

# Pedro's Journal

## Before Reading

*Pedro's Journal* is a story of Christopher Columbus's first voyage, told through the fictional journal of Pedro, a ship's boy. Journals are an important source of information about the voyages of explorers like Columbus.

Imagine how you would feel if you were the only young crew member 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. Think about how you might feel on the day of liftoff. How might feelings change as the days went by? Try to identify with Pedro's feelings as he says goodbye to the world he knows, and his ship sets out into the unknown.

In Pedro's journal, each entry is identified by a date. 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*.

## Literary Concepts

**Setting:** Look at a globe or a map of the world. Locate Spain and mark near Palos, in the Canary Islands, and in India. Draw a line from the Canary Islands to the West Indies.

The 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. Look on the map or globe to find the way Italian merchants could travel east, by sea and then by land, to India and China. Merchants did travel Marco's route, traded with the eastern lands, and made huge fortunes; but overland travel was long, costly, and dangerous. 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. But Columbus had a different idea.

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. Do you think Columbus had a realistic idea or not, why?

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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.

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? How will his sailors feel?

## Points to Ponder

1. What qualities does Pedro have that will help him on this voyage?

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What are the crew's feelings about the voyage? How do you know?

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Describe life on shipboard, including the sounds and physical feelings.

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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?

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## Enrichment Activities - Choose and complete any one (1)

**Exploring Genre- Fact or Fiction** 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. Make a chart with four columns, like shown below. As you read, jot down interesting observations from the story under the observation category. Then formulate a question for each observation and do research to determine whether the observation is fact or fiction and why.

Observation	Question	Fact	Fiction
Columbus is mean to people on the ship.	Was Columbus an egotistical, unpleasant person?	In fact, Columbus was a very egotistical and ill tempered person.	
Pedro is a ship's boy on the Santa Maria	Was there really a ship's boy named Pedro who acted as Columbus' confidant?		It is unlikely Columbus would have confided in someone with such a low status on the ship.

**A Sea of Words** This book is loaded with 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 for your classmates. Here are a few to get you started: 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? If given the chance to be "Ship's Boy" on an exploration into space, would you 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. Include details with yours.