that was captured by pirates under the command of Captain Samuel "Black Sam" Bellamy in February of 1717. While sailing north along the Cape Cod coastline, the *Whydah* and her crew went down in a violent nor'easter on the night of April 26, 1717.

In 1984, the shipwreck was discovered off the coast of Wellfleet by Cape Cod native, Barry Clifford, and his team of divers and archaeologists. The following year, Clifford's team recovered the galley's bronze bell, which bears the inscription, "The Whydah Gally 1716," and definitively confirmed the wreck is in fact the *Whydah* of historical record.

In addition to presenting the raw facts and chronology associated with the *Whydah*, her crew, and her discovery, the museum's historical narrative focuses on the following themes:

Outlaw Democracy

As discussed in the introduction, the pirates' hierarchy was surprisingly democratic. With many crewmen having once sailed under the absolute authority of a merchant captain, pirates took measures to limit their captain's power—except in times of battle. Captains could be deposed and replaced with a simple majority vote. Pirate crews also elected a quartermaster to represent their interests and to challenge the captain if he overstepped his bounds. All men who signed the articles were given a vote on any major decision regardless of race, age or position.

Diversity with Unity

The men aboard the *Whydah* were a diverse group of Anglicans, French, Dutch, Swedes, North American and Caribbean colonists, Africans and Native Americans of at least two tribes. Despite their motley mixture, the pirates organized themselves into an intimidating naval force, unified under a common spirit of revolt. Aboard ships like the *Whydah*, ability and loyalty transcended traditional boundaries like race, religion, and nationality.

Accounts of Ordinary Men

History textbooks have no shortage of accounts told from the perspective of rulers, leaders, and other famous figures. In contrast, the story of the *Whydah* is among the few told from the vantage point of common folk. The pirates' perspective gives students an opportunity to see how ordinary people responded—albeit sometimes radically—to the circumstances and conventions of their time.

Personal Stories

As the museum is built upon the artifacts and history of the *Whydah Gally* specifically, the narrative would not be complete without detailing the lives of known crew members. These individuals—each with their own experiences, personalities, and desires—deserve to have their stories told. Here are brief biographies of a few:

Samuel Bellamy- A poor English sailor who moved to Cape Cod between 1713-1715. There he fell in love with a girl from the wealthy Hallett family. He "went on the account" in hopes of acquiring a fortune and thus her hand in marriage. Charismatic and well-respected, his

men elected him captain. "Black Sam" was more egalitarian than most pirates and became one of the most successful captains of the Golden Age—without intentionally killing any of his captives.

John Julian- A teenage Afro-Amerindian from the Mosquito Coast who joined the pirates in their early days. He served as the ship's pilot. Julian survived the deadly shipwreck only to be denied a trial because of his heritage. He was instead sold into slavery.

John King- 8-to-11 years old, King willingly left behind a wealthy lifestyle to join the pirates in November, 1716. He is the youngest known pirate in recorded history. King's fibula bone, leather shoe and silk stocking were discovered in 1989 and are displayed at the museum.

PHILOSOPHY

To date, *The Whydah Gally*, is the only discovered and fully-verified pirate shipwreck in the world. Furthermore, the museum contains the only authentic collection of pirate treasure anywhere. The Whydah Pirate Museum strives to make the most of these unique accolades and is guided by the following principles:

Authentic History

The history of the *Whydah*, her crew and their adventure is substantiated by over four hundred pages of primary source documents uncovered from colonial archives. The *Whydah Sourcebook* contains a wide variety of primary sources including the depositions of captured captains and sailors, articles from the *Boston News-Letter* (1704-1776), correspondence between colonial Governors and trade boards, trial testimony of the surviving crew, and even a Captain's journal detailing the original (mostly failed) salvage operation that began only weeks after the *Whydah* capsized.

Tangible History

With hundreds of thousands of artifacts in its collection, the Whydah Museum displays real objects that were last handled by real pirates. Students can see real weapons, tools, and currency from the early 18th century. Moreover, because all of these artifacts were actually on the ship, they provide an authentic glance at the wide assortment of items used by sailors three centuries ago. In addition to coins and weapons, the museum's exhibits also contain navigation

instruments, sailing equipment, jewelry and clothing adornments, carpenter's tools, syringes, kitchenware and utensils, and even leisure devices like gaming tokens and smoking pipes.

A Still Unfolding Story

As diving operations and artifact excavation and conservation are still ongoing, the *Whydah's* story is not yet complete. It remains to be seen what relics might be unearthed tomorrow or how they may influence the *Whydah's* legacy. In the spirit of continuing discovery, the museum has an active laboratory where students can watch the excavation process unfold.

ADDRESS, CONTACT AND PLANNING INFORMATION

For pricing, logistics and information, or to schedule a virtual class trip, please contact our office manager: education@shipwreckcenter.org

Center for Historic Shipwreck Preservation, Inc.

486 Underpass Road
Brewster, MA 02631
(508) 896-5110

Whydah Pirate Museum in West Yarmouth

Whydah Pirate Museum
674 MA-28 (Main St.)
West Yarmouth, MA 02673
(508) 534-9571

Whydah Wreck Site at Cape Cod National Seashore

National Park Service Headquarters, Marconi Beach
99 Marconi Site Road
Wellfleet, MA 02667
(508) 771-2144

References for History Curriculum Grades 3-12

- [1] Kenneth J. Kinkor, *Black Men Under the Black Flag*—published in *Bandits at Sea: A Pirate Reader*, edited by C. R. Pennell (NYU Press, 2001), pg. 195
- [2] Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pgs. 27-28
- [3] Kenneth J. Kinkor, *Black Men Under the Black Flag*—published in *Bandits at Sea: A Pirate Reader*, edited by C. R. Pennell (NYU Press, 2001), pg. 196
- [4] *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum*—excerpted and adapted from *Education for Democracy: A Statement of Principles* (Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers, 1987)