

Island of the Blue Dolphins
Alert Logbook

Grade Level

Middle School: Sixth Grade through Eighth grade

High School: Ninth Grade through Twelfth Grade

Subject

Literacy and Language Arts, Social Studies

Common Core Standards

6–8.SL.1, 6–8.SL.1.B, 9–10.SL.1, 9–10.SL.1.B, 11–12.SL.1, 11–12.SL.1.B, 9–10.RH.1, 9–10.RH.2, 9–10.RH.4, 9–10.RH.7, 6–8.RH.1, 6–8.RH.2, 6–8.RH.4, 6–8.RH.7, 9–10.RH.1, 9–10.RH.2, 9–10.RH.4, 9–10.RH.7, 11–12.RH.1, 11–12.RH.2, 11–12.RH.4, 11–12.RH.7

Background Information

The goal of this lesson is to have students analyze a primary source document to learn about maritime trade on the Pacific Coast in the early 1800s (nineteenth century). This lesson requires students to transcribe and analyze a ship's logbook, answering questions about what they learned from close reading.

One of the many responsibilities of a ship's captain was to keep a logbook. The captain, or perhaps one of the mates, had an obligation to record all important information about the voyage such as weather, the ship's location, and sailors' activities. The term logbook comes from an era when a ship's speed was measured with a "chip log" made of wood. Triangular in shape, this log was attached to a line and thrown over the side of the vessel near the bow. A series of knots was tied along the line, and as the knots passed through a sailor's hand as the ship sailed by the floating log, the ship's approximate speed could be determined. For example, if six knots passed through the sailor's hand as the ship glided by the chip log, it was said that the ship's speed was six knots. Knowing a ship's speed was essential to determining where a ship was along its route. Therefore, the ship's speed was recorded in a book, aptly dubbed the "logbook." Over time, as maritime industries evolved, the data sailors entered into logbooks became standardized.

Longitude, latitude, ocean currents, wind speed, and ship's speed were data recorded in a logbook. A captain must know where his (or her) ship is in the world, but in an earlier era, this was difficult to figure out when far from land. Captains used a variety of tools to determine location. With a sextant and chronometer, a sailor could measure latitude and longitude and then, using these two coordinates, chart a ship's progress on a map. A good sailor and captain also used the speed of the ship, ocean currents, and wind speed and direction to adjust calculations and make predictions about when the ship would arrive at the next port. Logging this information was a great responsibility and a necessary task on board vessels.

Captains sometimes recorded other information, such as sailors' activities (both voluntary and assigned), as well. Some captains even went so far as to record their personal thoughts and feelings in their logbooks. For these reasons and more, logbooks have become an important source of information for historians.

For more information on the navigation tools used on board ship, see the [Voices from the Field for chapter 10](#).

The Logbook of the Alert

William Dane Phelps (1802–75) was one of those sea captains who kept detailed records of his voyages; in addition to recording the standard information about his ship's location and distance traveled, Phelps noted the activities of his crew and wrote down what he saw and heard, on board and on shore. He later shared his notes with his wife, who was back home in Massachusetts.

Phelps traded along the California coast from 1840–42. In the logbook page included with this lesson, Phelps is engaging in the hide and tallow trade, filling his vessel's hold with cowhides and animal fat. The *Alert* also carried maritime furs. One of the stories Phelps recorded in his logbook was about the Lone Woman, a California Indian who spent eighteen years living in isolation on the most remote of the Channel Islands after sea otter hunting greatly disrupted life on San Nicolas Island. The Lone Woman became a news sensation in the nineteenth century, and in the mid-twentieth century she inspired Scott O'Dell's novel *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. You can view the page of the [Alert logbook](#) that retells the story of the Lone Woman in the Lone Woman and Last Indians Digital Archive. The *Alert* logbook is now owned by Harvard University.

Materials

- Copy of activity sheet for each student (provided)
- Computers for each student or student group, if possible (copies of the logbook page can be used instead)
- Projector to display the *Alert* logbook page, if possible

Procedure

1. Review Background Information above.
2. Preview the provided transcription of the *Alert* logbook page (note: this is not to be shared with students until after they have tried transcribing the text themselves).
3. Upload the image of the *Alert* logbook onto student computers and project the image for the class.
4. If individual computers are not available for students, print a copy of the primary source image for each student.
5. Tell students that they will be working with one page from the original logbook of the ship *Alert*, which sailed in the mid-1800s (nineteenth century). Briefly explain

the purpose of a ship's logbook: to keep a record of daily progress toward the ship's final destination.

6. Assign students to a computer. Direct students to use the zoom feature to focus on the writing on the logbook page and ask them to select one logbook entry to transcribe. Explain that the entries are one paragraph in length and include a date on the left-hand side.
7. Pass out the activity sheet and ask students to begin by transcribing one day's entry (their choice) and then answering the questions provided.
8. Direct students who finish early to work on the extension activity.
9. Moderate a class discussion in which students share their findings. Focus particularly on their answers to questions 5 and 6.
10. Enrich the student discussion by sharing some or all of the information provided in the Background Information section of this lesson plan.

Vocabulary:

latitude	knots	longitude	swells
fathom	bullock	steerage	gale

Image from page 3 of the Alert logbook

3

Santa Barbara ——— St. Luis Obispo.

Thurs 7th Breeze from N.W. and fine weather. At 10 AM
 left the harbor between the islands, San Carlos & Santa Cruz.
 Latter Part calm, with much swell.

Frid 8th Morning light breeze from N.E. by tide anchored off Sta
 Barbara in 14 fathoms (in afternoon anchored inside of
 the reef). Latter Part — all hands employed in repairing
 the sails — & setting up the topmasts & mast stays. Spent the
 day on shore myself — and dined with the old Command
 & family.

Sat 9th Light breeze and pleasant. All hands repairing sails
 killed a Bullock. Latter Part under weigh for St. Luis
 Obispo.

Sund 10th Light variable winds with considerable swell. At 2 PM
 the ship made the shore and drifting towards it, lowered
 the anchor & steamed boat and towed her off. At daylight
 not having steamed away and drifting towards the shore
 came to anchor in 7 fathoms. Kind calm.

Mon 11th Light breeze from N.W. at daylight got under sail
 again. Not making any progress at 5 PM came to in
 7 fathoms — 1st Conception 10 miles distant. To Ensay

Tues 12th Under weigh with moderate breezes from N.W.
 beating to windward. At 4 PM exchanged signals with Brig
 Juan Pineda bound in to Sta Barbara. Latter part
 strong breezes — ship under double reef, outside the
 canal.

Wed 13th Continuation of fresh Breeze. Ship beating up the coast.

Thurs 13th Winds and weather as yesterday. Ship off Pt. St. Luis
 at 10 AM. At daylight off Pt. St. Luis. Shortened sail and
 lay by.

Frid 14th Strong Breezes & foggy. At 4 PM made sail and
 stood in. At 8 PM. Came to anchor in the anchorage
 of St. Luis Obispo, in 5 fathoms — sandy bottom.
 Latter Part — employed in unloading & stowing
 cargo.

Sat 15th Breeze with strong gales from the N.W. with clear
 weather. I had lunch on the beach — we commenced in
 getting off about 5 PM. and 10 PM. of yellow.
 At 11 AM. The British Frigate came in to anchor.
 After breakfast — took my gun and walked a few
 miles up a beautiful valley enclosed by lofty hills.
 the valley of about, from 1/2 to 3/4 of a mile in width.

Name _____

Island of the Blue Dolphins

***Alert* Logbook**

Primary Source Analysis

Directions: Examine the logbook page provided, then choose ONE logbook entry and transcribe it in the box below. Use a “??” for any words you cannot decipher.

On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions.

1. What kind of information is included in the logbook entry you transcribed?
2. What do the sailors appear to be doing on board the *Alert* on the day of your logbook entry?
3. Is there any information that tells you where the ship is on this day? If not, can you estimate the location based on other logbook entries?
4. Is there information in your logbook entry that is also included in other entries that you did not transcribe? What patterns emerge?
5. Why do you think it was important for sailors to make entries in their logbooks every day?
6. If you were a sailor and in charge of keeping the log, would you include the same information as you found in your logbook entry? Would you include additional or different information? Why or why not?

***Alert* Logbook**

Extension Activity

In transcribing and analyzing the contents of a logbook entry, you paid careful attention to information provided in writing. But logbooks sometimes included sketches, drawings, and paintings as well. Below is an image of the *Alert* that was included in its logbook. Take a close look and answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper.



1. How would you describe the *Alert*?
2. What kind of vessel is it? (Be sure to explain how you can tell.)
3. Where in the world is the *Alert* at the moment this image was made (hint: look at the caption)?
4. Why might the artist have included this image in the logbook?
5. What can historians learn about the vessel from this image that they might not have learned from the logbook's written entries?