

Textbook Detectives

ACTIVITY ONE: ANALYZING AND CRITIQUING ACCOUNTS OF THE COLUMBUS STORY

See articles in RTC (pp 19-21; 38-40; 47-55; 62-8)

This can be used as an extension of the above activity. The abovementioned articles all offer references, ideas, and/or resources helpful for this activity. The following is adapted from Bob Peterson's activity in RTC (p. 39). In order to do this activity, students must have some familiarity with the Columbus-Taíno encounter from previous readings and/or activities.

Preparation

Before beginning this activity, the teacher must find an assortment of books about Columbus at the appropriate reading levels for the class—the school library or public library are good places to find these. Picture books are great resources for all age groups for this activity.

Process

1. First, the class must decide what the criteria will be for evaluating the books. There are a variety of ways to do this: a whole class brainstorm, small group brainstorm, providing a list that you have compiled, or using the list below. The following checklist was taken from Peterson's article (RTC p. 38). This has also been included as a Resource Sheet that can be copied and distributed to your entire class. In his article Peterson suggests having students brainstorm ideas for the criteria with which to analyze the books. The checklist below can be used as a guide to help students create their own checklist.
2. With the checklist completed students can work in pairs to evaluate one of the books on Columbus that the teacher has provided. Depending upon your class, you may need to use one shorter book to model the activity, completing it as a whole group. Then, students can work in pairs to complete the activity on their own with a different book.
3. Student pairs present their findings to the class.
4. Peterson suggests (RTC, p. 39) that you then brainstorm things that can be done with what the students have found during the activity. He suggests having students write letters to authors or librarians, sharing their findings with them, and then asking them why the books don't always tell the whole story.

ACTIVITY TWO: TEXTBOOK DETECTIVE SHEET

Use the following questions to analyze the book you have been given about Columbus. Read through each question so you know what to look for as you read through the book. Then read your book. Once you have read your book once, go back through and re-read it to answer the questions below. You will present what you find to the class.

- 1. How many times did Columbus talk?**
- 2. How many times did we get to know what he was thinking?**
- 3. How many times did the native people have names?**
- 4. How many times did the native people talk?**
- 5. How many times did we get to know what the native people were thinking?**
- 6. What do you learn about Columbus' life?**
- 7. What do you learn about native people's lives?**
- 8. Does the book describe the native people's feelings?**
- 9. Does the book describe how Columbus treated the native people?**