

# PIRATES: ROMANCE AND REALITY

1 In many movies, a pirate's life is an exciting adventure. But what was life actually like for an 18th-century pirate? And which parts of the movie pirate are real and which are invented?

## 5 A PIRATE'S LIFE

In reality, the **average** pirate was usually trying to escape from a difficult life. Some were ex-sailors who were treated poorly on their ships. Others were escaped slaves who wanted their **freedom**. They came from many different backgrounds. But on a pirate ship, **equality** was important. Men elected<sup>1</sup> their captain and created the ship's rules together. The men also **divided** the **income** from stolen goods, and they shared these earnings fairly.

## PIRATE TREASURE

15 In popular culture, pirates are often shown with chests full of gold. It is true they took money from others. However, it was far more common for pirates to **steal** things like cloth, spices, and even medicine. Then they often sold these things. Of course, **purchasing** stolen goods from pirates was **illegal**, but many people did it. Also, unlike movie pirates, real "pirates didn't bury their money," says Cori Convertito, who works at a maritime museum in the U.S. "They blew it as soon as they could on women and booze."<sup>2</sup>

## PIRATE STYLE

25 Movie pirates often wear eye patches and have wooden legs. In reality, many pirates did look like this. Why? One **factor** was the poor living conditions. "Life at sea was hard and dangerous," says David Moore, a maritime museum employee in the U.S. **Disease** was also common. For these reasons, some pirates lost eyes and legs. But many pirates did one thing for their health: they wore earrings—just as in the movies. They believed putting weight on the ears stopped seasickness.

<sup>1</sup> If you **elect** someone, you choose that person to lead.

<sup>2</sup> **Booze** is an informal word meaning *alcohol*.



▲ A chest of treasure from Black Sam Bellamy's pirate ship, the *Whydah*



▲ Around 1700, a French pirate was the first to use a black flag with a skull and crossbones, later known as the Jolly Roger.

# Women of the Waves

Throughout history, the majority of pirates have been men. But were there any women pirates? Absolutely! Below are two from different parts of the world.

## MARY READ: PIRATE IN DISGUISE

5 Mary Read was born in England around 1690. She lived most of her life disguised as a man. As a teenager, looking for adventure, she dressed as a boy and got a job at sea. Later, as a young woman (still **pretending** to be a man), she got work on a ship and **sailed** to the Caribbean.

10 On one journey, pirates attacked Mary's ship. Instead of fighting, she joined them. But Mary had to be careful because many pirate ships had a rule: no women allowed. If the men discovered her true identity, they might **shoot** and kill her. So at first Mary stayed by herself and **avoided** the others. But one day, she made a  
15 surprising discovery: one of the pirates on the ship was actually a woman! Anne Bonny was the captain's girlfriend, but she was also a pirate herself. Mary told Anne her secret, and the two women became good friends, and powerful fighters. They fought together until they were captured in 1720.

## 20 CHING SHIH: PIRATE QUEEN

In the early 1800s, pirate Ching Shih terrorized the Chinese coast. When her powerful pirate husband died, control of his 500 junks **transferred** to Ching Shih. While she was **boss**, her fleet grew to almost 2,000 ships.

25 A **fearless** fighter, Ching Shih led nearly 80,000 pirates—both men and women. They **targeted** ships and towns along the coast of China. For years, leaders throughout the region **failed** to stop her. Eventually, Ching Shih retired,<sup>1</sup> a rich and **respected** woman.

<sup>1</sup> If you **retire**, you stop working completely.



▲ Ching Shih controlled almost 2,000 junks.