

Islands of the Blue Dolphins, Chapter 29
Disease Transmission

Grade Level

Upper Elementary: Third Grade through Fifth Grade

Subject

Literacy and Language Arts

Common Core Standards

4.RI.7, 5.RI.3

Background Information

Island of the Blue Dolphins opens with the arrival of “a red ship with two red sails” and it ends with a different ship’s arrival on Karana’s island. Sailing ships brought with them new people and new trade goods. But they also brought diseases.

Island of the Blue Dolphins doesn’t discuss the effect diseases have on Karana’s people, and this lesson helps students to think about what the book doesn’t show: how the arrival of European ships undoubtedly exposed Karana’s community to new diseases, many of which were fatal. The historical model for Karana may have been a victim; she died just seven weeks after arriving in Santa Barbara, California.

This lesson consists of three parts. The pre-activity, designed for students to complete after reading chapter 29 of the novel, focuses on San Nicolas Island, showing students that disease transferral likely took place on Karana’s home island. The hands-on activity allows students to visualize how diseases were transmitted in the nineteenth-century Pacific World. Finally, the post-activity ties back to *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by focusing on the death of Karana’s real-life counterpart, the Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island.

Materials

- Cardstock cut into pieces approximately 2x3 inches in size; four pieces needed per student
- Crayons
- Copy of activity sheet for each student (provided)

Procedure

Pre-Activity:

1. Complete the activity sheet as a class. Use book characters as examples of different people from different places coming to San Nicolas Island in the early 1800s (nineteenth century).

Hands-on Activity:

1. Give each student four pieces of cardstock.
2. Split the class into four groups and give each group a place of origin—Boston; Galapagos Islands; Canton, China; or California Coast. Have groups sit together.

3. Have students color their pieces of cardstock—Boston: yellow; Galapagos Islands: blue; Canton, China: red; California Coast: green.
4. Transmission of disease will be simulated by groups rotating to each “stop” on their trade route. Have them leave one card at their home base and carry three cards with them.
5. The Boston group will “dock” at the Galapagos Islands; then Canton, China; then the California Coast, and then return back to Boston. At each stop, group members will leave a card and pick up the colored card from that location.
6. You might explain to students that this is a stimulation and they need to use their imagination. In real life, these sailors would have had to make several stops long before reaching these locations—they would have needed to take on fresh drinking water, for example.
7. Have the other three groups follow a similar rotation.
8. At this point, the teacher should reveal the key (provided) and explain that the colored pieces are representative of the diseases that each person might have carried. Each color depicts a different disease.
9. Students will have new cards representing the new diseases they acquired through bodily contact and/or other exposure. At their home base they will have the card that shows what disease they carried with them throughout the journey. Explain this to students.
10. Have the students identify what diseases they started out with and what diseases they contracted throughout the activity. Engage in a discussion about the way that interaction with people from different places can lead to the unintentional transmission of disease. Today, because of advanced travel methods and increased global interactions, most of the world has been introduced to diseases from other places. Fortunately, vaccines aid in disease prevention. However, in the 1800s (nineteenth century), isolated areas around the world had yet to be introduced to many diseases. So, as the circulation of people between places increased, the diversity of diseases in communities grew, often with devastating effects.

Disease key:

Disease	Color
Smallpox (Boston)	Yellow
Malaria (Galapagos Islands)	Blue
Bubonic plague (Canton, China)	Red
Dysentery (California Mainland Coast)	Green

Post-Activity:

- Recall that *Island of the Blue Dolphins* ends with Karana leaving the island, headed for Santa Barbara on the California coast. Explain that, in real-life, the Lone Woman died shortly after her arrival to Santa Barbara. One likely cause of her death was dysentery, an infection of the intestines.

Further Readings

Gibson, James R. *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: the Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785–1841*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992.

Harvard University Libraries Open Collections Program: "Contagion, Tuberculosis in Europe and North America," 1800–1922." Accessed November 30, 2017.
<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion/tuberculosis.html>.

Igler, David. "Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770–1850," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (2004): 693–719.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930: 62-96. (available as an ebook from Google Books)

Name _____

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Where Did They Come From?

Directions

1. Write on the blank lines below the names of all the people who came to Karana's island from different parts of the world. They are listed below.
2. Color each arrow a different color.
3. Color the island with a mixture of every color of every arrow, along with one **different** color to represent Karana's people.

Outsiders Arriving on Karana's Island

Captain of the red ship with the red sails, sailors on the ship with the red sails, California sea otter hunters, Tutok, Spanish priest

