

Pedro's Journal

A voyage with Christopher Columbus

How would it have felt to have been aboard the Santa Maria when Christopher Columbus set sail to find the New World? In this excerpt from Pedro's Journal, a boy keeps a written account of his adventures on the long voyage.

October 10 This has been the worst day of all for the Captain. I am certain of this. We have doubled all previous records of days and leagues at sea, and we've gone way past the point where he originally said we would find land. There is nothing out here. Surely we are lost. And everyone is certain now as well. This morning the men responded slowly to orders, scowling and slamming down their tools and lines. They whispered in pairs and small groups on deck and below. The air was thick with mutiny and betrayal, until finally everything came to a dead stop. The wind howled through the shrouds, and the men just stood there on deck and did not move aside when Columbus came.

"Enough," one of the men said to his face. II "This is enough. Now we turn back." The other men grumbled their assent and nodded, their fists clenched, their chests broad. And they remained motionless and unmoved while Columbus paced the deck, telling them how close he figured we must be, that land could be right over the next horizon. He told them again of the fame and fortune that would be theirs if they could only last a little

longer. And they laughed at him, the cruel laughter of impatient and defeated men. I "All that aside," he added, "with the fresh I easterly wind coming at us and the rising sea, we can't turn a course back to Spain right now. We would stand still in the water." I looked up at the sails, full and straining, taking us farther and farther from Spain. What if a westerly wind never came? What if we were just blown away forever and ever? "Let me offer you this," Columbus finally said. "Do me this favor. Stay with me this day and night, and if I don't bring you to land before day, cut off my head, and you shall return. " The men glanced at each other. Some nodded. "One day,» they said. "One day, and then we turn around.» "That is all I ask,» Columbus said. Later, when I _went down to the cabin with the log, the Captain's door was bolted shut, and when I knocked he didn't answer, so I sat outside the door with the heavy journal in my lap and waited.

October 11 Through the day, the day that was to have been our last day traveling westward, many things were seen floating in the water, t:hing5 that stirred everyone's hopes and had the men once again scanning the horizon. We saw birds -in flocks, reeds and plants floating in the water, and a small floating board, and even a stick was recovered that had iron workings on it, obviously man-made. Suddenly no one wished to turn around. There was no further word on it. At sunset, I led the prayers and the men sang the Salve Regina. Then the Captain spoke to the seamen from the sterncastle, doubling the night watch and urging everyone to keep a sharp lookout. No one asked about turning back. Then the Captain added a

new bonus to his reward of ten thousand maravedis. He added a silk doublet, and some of the men joked with each other. Next the Captain nod. I ded to me, and I sang for the changing of the watch, but my words were lost in the wind that was growing brisker and in the seas that were growing heavier and sounding like breakers all about us. The men dispersed to their watches and their bunks, and the Captain paced the deck. I don't know why, but this night I stayed with him. I stayed still by the gunwale, watching over the side. Once in a while he would stand beside me, silent, looking westward, always westward. Then, an hour before moonrise, the Captain froze beside me. "Gutierrez!" he called to one of the king's men on board, who came running. He pointed out across the water. "What do you see?"

Gutierrez peered into the west. "I don't see anything," he said. "What? What? What do you see?" "Can't you see it?" the Captain whispered. "The light? Like a little wax candle rising and falling?" The man at his side was quiet. I was there beside him, too, straining my own eyes to the dark horizon: Suddenly another seaman called out across the darkness, "Land! Land!" "He's already seen it!" I shouted. "My master's already seen it!" And the Captain laughed and tousled my hair. "Tierra! Tierra!" It was heard all across the water from all three ships. II I am below now in the Captain's cabin writing, while in the light of the rising moon, with our sails silver in the moonlight, we three exploring ships are rolling and plunging through the swells towards land. Tomorrow our feet will touch soil, and I can assure my dear mother in

the hills of Spain that no one will get much sleep on
board the Santa Maria tonight!