

Accurate Account of the Columbus/Taíno Encounter

This activity is based upon Bob Peterson’s discussion in his article “Columbus and Native Issues in the Elementary Classroom” from RTC (p. 38-9). The appropriateness of the questions and the content of this activity very much depend upon the grade level and maturity level of the particular class.

ACTIVITY ONE: ACCURATE ACCOUNT DISCUSSION

There are a couple of ways to approach this activity. You could begin by asking questions listed below, then read various accounts of the Columbus explorations with the students that expand upon these ideas, or don’t mention them at all—using the different accounts as the starting point for discussion.

The second way to do this activity is to first offer various accounts of the Columbus explorations—reading them aloud, providing copies for students to read on their own, or dividing the class into groups and giving each group a different account of Columbus. You may have already introduced them to *Encounter* or *Morning Girl* if not you could use those here. You could also use students’ textbooks, history books from the library, encyclopedias (print or online), or any grade level appropriate book on Columbus from the library. It could even be an assignment to check out a book on Columbus from the school or public library. Another useful source (copies provided here as part of the Supplementary Documents listed at the end of this guide) is the book *A History of US: The First Americans, Volume 1*, chapters 15-18 or pages 64-79. It’s not necessarily a critical account, but it mentions a great deal of information that isn’t often used in other texts. It can be used as read aloud, or copied for each student and used for guided reading or small group reading.

Some possible questions taken from Peterson’s article are as follows. Again, keep in mind what’s appropriate for your grade level.

1. Do you know that few native children who witnessed Columbus’ arrival in the Americas ever grew to adulthood?
2. Do you know that Columbus and the Spaniards purposefully used attack dogs against native peoples? They also used other tactics like cutting off hands and burning native people alive.
3. Did you know that Columbus initiated the trans-Atlantic slave trade when he sent hundreds of native people back to Spain on his second voyage, to be sold as slaves?