

Christopher Columbus: Excerpts from his 1492 Journal

Source: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/columbus1.html>

Instructions: Christopher Columbus dictated a journal of his 1492 voyage of discovery to a sailor in his crew. As you read these excerpts from the journal, list important events described in each section.

A. The Voyage	B. First Contact
1. Friday, 3 August. Set sail . . . at 8 o'clock, and proceeded with a strong breeze till sunset, sixty miles or fifteen leagues south, afterwards southwest and south by west, which is the direction of the Canaries.	1. As I saw that they were very friendly to us, and perceived that they could be much more easily converted to our holy faith by gentle means than by force, I presented them with some red caps, and strings of beads to wear upon the neck, and many other trifles of small value. . . Afterwards they came swimming to the boats, bringing parrots, balls of cotton thread, javelins, and many other things which they exchanged for articles we gave them, such as glass beads, and hawk's bells.
2. Monday, 17 September. At dawn they saw many more weeds, apparently river weeds, and among them a live crab, which the Admiral kept, and says that these are sure signs of land.	2. They seemed on the whole to me, to be a very poor people. They all go completely naked, even the women, though I saw but one girl. All whom I saw were young, not above thirty years of age, well made, with fine shapes and faces. . . Some paint the face, and some the whole body; others only the eyes, and others the nose.
3. Thursday, 11 October. The crew of the Pinta saw a cane and a log; they also picked up a stick which appeared to have been carved with an iron tool, a piece of cane, a plant which grows on land, and a board. The crew of the Nina saw other signs of land . . . and they all grew cheerful. . . .	3. Weapons they have none, nor are acquainted with them, for I showed them swords which they grasped by the blades, and cut themselves through ignorance. . . I am of opinion that they would very readily become Christians, as they appear to have no religion. . . I intend . . . to carry home six of them to your Highnesses, that they may learn our language.
4. The land was first seen by a sailor called Rodrigo de Triana, although the Admiral at ten o'clock that evening standing on the quarter-deck saw a light, but so small a body that he could not affirm it to be land. . . . At two o'clock in the morning the land was discovered; they took in sail and remained . . . lying to till day, which was Friday, when they found themselves near a small island. . . called in the Indian language Guanahani.	4. Saturday, 13 October. I . . . strove to learn if they had any gold. Seeing some of them with little bits of this metal hanging at their noses, I gathered from them by signs that by going southward or steering round the island in that direction, there would be found a king who possessed large vessels of gold.
5. Thursday, 11 October. The Admiral landed in the boat, which was armed, along with Martin Alonzo Pinzon, and Vincent Yanez, captain of the Nina. The Admiral bore the royal standard, and the two captains each a banner of the Green Cross; this contained the initials of the names of the King and Queen each side of the cross, and a crown over each letter. . . . The Admiral called upon the two Captains, and the rest of the crew who landed . . . to bear witness that he . . . took possession of that island for the King and Queen.	5. Monday, 15 October. We anchored near the cape . . . to enquire for gold, for the natives we had taken from San Salvador told me that the people here wore golden bracelets upon their arms and legs. I believed . . . that they had invented this story . . . to find means to escape from us, still I determined to pass none of these islands without taking possession, because being once taken, it would answer for all times.

Assignment: Imagine that you were a sailor on this voyage. Use your list of events to write a letter to your family describing your experiences.