

Starving Sailors Activity Sheet

Going to sea was a difficult and harrowing experience. Explorers followed the coastline and were able to stop and pick up fresh food and water. But, when the trips became longer and farther away from land, the provisions had to last longer. Before the advent of refrigerators and iceboxes, food would easily spoil on a voyage.

More mutinies have been caused by complaints about food than those caused by low pay or tyrannical behavior. In the forefront of the demands of the mutineers of 1797 is a request for more vegetables and better quality food.

Starving Sailors, National Maritime Museum, 1981

Sailors even wrote poems and sea shanteys about the poor food.

Le corsaire le grand Coureur

In order to rest from fighting
We have with our meals
Dried beans and rancid bacon
Vinegar instead of wine
Already rotten biscuit
And camphor every morning

It was believed by sailors if you put camphor in your drink it would curb amorous tendencies.

Activity:

In groups of three or four have the students answer the following question:

If you were the provisions officer and had to supply the ship for a four-month voyage out to sea, what types of food and drink would you take and why? This can be done using either modern or historical foodstuffs.

After answering the questions, bring the groups together and find common items they would take. Then compare the students' list with the real items taken on long voyages.