

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Black Pearl

by  
Scott O'Dell

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### Book Information

Scott O'Dell, The Black Pearl  
Quiz Number: 104  
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96 Pages  
Book Level: 5.4  
Interest Level: MG

In claiming as his own the magnificent black pearl he finds, a sixteen-year-old youth enrages the sea devil that legend says is its owner.

**Award:** Misc./Other; Newbery Honor

**Topics:** English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 14, 90%; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

### Main Characters

Blas Salazar Ramon's father

Gaspar Ruiz (The Sevillano) a pearl diver

Ramon Salazar a sixteen-year-old boy; the main character in the story

Soto Luzon an Indian who teaches Ramon to dive

### Vocabulary

**ambergris** a waxy substance that floats in tropical waters

**league** a measurement of distance (2.4-4.6 mi or 3.9-7.4 km)

**manta** devilfish

**singlet** undershirt

### Synopsis

Ramon is a sixteen-year-old boy who lives in the town of La Paz on the edge of the Vermilion Sea. His father, Blas, is a well-known pearl dealer who owns a fleet of boats used for pearl diving.

On Ramon's sixteenth birthday, Blas holds a fiesta for Ramon and makes him a partner in the family business. Ramon begins to learn how to be a pearl

dealer, but is anxious for the opportunity to learn to dive for pearls.

Although Blas had promised that when Ramon was sixteen he could go out with the fleet and learn to dive for pearls, now that the time has come, Blas is reluctant to allow him to go. Blas fears that a storm will come up, both of them will drown, and everything he has worked for will be lost. Blas finally allows Ramon to accompany the fleet on a calm day, providing Ramon stays on deck and does not dive.

One day, while Ramon is in the shop, Soto Luzon, a local Indian, brings in a pearl to sell to the Salazars. Ramon asks Luzon to teach him to dive, and Luzon agrees. Ramon learns quickly, and one day discovers The Pearl of Heaven, a large black pearl.

Luzon tells Ramon to throw the pearl back into the sea so that the Manta Diablo, a huge legendary ray, does not become angry. But Ramon keeps the pearl and becomes the talk of the town.

When Blas cannot find a buyer willing to pay the price he is asking for the pearl, he gives it to Father Gallardo to give to the Madonna. Blas believes this will bring a blessing upon the House of Salazar.

When Blas is killed in a storm, Ramon decides to steal the pearl and return it to the sea. He is followed by Gaspar Ruiz, another pearl diver, who intends to steal the pearl from Ramon. While at sea, Gaspar and Ramon encounter the Manta Diablo. Gaspar kills the Manta Diablo, but loses his life in the process. Ramon then takes the pearl and returns it to the hand of the Madonna in the church.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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## Initial Understanding

How did Ramon's mother feel when Blas did not sell the pearl?

*Answers may include: frustrated, angry, sad, helpless, and disappointed. She had her heart set on buying a horse and carriage.*

## Literary Analysis

What are some of the things The Pearl of Heaven symbolizes to Ramon?

*Answers may include: success, wealth, and prestige.*

## Inferential Comprehension

How did Gaspar's obsession with the feud between Ramon and himself contribute to his death?

*He was determined to kill the Manta Diablo, even at the cost of his own life, in order to prove he was "more of a man" than Ramon.*

## Constructing Meaning

Do you think Ramon made the right choice when he returned the pearl to the Madonna? Why or why not?

*Answers will vary, but must be supported with reasons to be correct.*

eyes and seven rows of teeth. Ask students to research mantas and list facts about these animals. What is the average size of a manta? Where do they live? Are they endangered?

**Understanding Sequence** At the end of the book, Ramon is going home, but is not sure what he will say to his mother about the events that have occurred. Since the book ends, we do not know what Ramon tells his mother, what happens to the family business, if Ramon finds another large pearl, etc. Discuss the concept of sequels with the class and have the students write a brief summary of a sequel to the book. Remind them to have the beginning of the sequel mesh with the end of *The Black Pearl*. They can also choose a title for the sequel.

**Differentiating Fact and Opinion** Many times in a story, an opinion is stated as a fact. For instance, Luzon's statement, "...the pearl belongs to the Manta Diablo...", may appear to be a fact, but it is actually an opinion. Have the students identify three other opinions that are stated as facts in the book. Then have them find an advertisement from a newspaper or magazine and identify which statements are facts and can be proven and which statements are presented as facts, but are, in truth, opinions.

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Plot** Blas and Ramon Salazar were pearl dealers. Blas had many things to teach Ramon about pearls when he made him a partner in the business. Have the students do research on pearls and write a short report on them. Information gathered can include who deals in selling pearls today, what makes one pearl more valuable than another, where are pearls found, what simulated pearls are and when might they be preferred over other pearls, and why black pearls are valuable.

**Recognizing Cause and Effect** In *The Black Pearl* the Manta Diablo is described as having mythic proportions. He is reported to have seven