

HOLIDAYS & HEROES

Let's Celebrate
COLUMBUS DAY



BY Barbara deRubertis • ILLUSTRATED BY Thomas Sperling

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

deRubertis, Barbara.

[Columbus Day]

Let's celebrate Columbus Day / by Barbara deRubertis ; illustrated by Thomas Sperling. -- Revised edition.

pages cm. -- (Holidays & heroes)

Original edition published: 1992.

Original edition has subtitle: Let's meet Christopher Columbus.

ISBN 978-1-57565-634-2 (pbk. : alk. paper) -- ISBN 978-1-57565-725-7 (library reinforced edition : alk. paper)

1. Columbus Day--Juvenile literature. 2. Columbus, Christopher--Juvenile literature. 3. America--Discovery and exploration--Spanish--Juvenile literature. I. Sperling, Thomas, 1952- illustrator. II. Title.

E120.D47 2013

394.264--dc23

2013001682

Synchred Read-Along Version by:

Triangle Interactive LLC

PO Box 573

Prior Lake, MN 55372

eISBN: 978-1-57565-635-9

ISBN-13: 978-1-68452-016-9 (ebook)

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Revised edition first published in the United States of America in 2014 by Kane Press, Inc.

Book Design: Edward Miller

Photograph/Image Research: Maura Taboubi

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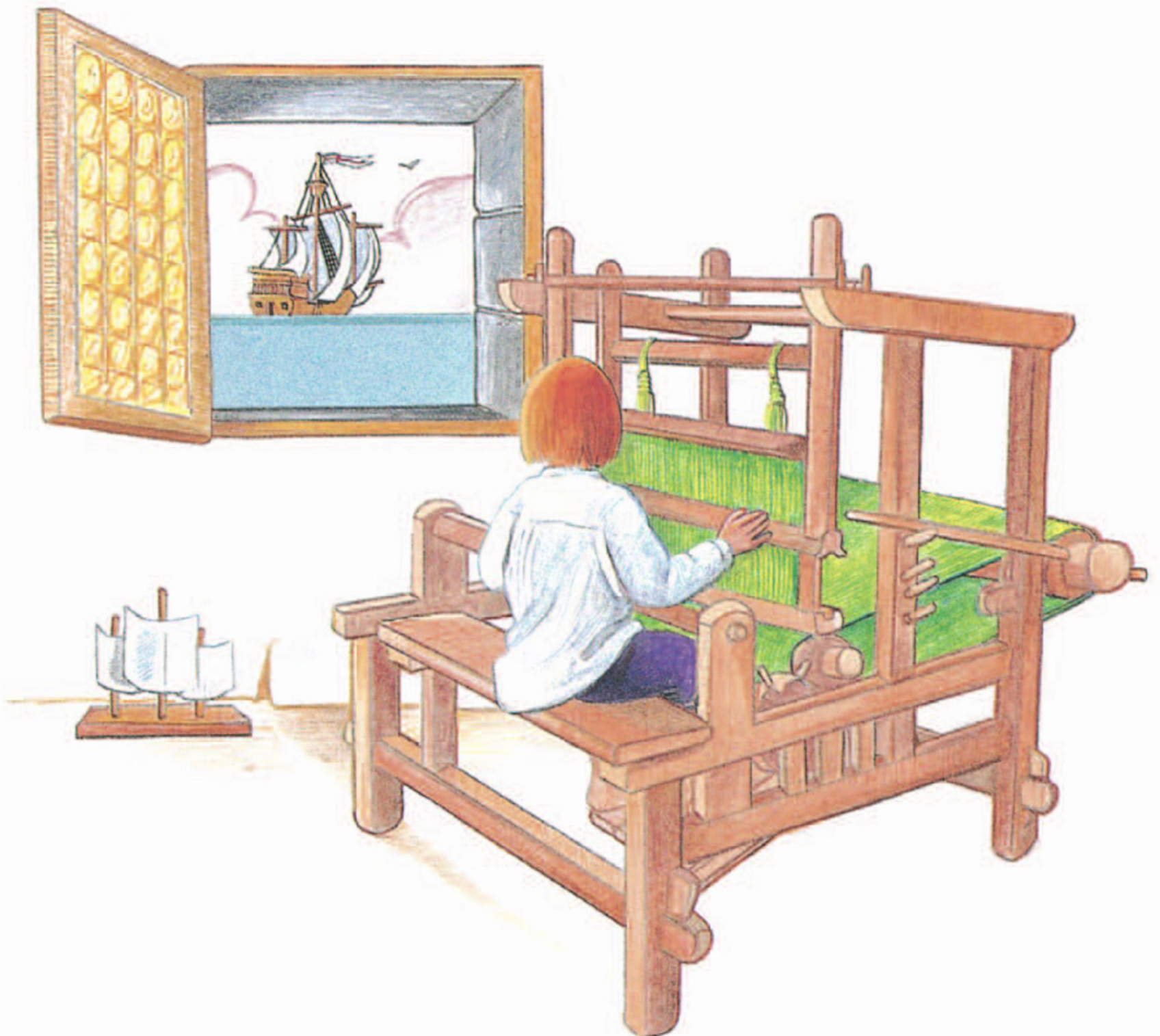
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Christopher Columbus was born around 1450 in Genoa, a city that is now part of the country of Italy.

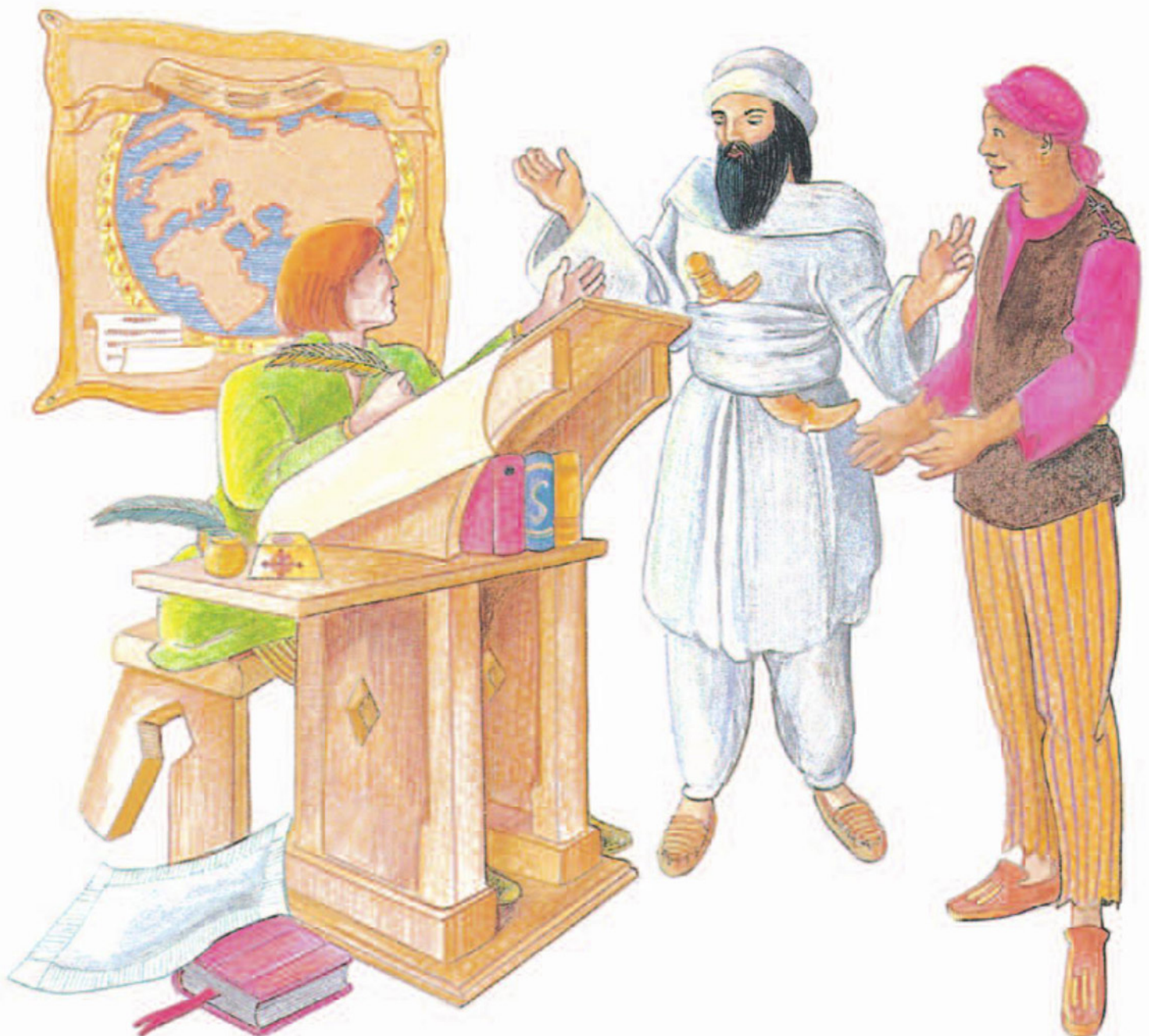
Christopher's father was a weaver of cloth. He wanted Christopher to be a weaver, too. But Christopher dreamed of being a sailor. Finally, his father agreed.



By the time Christopher Columbus was twenty-five years old, he had sailed many places. He worked trading goods with people along the coasts of Europe and West Africa.

As Columbus traveled, he learned several languages. He spoke with other sailors. He read books about geography, astronomy, religion, and history.

But Columbus was especially interested in a book written by Marco Polo.





It was a daring plan . . . but it had problems!

Most of the maps that were available at that time showed a world that was much smaller than it really is. Columbus figured that he would cross the “Ocean Sea” (now called the Atlantic Ocean) and land in China.

Columbus did not know that after crossing the Ocean Sea, he would bump into two continents that were unknown to him and to most people in Europe. These continents were later named North America and South America.

The Americas were already home to many people. Thousands of years earlier, settlers had traveled across a land bridge to what is now Alaska. They then spread out across the two continents. Over time, the land bridge was covered with water.

Also, about 500 years before Columbus dreamed of sailing west, Viking explorers had done so. They made settlements in Greenland and Canada that lasted hundreds of years.

But people in southern Europe knew little or nothing about the Viking voyages.



Columbus knew his journey would be difficult and possibly dangerous. Most sailors thought the Ocean Sea was too wide for a safe voyage to the Indies. Also, the plan was expensive and Columbus did not have enough money.

In 1484, he asked the King of Portugal for help.



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