**INTERPRETING COLUMBUS THROUGH PRIMARY SOURCES AND DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES**

*Thursday, October 11, 1492*

Adapted Excerpt

Very early one morning, Columbus’ ship stopped near an island. Some people, called the Arawak or Taíno, came out to see it. Columbus and some of his men got in a small boat and claimed the land for the King and Queen of Spain. They saw many green trees, water and different kinds of fruit. Soon, many people came out to see them.

*Two hours after midnight land appeared, some two leagues [3 nautical miles] away. They took in all sail…and lay…waiting for day. ..This was Friday, on which they reached a small island…called in the Indian language Guanahani. [Thought to be Watling Island in Bahamas]*

*Immediately some naked people [Now known as Taíno or Arawak peoples] appeared and the Admiral [Columbus] went ashore on the armed boat, as did Martin Alonso Pinzon and Vicente Yanez his brother, captain of the Nina.*

*The Admiral raised the royal standard and the captains carried two banners with the green cross which were flown by the admiral on all his ships…On landing they saw very green trees and much water and fruit of various kinds. The Admiral called the two captains and the others who had landed…and demanded that they should bear faithful witness that he had taken possession of the island…for his sovereigns and masters the King and Queen...Soon many people of the island came up to them.*

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to “take possession” of the land for the King and Queen?

2. Why did Columbus do this? What do you think about what he did?

3. What words did the author use to describe the land? Does it sound like a good place to live?

*In order to win their friendship…I gave them some red caps and glass beads which they hung round their necks, also many other trifles. These things pleased them greatly and they became marvelously friendly to us. They afterwards swam out to the ship’s boats in which we were sitting, bringing us parrots and balls of cotton thread and spears and many other things, which they exchanged with us for such objects as glass beads, hawks and bells. In fact, they very willingly traded everything they had. But they seemed to me a people very short of everything. They all go naked as their mothers bore them, including the women, although I saw only one very young girl*

Adapted Excerpt

To make friends, I gave them beads to hang around their necks, which they liked. Later, they swam out to our boats and brought us parrots, balls of cotton thread, spears and other things. They traded them for glass beads and brass bells. They traded everything they had. But I think they need many things. They have no clothes

Discussion Questions:

1. Did the Taíno people own many things?

2. Do you think they needed a lot of things to live on the island?

3. Did Columbus think they were poor because they didn’t have clothes? Do you think so?

4. Did they have the same kind of things that Columbus’ people had?

5. What does it mean to “trade”? What were some of the items they exchanged?

Excerpt from Morning Girl by Michael Dorris

I looked at the place where I was, to remember it. The island was all green and brown, the flowers red and yellow, the sky a deep and brilliant blue…Dawn made a glare on the ocean, so I splashed through the shallow surf and dived without looking. I felt the hair lift from around my head, felt a school of tiny fish glide against my leg as I swam underwater. Then, far in the distance, I heard an unfamiliar and frightening sound. It was like the panting of some giant animal, a steady, slow rhythm, dangerous and hungry. And it was coming closer.

I forgot I was still beneath the surface until I needed air. But when I broke into the sunlight, the water sparkling all around me, the noise turned out to be nothing! Only a canoe! The breathing was the dip of many paddles! It was only people coming to visit, and since I could see they hadn’t painted themselves to appear fierce, they must be friendly or lost.

I swam closer to get a better look and had to stop myself from laughing. The strangers had wrapped every part of their bodies with colorful leaves and cotton. Some had decorated their faces with fur and wore shiny rocks on their heads. Compared to us, they were very round. Their canoe was short and square, and in spite of all their dipping and pulling, it moved so slowly. What a backward, distant island they must have come from. But really, to laugh at guests, no matter how odd, would be impolite, especially since I was the first to meet them. If I was foolish, they would think they had arrived at a foolish place...I kicked toward the canoe and called out the simplest thing.

“Hello!”

One of the people heard me, and he was so startled that he stood up, made his eyes small, as fearful as I had been a moment earlier. Then he spotted me, and I waved like I’d seen adults do when visitors arrive, my fingers spread to show that my hand was empty.

The man stared at me as though he’d never seen a girl before, then shouted something to his relatives. They all stopped paddling and looked in my direction.

“Hello,” I tried again. “Welcome to home. My name is Morning Girl. My mother is She Wins the Race. My father is Speaks to Birds. My brother is Star Boy. We will feed you and introduce you to everyone.”

All the fat people in the canoe began pointing at me and talking at once. In their excitement they almost turned themselves over, and I allowed my body to sink below the waves for a moment in order to hide my smile. One must always treat guests with respect…even when they are as brainless as gulls.

When I came up they were still watching, the way babies do: wide eyed and with their mouths uncovered. They had much to learn about how to behave. (3. How do you behave when you see someone that looks different from you?)

“Bring your canoe to the beach,” I shouted, saying each word slowly so that they might understand and calm themselves. “I will go to the village and bring back Mother and Father for you to talk to.”

Finally one of them spoke to me, but I couldn’t understand anything he said. Maybe he was talking in Carib or some other impossible language. But I was sure that we would find ways to get along together. It never took that much time, and acting out your thoughts with your hands could be funny. You had to guess at everything and you made mistakes, but by midday I was certain we would all be seated in a circle, eating steamed fish and giving each other presents. It would be a special day, a memorable day, a day full and new.

I was close enough to shore now for my feet to touch bottom, and quickly I made my way to dry land. The air was warm against my shoulders, and there was a slight breeze that disturbed the palm fronds on the ground. I squeezed my hair, ran my hands over my arms and legs to push off the water, and then stamped on the sand.

“Leave your canoe right here,” I suggested in my most pleasant voice. “It will not wash away because the tide is going out. I’ll be back soon with the right people.”

The strangers were drifting in the surf, arguing among themselves, not even paying attention to me any longer. They seemed very worried, very confused, very unsure what to do next. It was clear they hadn’t traveled much before.

I hurried up the path to our house…as I dodged through the trees, I hoped I hadn’t done anything to make the visitors leave before I got back, before we learned their names. If they were gone, Star Boy would claim that they were just a story, just like my last dream before daylight. But I didn’t think that was true. I knew they were real.