



Pedro's Journal by Pam Conrad

The tale of Pedro de Salcedo, a ship's boy aboard the Santa Maria, who accompanies Christopher Columbus on the journey to find the new world is told in this book. Pedro's story is told in journal entries about the trip across the Atlantic and the exploration of the Indies. Pedro sees Columbus as egotistical and hot-tempered. He describes the native people as peaceful and unfairly terrorized by the Spanish. This book is appealing for reluctant readers because the characters, historical details, and plot are written in simple language.

Before Reading:

Explain to students that **Pedro's Journal** is a story of Christopher Columbus's first voyage, told through the fictional journal of Pedro, a ship's boy. Tell them that journals are an important source of information about the voyages of explorers like Columbus.

Ask students to imagine how they would feel if they were the only young crew members of a space journey to Mars, where no one has ever gone. The captain and other experts would know the route and plans, but the young crew members would just have to trust the leaders to get them there. They would have to learn their tasks, and at first everything about life aboard a spaceship would seem strange. Encourage students to talk about how they might feel on the day of liftoff. How might their feelings change as the days went by? Suggest that they try to identify with Pedro's feelings as he says goodbye to the world he knows, and his ship sets out into the unknown.

Explain that because this is Pedro's journal, each entry is identified by a date. Tell students that Pedro's sketches give information that helps to understand his journal entries. For example, the banners on page 1 represent the identifying flags flown by each ship, the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María.

During Reading:

Ask students to listen as you read pages 1–12 aloud. When you have finished reading, ask the children to identify Pedro's feelings about the voyage. Discuss how his responses compare with their own feelings about a space voyage.

Make a big chart on a bulletin board with the following categories:

- Observations
- Questions
- Fact
- Fiction

While reading, ask students to jot down interesting observations from the story onto sticky notes. Place the sticky notes under the observation category. Ask students to

formulate a question for each observation they make and then do research to determine whether the observation is fact or fiction and why.

Literary Concepts:

Discuss setting: Display a globe or a map of the world. Locate Spain and place colored pins or stickers near Palos, in the Canary Islands, and in India. Stretch a piece of string or yarn from the Canary Islands to the West Indies.

Explain to students that a famous traveler, Marco Polo, had traveled overland from Italy to India and China in the 1200s, and had brought back gold, silk fabrics, and spices the Europeans had never seen before. Marco Polo told of lands to the east that had great riches—the Indies, China, and Japan. Show students on the map or globe how Italian merchants could travel east, by sea and then by land, to India and China. Tell them that merchants did travel Marco's route, traded with the eastern lands, and made huge fortunes; but overland travel was long, costly, and dangerous. Then explain that people believed they could acquire these riches more quickly and in greater abundance if they could find a sea route to the Indies. Some brave navigators tried to go around Africa. (Use map or globe to illustrate.) But Columbus had a different idea.

Point out that most educated people of Columbus's time had begun to believe that the earth was a sphere. So Columbus believed he could get to the Indies by sailing west. Ask students whether Columbus had a realistic idea or not. (In theory, it was possible. What Columbus did not know was that there were whole continents, North and South America, between Spain and the Indies.) Explain that the sailors were fearful because they could not understand the concept of sailing west to get to the Indies, or eastern lands. Some believed that there were monsters and other dangers in the unknown seas, or even that the earth was flat and they might sail right off the edge.

Ask students to predict what might happen if and when the ships eventually do reach land. How do they think Columbus, who expects to find the wealth of the Indies, will react to what he does find? And how will his sailors feel?

Points to Ponder:

- What qualities does Pedro have that will help him on this voyage?
- What are the crew's feelings about the voyage? How do you know?
- Describe life on shipboard, including the sounds and physical feelings.
- Although she is not present, Pedro's mother is an important figure in his life. He has already spoken of her more than once. What part do you think she has in this story?

Exploring Genre:

This book is a good example of the genre Historical Fiction. Set in the period of 1492-1493 during the actual voyage of Columbus to the New World, it weaves a fictional story around historical fact and research. The author's note at the end of the book acts as a disclaimer for absolute accuracy, as her purpose was to create fiction, but the book can serve as an excellent vehicle for exploring facts from the time period.

A Sea of Words

This book contains many nautical terms. Be a word detective and make a list of the nautical words used to describe and name ship parts and crew. Try to determine what the word means from the context of the story. If you don't know what the word means, check it out in a dictionary. Use your list of words to create a word search or crossword puzzle. Here are a few to start with: captain, dock, fleet, ship's boy, dinghy.

The Pedro Times:

Imagine that you are Pedro de Salcedo just returned from your seven month voyage. Write an article for the local newspaper, giving a first hand account of some of your adventures. Include a drawing or two of the strange things you saw on the voyage to the New World.

A Different Point of View:

Imagine that you are one of the native people that Columbus meets on the islands. Write an account of how the native person would view Columbus and his men and ships. Use information from the book to support the native point of view.

21st Century Explorers:

What are the new worlds left to be explored today? Columbus sailed, at great risk, into the unknown to find fame and fortune. If Columbus lived today, what might he be doing? Ask your students, if given the chance to be "Ship's Boy" on an exploration into space, would they go? Why or why not?

Models:

Build a model of one of Columbus's sailing ships or make a drawing of one. Do some research to find out the actual size and dimensions of the ship.

Reading Extensions:

Read Jane Yolen's *Encounter*, a fictionalized account of Columbus's meeting with the Taino people, written from the perspective of a Taino child. Or your students may read *Morning Girl* by Michael Dorris, which deals with the Taino people immediately before Columbus lands on their island. Used together, *Pedro's Journal*, *Morning Girl*, and *Encounter* may raise questions about the treatment of indigenous people and how their lives were changed following their "discovery." Explore some of the questions and issues of exploration and exploitation. Do the authors of these books have different points of view?

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