

The Last Voyage of Henry Hudson

User's Guide

Ages: 12-16

Running time: 27:51

Historical Context/Synopsis

This film provides a dramatic account of explorer Henry Hudson's final, ill-fated attempt to discover a northwest passage — a route for ships through the frozen Arctic Ocean. Before Hudson, mariners Martin Frobisher (1576) and John Davis (1585) had spotted open water beyond Baffin Island.

Henry Hudson made two attempts to find a polar route to Asia north of Europe, and also travelled to North America up what is now known as the Hudson river. In 1610, he set sail from London on his last voyage, aboard the ship *Discovery*.

Long before the ship entered the bay that now bears Hudson's name, the *Discovery* was rife with conflict. Mr. Juet, the mate, who had sailed with Hudson on other voyages, did not share his master's enthusiasm; he was convinced the whole enterprise was bound for catastrophe. Despite all objections, Hudson, convinced he was looking at the Pacific Ocean, was determined to enter and explore the huge expanse of water we now know as Hudson Bay.

Although the season was growing short, Hudson ignored good camp sites, where the crew could have spent the winter. Talk onboard turned to mutiny. When the *Discovery* was at last trapped in the ice, captain and crew were forced to settle in for a long and painful winter in James Bay.

Come spring, Hudson stubbornly prepared to continue the search. Mutiny was now inevitable. Only Hudson's son and six members of the crew remained loyal. They were cast adrift in a small boat, never to be seen again. The mutineers set sail for England, though only eight made it home alive.

In spite of the tragedy and failure of his last voyage, Hudson gave England access to an immense fur-trading region and laid the foundation for English settlement in Western Canada.

Research, Discussion and Writing Topics

- Using a large map, trace Hudson's route from the Atlantic to the point where he was cast adrift.
- Compare the route of Hudson's fourth voyage with those of his first three.
- Which North American bodies of water bear Hudson's name?
- Discuss the religious, intellectual, social and economic factors underlying the great explorations of the 16th and 17th centuries.
- Research what life was like aboard an early 17th century European sailing vessel and write a few entries in a sailor's logbook.
- Debate whether or not Hudson treated his men fairly. Was the mutiny justifiable? How could it have been avoided?
- Imagine what happened to Hudson and the other men in the small boat and write a story about what might have happened after they were cast adrift.

Questions

- Which scenes demonstrate the following aspects of Hudson's personality?
 - a) faith in his mission
 - b) quick temper
 - c) loyalty
 - d) ambition
 - e) generosity
 - f) authoritarianism
 - g) kind-heartedness
 - h) irritability
- Why was Hudson so determined to find a passage to Asia?
- Why did Hudson refuse to winter at Digges Island?
- What brought the mutiny to a head in spring?
- What happened to the *Discovery* and the mutineers?
- Why was Hudson's voyage important, despite its tragic end?