

Columbus and the Egg

7th Grade Historical Fiction

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By James Baldwin (Adapted) From Thirty More Famous Stories Retold.
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This is a story about Columbus, the explorer who “discovered” America. We have put “discovered” in quotation marks because actually other people already lived on the continent long before Columbus made his voyage in 1492. This is a story about what might have happened long ago when he was back in Spain. Is it accurate, did it really occur? That’s not known, but it is a story that could have happened. Stories such as this are passed from generation to generation and sometimes are based on facts.

When Columbus came back from his trip to the Americas, many people praised him. He was made an admiral, he had made a remarkable voyage despite many challenges. People said what a great thing he had done, discovering the Americas. However, not everyone appreciated him; there were some who were jealous of all the adulation.

One day Columbus was at a party that a Spanish gentleman gave in his honor. People were saying, “What a great discovery you have made!” Several persons were present who resented this great admiral's success. They were proud and conceited, and they very soon began to try to make Columbus uncomfortable.

“You have discovered strange lands beyond the seas,” they said, “but what of that? We do not see why there should be so much said about it. Anybody can sail across the ocean; and anybody can coast along the islands on the other side, just as you have done. It is the simplest thing in the world. All you need to do is sail West, that’s not a remarkable feat.”

Columbus made no answer; but after a while he took an egg from a dish and said to the company: “Who among you, gentlemen, can make this egg stand on end?”

“That’s impossible,” the host replied. “You would need to be a magician to do that.” One by one those at the table tried the experiment. When the egg had gone entirely around and none had succeeded, all said that it could not be done, it was defying gravity.

Then Columbus took the egg and struck its small end gently upon the table so as to break the shell a little. After that there was no trouble in making it stand upright.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “What is easier than to do this which you said was impossible? It is the simplest thing in the world. Anybody can do it—AFTER HE HAS BEEN SHOWN HOW!”

Analyze and Infer Author's Point of View and Purpose – Historical Fiction

Questions developed by Center for Urban Education for use by Chicago Public Schools 2008-2009.

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. Why did the writer write this story?

- a. to show how smart Columbus was
- b. as a joke
- c. to show how people should be humble
- d. to explain what Columbus did

3. Why did the writer say that the men who made fun of Columbus failed to solve the puzzle?

- a. to show they were foolish
- b. to show they were brave
- c. to show they were afraid
- d. to show they were sorry

2. How did the writer feel about Columbus?

- a. He thought he was important.
- b. He thought he was smart.
- c. He thought he was strange.
- d. He thought he was a “show-off”.

4. Why did the writer say what Columbus said at the end?

- a. to make his idea clear
- b. to show it was a joke
- c. to tell people it was simple
- d. to help people learn the trick

5. *Write your own answer to this question. Many writers write a story with a lesson. What is the lesson that this writer wants to teach?*

TEACHER NOTES: Develop Students' Skills: Exercise Thinking

These questions have not been validated, so decisions about student's achievement should not be made based on their responses. They are intended to exercise skills. Recommended activities include: students work in pairs to choose the best response; give students the questions without the responses so they generate their own answers; students make up additional questions; students make up questions like these for another passage.

Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	1	2	3	4
Answer	c	a	a	a

Question 5 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.
The lesson is not to make fun of other people.