The moon was well overhead, and our great fire had burned low. A loud clap of thunder woke me from my dream. All dreams are not true dreams, my mother says. But in my dream that night, three great winged birds with voices like thunder rode wild waves in our bay. They were not like any birds I have ever seen, for sharp, white teeth filled their mouths.

I left my hammock and walked to the beach. There were my dream birds again. Only now they were real—three great-sailed canoes floating in the bay. I stared at them all through the night. When the sun rose, each great canoe gave birth to many little ones that swam awkwardly to shore. I ran then and found our chief still sleeping in his hammock. “Do not welcome them,” I begged him. “My dream is a warning.” But it is our custom to welcome strangers, to give them the tobacco leaf, to feast them with pepper pot, and to trade gifts. “You are but a child,” our chief said to me. “All children have, bad dreams.”

The baby canoes spat out many strange creatures, men but not men. We did not know them as human beings, for they hid their bodies in colors, like parrots. Their feet were hidden, also.

And many of them had hair growing like bushes on their chins. Three of them knelt before their chief and pushed sticks into the sand. Then I was even more afraid.

Our young man left the shelter of the trees. I—who was not yet a man—followed, crying, “Do not welcome them. Do not call them friends.” No one listened to me, for I was but a child. Our chief said, “We must see if they are true men.” So I took one by the hand and pinched it. The hand felt like flesh and blood, but the skin was moon to my sun. The stranger made a funny noise with his mouth, not like talking but like the barking of a yellow dog.

Our chief said to us, “See how pale they are. No one can be that color who comes from the earth. Surely they come from the sky.” Then he leaped before them and put his hands up, pointing to the sky, to show he understood how far they had flown. “Perhaps they have tails,” said my older brother. “Perhaps they have no feet.” Our young men smiled, but behind their hands so the guests would not feel bad. Then they turned around to show they had no tails.

Our chief gave the strangers balls of cotton thread to bind them to us in friendship. He gave them spears that they might fish and not starve. He gave them parrots, too—which made our young men laugh behind their hands all over again, knowing it was our chief’s little joke, that the strangers looked like parrots. But the strangers behaved almost like human beings, for they laughed, too, and gave in return tiny smooth balls, the color of sand and sea and sun, strung upon a thread. And they gave hollow shells with touches that sang Chunga-chunga. And they gave woven things that fit upon a man’s head and could cover a boy’s ears.

For a while I forgot my dream. For a while I was not afraid.

So we built a great feasting fire and readied the pepper pit and yams and cassava bread and fresh fish. For though the strangers were not quite human beings, we would still treat them as such. Our chief rolled tobacco leaves and showed them how to smoke, but they coughed and snorted and clearly did not know about these simple things.
Then I leaned forward and stared into their chiefs’ eyes. They were blue and gray like the shifting sea. Suddenly, I remembered my dream and stared at each of the strangers in turn. Even those with dark human eyes looked away, like dogs before they are driven from the fire. So I drew back from the feast, which is not what one should do, and I watched how the sky strangers touched our golden nose rings and our golden armbands but not the flesh of our faces or arms. I watched their chief smile. It was the serpent’s smile—no lips and all teeth. I jumped up, crying, “Do not welcome them.” But the welcome had already been given.

I ran back under the trees, back to the place where my Zemis stood. I fed it little pieces of cassava, and fish and yam from the feast. Then I prayed.

“Let the lake strangers from the sky go away from the feast. Then I prayed. "Let the pale strangers from the sky go away from us.”

My Zemis stared back at me with unblinking wood eyes. I gave it the smooth balls a stranger had dropped in my hand. "Take these eyes and see into the hearts of the strangers from the sky. If it must be, let something happen to me to show our people what they should know." My Zemis was silent. It spoke only in dreams. Indeed, it had spoken to me already.

When u returned to the feast, one of the strangers let me touch his sharp silver stick. To show I was not afraid, I grasped it firmly, as one would a spear. It bit my palm so hard the blood cried out. But still no one understood, no one heard.

They did not hear because they did not want to listen. They desired all that the strangers had brought: the sharp silver spear; round pools to hold in the hand that gave a man back his face; darts that sprang from sticks with a sound like thunder that could kill a parrot many pages away. We were given none of these—only singing shells and tiny balls on strings. We were patted upon the head as a child Pat's a yellow dog. We were smiled at with many white teeth, a serpent's smile.

The next day the strangers returned to their great canoes. They took five of our young men and many parrots with them. They took me.

I knew then it was a sign from my Zemis, a sign from my people. So I was brave and did not cry out. But I was afraid.

That night, while my people slept on shore, the great-sailed canoes left our Bay, going farther and farther then even our strongest man could go. Soon the beach and trees and everything I knew slipped away, until my world was only a thin, dark line stretched between sky and sea.

What else was there to do?

In the early morning, another land lay close enough to see. Silently, I let myself over the side of the great canoe. I fell down and down into the cold water. Then I swam into that strange shore.

Many days I walked, following the sun. Many nights I swam. And many times the sky was full with the moon and stars. All along the way I told the people of how I had sailed in the great canoes. I told of the pale strangers from the sky. I said our blood would cry out in the sand. I spoke of my dream of the white teeth. But even those who saw the great canoes did not listen, for I was a child.

So it was we lost our lands to the strangers from the sky. We gave our souls to their gods. We took their speech into mouths, forgetting our own. Our sons and daughters became their sons and daughters, no longer true humans, no longer ours. That is why I, and old man now, dream no more dreams. That is why I sit here wrapped in a stranger's cloak, counting the stranger's bells on a string, telling my story. May it be a warning to all the children and all the people in every land.
**Encounter**

**Pre-reading activity**
Write ideas you already know about Christopher Columbus around the word bubble.

![Columbus](image)

**During Reading Activity**
Each group (the Natives and Explorers) have a different perspective of the encounter. List what the natives are feelings, thinking and seeing during the encounter. List what the explorers are feelings, thinking and seeing during the encounter.

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