

A note from our Chairman of Judges — Nury Vittachi

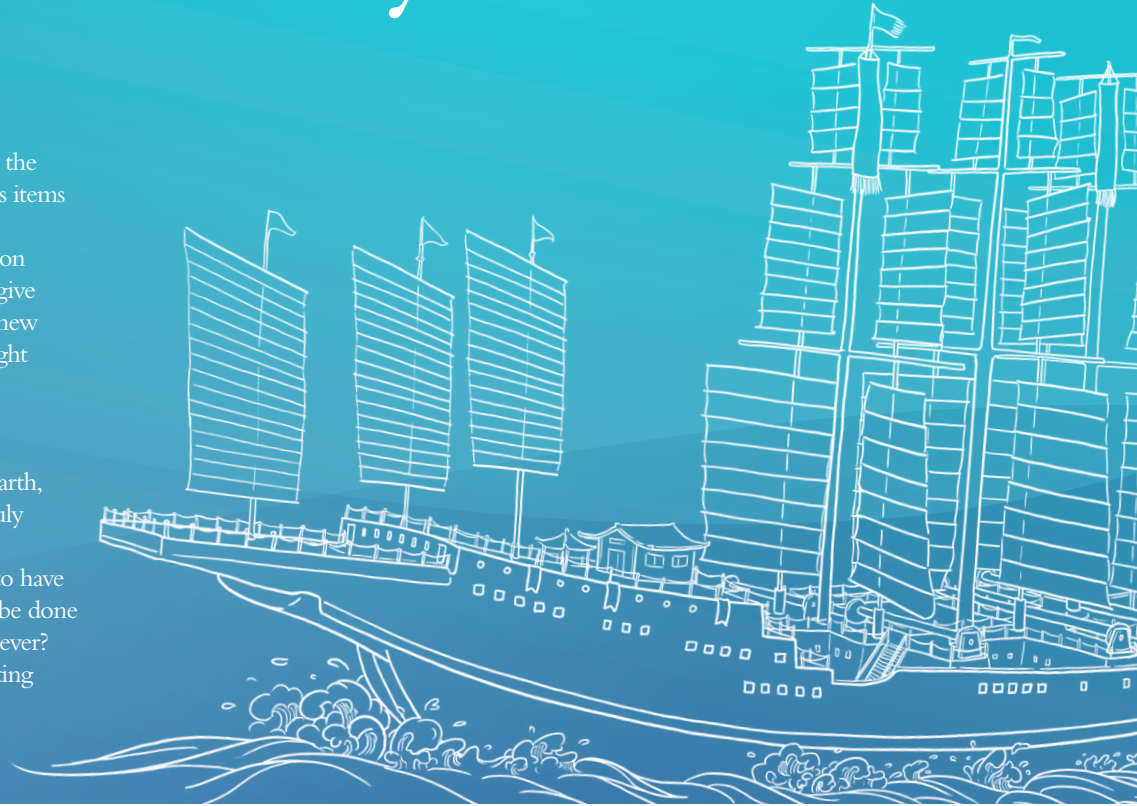
Pirates usually travel the seas looking for gold to steal. But in the early 1400s, a fleet of ships set sail from China which did the exact opposite! It carried cargoes of gold and silk and other precious items for the captain and the sailors to give away as gifts.

There were seven voyages by the Ming Treasure Fleet—and the people on board had many adventures. Sometimes they met peaceful people and did give away the wonderful presents they had brought from the Emperor, making new relationships with a variety of countries. On other occasions, they had to fight battles with hostile armies, or deal with nasty pirates of the more usual sort. Luckily, the ships also carried military forces and weapons.

But this group of travellers also did something wonderful: they won for themselves a place in history as some of the first great explorers of planet Earth, reaching India and Africa and Arabia. Historians looking back say China truly “ruled the seas” in those days.

What sort of adventures do you think they had? What would it be like to have been a young person on such a journey? What sort of jobs would have to be done on the ships, and what sights would you see that you would remember for ever?

We hope this rich topic will get the imaginations of young writers’ floating into whole new waters!



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