

## TOPIC 2.4

# Developments in Europe

Why is the “discovery” of the Americas seen as such a major event in history?

What discovery would you like to see that would change society?



**2.40 A perception of earth in the 1400s**

This illustration by modern artist Antar Dayal shows how some Europeans likely perceived the world across the ocean in the late 1400s. The idea of venturing out into the Atlantic terrified many European mariners of the time – some even believed they would sail over the edge of the world. They were a superstitious lot, who believed in sea monsters, giant whirlpools that swallowed ships, and strange lands prowled by man-eating demons.

## Introduction

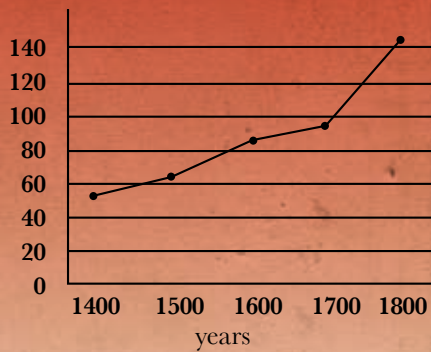
Across the Atlantic, meanwhile, developments were taking place in Europe that would have unexpected and far-reaching consequences for Newfoundland and Labrador. In the 1500s, Western Europe was changing: its population was increasing, it was becoming wealthy, and it was making advances in technologies that encouraged exploration. These factors led to the establishment of colonies throughout the world. The Newfoundland fishery was a consequence of this expansion.

## Changes in Europe

Since the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE, Western Europe had become a rather stagnated part of the world. Between 500 and 1200 there was little innovation – life continued practically unchanged from year to year. This characterizes what is sometimes referred to as a **traditional economy**, in which people use resources in the same way as previous generations. However, between 1200 and 1400 Europe began to change in subtle ways. In particular, universities were



**European Population**  
1400-1800 CE (data in millions)



2.41

established. This resulted in an increase of knowledge, and eventually created a society in which new ideas emerged and spread.

By the 1400s, Western Europe was “rethinking” ideas related to many aspects of life, including travel and navigation. New advances in navigation and map construction would help transform travel by sea. In particular, the application of astronomy and mathematics to navigation early in the 1500s allowed mariners to calculate their position when out of sight of land. Prior to this time, extended voyages were virtually impossible to undertake. Combined with improvements in shipbuilding, this development encouraged European adventurers to begin seeking sea routes to Asia.

**“The discovery of America was important intellectually for Europeans because the new lands and peoples challenged traditional ideas ... Africa and Asia, though distant and unfamiliar for most people, had always been known about. America was entirely unexpected ... ”**

— Peter Watson in *Ideas: A History from Fire to Freud*

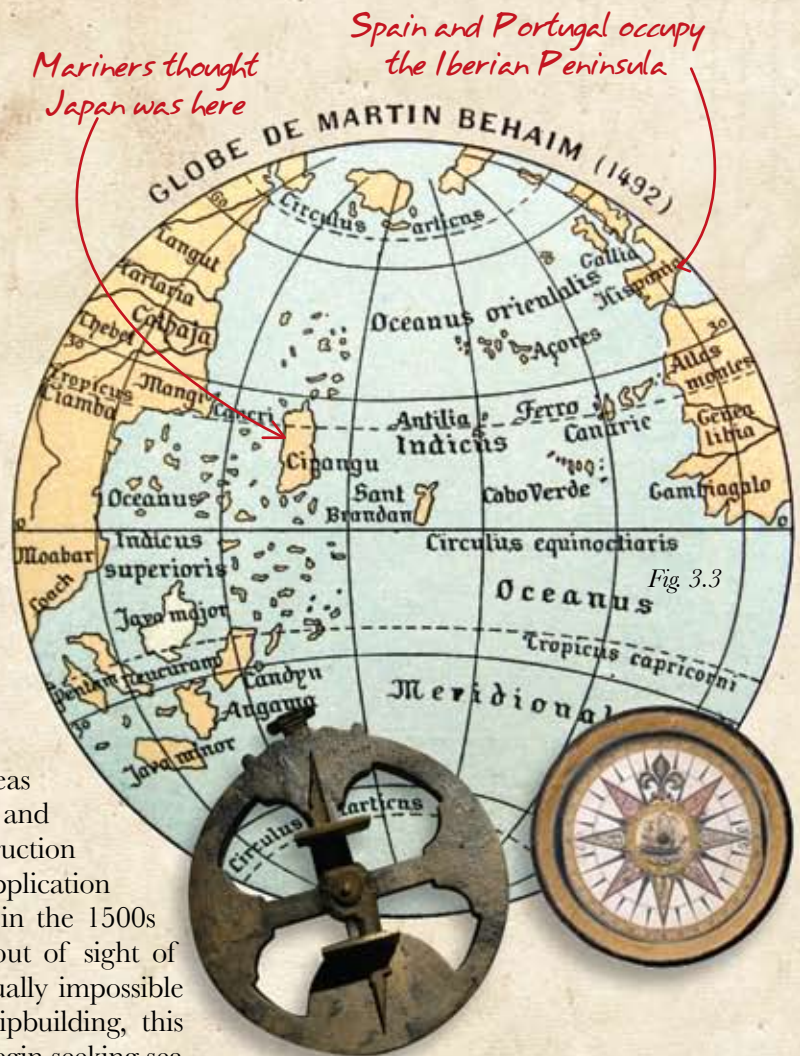


Fig. 3.3

#### 2.42 New Technology

(top) The globe as depicted by Martin Behaim in 1492. Behaim was a German navigator and geographer to the King of Portugal. Note how the globe shows only islands between Europe and Japan: the existence of North America was not even suspected.

(bottom left) Mariner's Astrolabe from Isle aux Morts shipwreck mid-1600s. This brass astrolabe was made in 1628, likely in Portugal by Joas Dyas.

(bottom right) The compass shown is from Italy and was made c. 1570.

## Experiencing The Arts

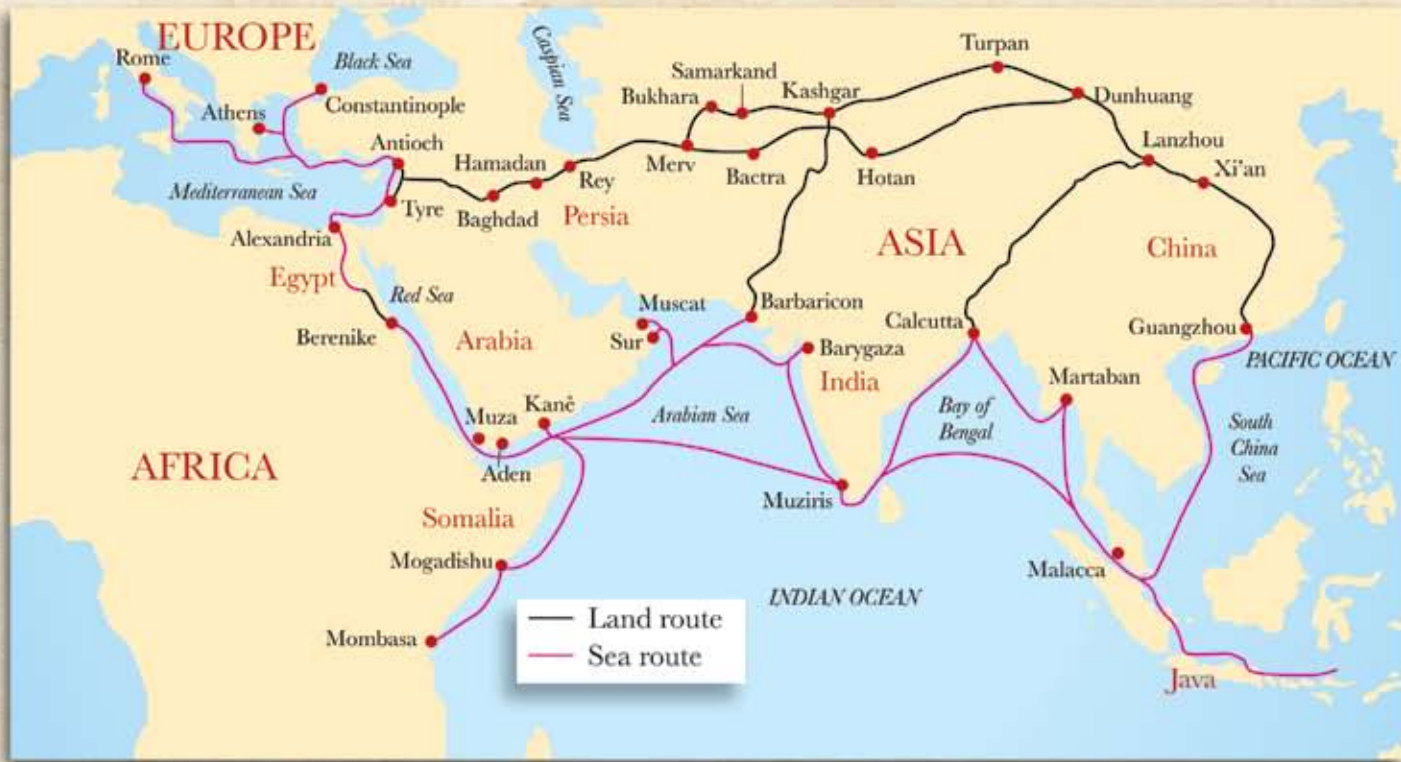
In the previous exercise, you created a list of questions about your personal past that you would like to have answered. Select one question (or several related questions) to explore.

In this exercise, you need to identify sources of information that you can use to help you construct your story. While oral history research will most likely be a primary means to gather the main information that you want, you should also consult other sources. (This includes talking to other people, looking at family photographs and memorabilia, and reading newspapers of the appropriate time period.)

Consulting other sources allows you to: (i) gain another perspective on the question you are researching, (ii) gain additional information, and (iii) verify the accuracy of details from other sources.

Keep your research information organized. Be sure to add jot notes for additional information. As you research, you may find new questions to answer. If this happens, you may be able to include these questions in your current research. If not, you may want to follow up on them after your main story has been completed.





### 2.43 Early trade routes

Medieval commerce stretched across many thousands of kilometres. This allowed the transport of goods such as silk, spices, and perfumes to Europe from Asia, and also facilitated the exchange of social, religious, and technological ideas. By the medieval period, sea routes began to reduce the importance of central Asian routes, but all were vulnerable to thieves, changeable weather, and the whims of rulers.

*Some spices, such as pepper, were used to help mask the foul odour of decaying food, making it easier to eat.*

For centuries, Western Europeans had traded with Asia to obtain resources such as silk and spices. During this time, an extensive network of trade routes developed between the two regions. One of the most-travelled routes became known as the Silk Road, which extended from the Far East through Central Asia to the Caspian, Black, and Mediterranean Seas. Ancient routes such as these allowed merchandise, music, art, and ideas to flow from Asia to Europe.

During the fifteenth century, however, the Ottoman Empire rose to power in Europe and the Middle East, which caused trade patterns to change. By 1453, Ottoman Turks had conquered the Byzantine Empire and seized its capital, Constantinople (present-day Istanbul). The Ottoman Empire expanded in the coming years and soon extended its power into southeast Europe, north Africa, and the Middle East. The middle ground of the Silk Road fell under Ottoman control, which made trade between Western Europe and the Far East much more dangerous and difficult than ever before.

In response, Western European powers such as Portugal and Spain sought out alternate routes that could maintain

their lucrative trade links with China and other Asian civilizations. Instead of travelling by land, Europe now focused on developing maritime routes. Advances in navigational, shipbuilding, and other technologies facilitated maritime exploration. In addition, Western Europe's population was expanding rapidly during this period, which created a growing demand for more food and other imports.

Various European powers now had the means and demand to establish an extensive maritime trade route with Asia. A competition soon emerged in Europe – with Spain and Portugal at the forefront – to find the fastest route to Asia. Portuguese fleets followed Africa's coast to India, while Spain sent Christoffa Corombo (Christopher Columbus) west\* across the Atlantic Ocean. Around the same time, Zuan Caboto (John Cabot) also attempted a transatlantic voyage, with funding from England's King Henry VII. Caboto's plan, however, was to cross the North Atlantic, which he hoped would bring him to Asia in less time than Corombo's more southerly route. Both men were looking for Cathay (China) when they "stumbled" upon the Americas.

*\*Remember, Europeans did not know at this time that the Americas lay between western Europe and eastern Asia.*



# The Value of Fish

When Caboto sailed into waters near Newfoundland and Labrador, he was amazed at the sea teeming with codfish. While King Henry VII was probably disappointed that Caboto did not have spices with him on his return, he recognized the fact that fish was valuable. As news of this “discovery” spread, other European nations began visiting Newfoundland and Labrador’s waters to exploit its resources. Early in the 1500s, Portuguese and French vessels began crossing the Atlantic annually to fish for the summer. Later, England and Spain joined in.

Fish in those days nearly always meant salt cod. The demand for saltfish was high for several reasons. Saltfish was an inexpensive source of protein. It had a long shelf life if thoroughly cured and, due to its light weight and small size, was easily transported. Also, saltfish could be stored for use through the winter when meat was scarce. These qualities made saltfish well-suited for crews on overseas voyages, armies on the march, and a growing urban population. In addition, saltfish was consumed by Catholics and some Protestants who maintained

Catholic traditions on Fridays and during obligatory fast-days in Lent. Consequently an abundant supply of fish was important to most European countries, and they encouraged the growth of new fisheries.

The transatlantic fishery further helped the European economy by creating jobs for workers directly and indirectly involved in the harvesting of fish. Alongside the thousands of people who worked as fishers, there were many more who either made salt, or manufactured nets, hooks, barrels, and other goods associated with the catching, processing, and packaging of fish. Other workers found employment with merchant firms selling cod to domestic and foreign markets. In addition to its economic benefits, the migratory cod fishery also became attractive to the French and English governments as a means of training and recruiting skilled seamen for their navies. These navies were needed to protect shipping and trade, and fight in the various European conflicts, which often extended beyond European boundaries.

## 2.44 Main centres of fishing and whaling, 16th century

Based on information from the *Historical Atlas of Canada – From the Beginning to 1800*, Vol. 1 by Cole R. Harris







**2.45 Defeat of the Spanish Armada, 8 August 1588**  
by Philippe-Jacques de Louthembourg, painted 1796,  
depicts the Battle of Gravelines

The Spanish fishery was much reduced by 1600, owing to wars with England and English attacks on the Spanish fleet. A Spanish Armada, attempting to invade England, was destroyed in 1588.

**2.46 A very fanciful French illustration of d'Haussonville's capture of St. John's, June 27, 1762**



- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| 1665   | Dutch attack St. John's                                  |
| 1673   | Dutch attack Placentia and Ferryland                     |
| 1692   | English fire on Placentia                                |
| 1693   | English fire on Placentia                                |
| 1694   | French attack Ferryland and St. John's                   |
| 1696-7 | French devastate English settlements on Avalon Peninsula |
| 1702-4 | French attack English settlements                        |
| 1702-4 | English attack French settlements                        |
| 1705   | French destroy St. John's                                |
| 1706   | English attack French settlements                        |
| 1708   | French take and burn St. John's                          |
| 1709   | English attack French fishing fleet                      |
| 1762   | French take St. John's, Carbonear Island, and Trinity    |
| 1762   | English retake St. John's                                |



## A New Pattern Emerges

This time of exploration and change was marked by conflict within and between countries in Europe. Strong monarchies arose in some countries, which battled with other countries for power and prestige. The effects of European wars were also felt in Newfoundland and Labrador, as its location and its fisheries were important and worth fighting about. These conflicts at home and away affected the Newfoundland fishery by changing the balance of power between the countries involved – mainly England, France, and Spain.

It was, in fact, religious turmoil in France that first brought England into the Newfoundland fishery in a large way. Repeated civil wars in France between Catholics and Protestants from 1562 to 1598 disrupted the French fishery and gave English merchants an opportunity to sell fish in France. Similarly, by 1600, wars between Spain and England reduced the Spanish fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador. However, the demand for fish in Spain remained high. Consequently, Spain also became a market for fish caught by the English in the waters of Newfoundland and Labrador. By the beginning of the 1600s, this left England and France as the two major participants in the Newfoundland fishery.

**The effects of European wars were also felt in Newfoundland and Labrador, as its location and its fisheries were important and worth fighting about.**

### Questions:

1. What innovations enabled Western Europeans to explore further in the late fifteenth century?
2. Why did European rulers fund voyages looking for new routes to Asia?
3. Why was the migratory fishery important to European countries? What was the most significant reason?
4. Although England and France knew of the discovery of the “New World” in the late 1490s, it would be over 100 years before either country took steps to encourage settlement. What might account for this?
5. Why did the peoples of the Americas not “discover” Europe?

## COLONIALISM

Colonialism is the domination of one group of people by another, and is an ancient phenomenon, going back to at least 500 BCE in Greece. Spain and Portugal were the dominant colonizers of North and South America during the fifteenth century. However, the nature of colonialism changed dramatically during the sixteenth century, as technological advancements in navigation and shipbuilding allowed European powers to travel further than ever before. New and powerful ships could transport large numbers of people to far-off ports and maintain ties between colonies and the mother land. Instead of expanding into relatively nearby areas, European powers could send their colonists and armies overseas to places like the Americas.

England, France, and Holland had established overseas empires by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rivalry among the various European powers sparked a series of wars during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ultimately leaving Britain as the principal colonial power in North America by the end of the Seven Years’ War in 1763.

In British colonialism, the main sponsors were usually merchants. As a result, the early British Empire developed as a trade network and involved the exploitation of resources with minimum government support for establishing colonies. While settlement struggled, however, overseas trade flourished and, by the end of the seventeenth century, the colonies became essential to Britain’s economic well-being.

By then, Britain’s colonial practices involved domination over foreign peoples and territories, the introduction of settlement in those territories, and the monopolization of trade with those territories. A network of communication was established that linked various parts of the British Empire with London as well as with each other. British settlements in North America were linked to their home ports through vast trade and communication networks. Colonizers – who included both settlers and traders – became conscious of their membership within a British Atlantic World.



# CASE STUDY

## Basque Whaling

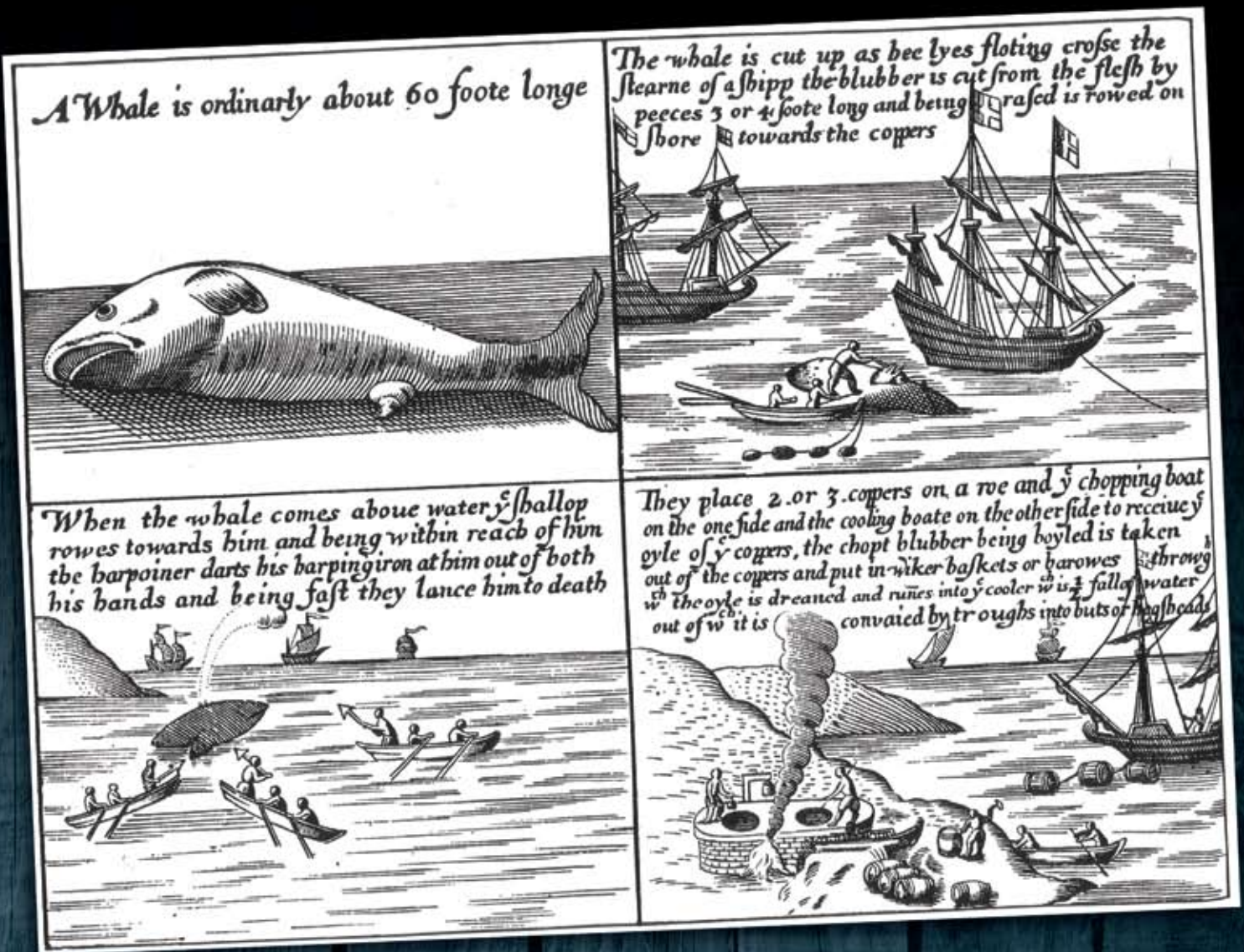
Although most European fishing fleets harvested cod from Newfoundland and Labrador waters, this was not always the case.

MIGRATORY BASQUE WHALERS FROM FRANCE AND SPAIN, WHO HAD previously hunted whales in their home waters, conducted a whaling industry at Labrador in the 1500s and early 1600s. They had heard of the large numbers of whales off Labrador from the French and Spanish fishing in Newfoundland's and Labrador's waters.

2.47 Rendering fat from blubber.

2.48 Model of a Basque whaler at Red Bay.





#### 2.49 Illustration of 17th Century whaling methods

From John Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some now first printed from Original Manuscripts. Others Translated out of Foreign Languages, and now First Published in English. To Which are added some few that have formerly appeared in English, but do now for their Excellency and Scarceness deserve to be Reprinted. Volume IV* (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1704)

The **Basques** began whaling at southern Labrador in the 1530s and took bowhead whales and right whales as they migrated through the Strait of Belle Isle. They used at least a dozen whaling sites on the Labrador coast, the best known of which is at Red Bay, the scene of extensive archaeological work. At its peak, in the mid-1500s, the whaling employed about 600 men and 15 ships per year.

The ships, as in the cod fishery, were used for transport. The whales were harpooned from small boats and then towed ashore. The blubber was cut from the whales and heated in large cauldrons which transformed it into oil. The oil was shipped back to Europe in

barrels and was used for lighting, lubrication, and in manufacturing. The whales' **baleen**, also known as whalebone, had a variety of industrial uses.

It is unclear why Basque whaling ended. Foreign competition, pirates, conflict with Inuit, and troubles in Spain have been suggested as partial causes. A decline in the numbers of whales due to over-hunting was most likely a major factor. In any event, the Basque whaling industry was almost over by the early 1580s – by which time the ships were coming home only half full. However, a few ships continued to come to North America up to the 1630s to hunt whales.

## Questions:

1. How would you support the statement that Red Bay was the first oil refinery in the province?
2. Today the right whale (including the bowhead) is

an endangered species. How did Red Bay contribute to this classification? What can be done to ensure survival of this species?