The Black Pearl

By: Scott O’Dell

Ed 325

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Sherman Carstensen
Teacher’s note:

The study guide is to be used as a tool for discussion of sections of the book. The questions are divided into six sections of three chapters each. There are also vocabulary words in most of the sections including some Spanish words. There are also activities in several sections to promote creativity and to increase the student’s enjoyment of the book.

The questions that follow could be used in several ways: 1) As a reading guide to be filled out by the students as they are reading the sections. 2) As discussion points that could be brought up in class. You could have the students each write two quiz questions from the section and discuss the student’s questions, using these questions as a supplement. 3) You could use the questions as a short quiz from the section after discussion.

Bibliographic Information*

Title and Author: *Black Pearl* by Scott O’Dell


Genre: Fiction book about bragging, family, thieves, the luck of the draw, and fantasy.

Readability: Grade level 7 – 12

Interest Level: Ages 12 – 20

Awards and Notable Lists*

O’Dell received the Newbery Medal award, an award given by the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books, named after John Newbery, the famous eighteenth-century publisher and seller of children’s books in England. The first of these awards was given in 1921 and have come to represent the best in children’s literature. Scott O’Dell was one of America’s most respected writers for young people – winner of the Newbery Medal for “Island of the Blue Dolphins” and recipient of three subsequent Newbery honors as well as of the Hans Christian Anderson Medal, the Regina Medal, and the German Jugendbibliopreis – known for his historical novels for children. 1968 – taken from Newbery Honor Book list.

Plot Summary*

This is the story of sixteen-year-old Ramon, who lives with his family in La Paz, in Baja, California-Mexico. When Ramon’s father, Blas Salazar, the most famous pearl dealer in the region, makes his son a partner in the business, it is the happiest day of his life.
Gaspar Ruiz, known as the "Sevillano," is the Salazar’s best diver. The Sevillano, however, is a braggart who continually boasts of his great achievements. Ramon believes the Sevillano directs his tales to him more than to anyone else.

Ramon’s dream is to find a pearl so large that the Sevillano will have to treat him with respect. To achieve this goal Ramon convinces Soto Luzon, who sells pearls to his father, to teach him to dive for pearls in his lagoon. Soto Luzon, a superstitious Indian, informs Ramon that the Manta Diablo, a giant manta, lives in a cave in the lagoon. Ramon continues to practice his diving in the lagoon, however, and on the fourth day his dream comes true – he finds the great Pearl of Heaven. Although Ramon offers to share his good fortune with the Indian, Soto Luzon refuses, insisting that the pearl belongs to the Manta Diablo. He warns Ramon that Manta will want it back.

The discovery of the pearl brings much excitement to the Salazar family and town of La Paz. Ramon’s father decides to give the pearl to the church after an unpleasant and unsuccessful attempt to sell it. It is his hope that the gesture will insure protection for his fleet. On his next trip to sea, the fleet is destroyed during a storm. Blas Salazar and all of his men but one are drowned; the only survivor is Sevillano.

When Ramon learns of the tragedy, he realizes that the Indian was right and he decides to return the pearl to the Manta Diablo. Taking the pearl from the church, he sets out by boat for the lagoon. The Sevillano who is determined to have the pearl, soon overtakes him. The Manta Diablo appears in the water and circles the boat. The Sevillano harpoons the creature, but in the act is caught in the rope and drowned. Ramon makes his way back to La Paz and returns the pearl to the church.

**Bibliography of Material by Same Author***

Books by Scott O’Dell:

1. *Black Star, Bright Dawn*. Fawcett
2. *Carlota*. Dell
4. *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Dell
5. *Kathleen, Please Come home*. Dell
8. *Sing Down the Moon*. Dell

*Sections taken from a Book Report done by Nancy Ladd on the following website: [http://www.utm.edu/staff/jimnance/jimnance/ladd1.htm](http://www.utm.edu/staff/jimnance/jimnance/ladd1.htm)
Section 1 – Chapters 1-3

Introduction: Show a picture of a manta ray and talk about the different features. There are several videos on Youtube.com and Wikipedia also has information.

Vocabulary: wrested, fatal, lagoon

Questions:

1) What is the Manta Diablo?
2) What did the Manta Diablo lose after it was commanded to disappear in the sea?
3) Why was Ramon so excited for his 16th birthday? What would he be able to do?
4) What are the three characteristics into which Ramon had to sort and categorize the pearls?
5) What was the name of the Sevillano?
6) What rude comment did Ramon overhear the Sevillano tell another crew member? How would you classify this comment?

Activity: Draw a picture of the Manta Diablo. Use resources in the library and the internet to research some of the characteristics of a manta.

Section 2 - Chapters 4-6

Introduction: Show the students a string of pearls or pictures of pearls. Describe some of the characteristics of pearls.

Vocabulary: ledger, crevice, hilt, league, fathom

Questions:

1) Who is Soto Luzon?
2) What was Ramon’s proposal to Luzon?
3) Why did Luzon agree to Ramon’s request?
4) How far was it from La Praz to Luzon’s home?
5) Why did Ramon have to be careful while walking on the bottom of the lagoon?
6) What did Ramon find diving by himself on the fourth day?
7) Where was the exact location of Ramon’s findings?
8) What did Luzon call Ramon’s findings?

Activity: Write a poem describing a pearl. Use at least 5 different characteristics in your poem. You will read the poem in front of the class.
Section 3 – Chapters 7-9

Introduction: Show on a map the Baja peninsula south of California. Find La Paz, Mexico and read about the climate, history, and economy. (Wikipedia)

Vocabulary: calabozo

Questions:

1) How did Ramon get back to La Praz?
2) What happened on his way home?
3) Why didn’t Ramon want anyone to find out about the pearl before his father got home?
4) How did Ramon’s father react to the pearl? What was the first thing Ramon’s father did with the pearl? What did he find?
5) What did Ramon and his father find out about the flaw in the pearl?
6) Who were the only ones who could buy the Pearl of Heaven from Salazon and Sons?
7) What was the price Ramon’s father was firmly asking for the pearl?
8) What happened to the Pearl of Heaven?

Activity: Write a short story about something of value that you or someone in your family owns. Include any history, approximate value, plans for the item, etc.

Section 4 – Chapters 10-12

Introduction: Talk about superstitions and there place in history. Talk about what the Bible has to say about superstitions and also where, as Christians, our confidence should be placed.

Vocabulary: bower, festooned, coromuel, borne, niche, belfry

Questions:

1) What happened during the celebration of the Pearl of Heaven?
2) What did the Sevillano have to say to Ramon?
3) Who hid in the shadows of Ramon’s house gate? What did he want?
4) What happened after the fleet left the harbor?
5) What happened to the fleet? Who relayed the message to Ramon?
6) How many men were in the Salazar fleet? How many survived?
7) What did Ramon decide to do?
8) Who had been warning Ramon about the possession of the pearl?

Activity: Write the second commandment with Luther’s explanation from memory, along with a summary of how this applies to the book.
Section 5 – Chapters 13-15

Introduction: Take a look at the parts of a sailboat. See if any of the students can point out the different parts of a boat referenced in the reading.

Vocabulary: lee

Questions:

1) Where did Ramon go with the pearl? What did he intend to do?
2) Who did he run into while on his way?
3) Paraphrase what happened next to Ramon and the pearl? Where were the two sailing?
4) While sailing across the Vermillian Sea, what did the boat encounter?
5) Why did Ramon and the Sevillano have to bale water out of the boat?
6) Where did the Sevillano decide to go to avoid further trouble? What was so dangerous about the destination?
7) Why was the Sevillano surprised Ramon believed in the Manta Diablo? Why was he upset with what Ramon told him to do with the pearl?
8) Why did Ramon and the Sevillano leave the island so quickly?

Activity: Pick one of the types of sailboats listed on Wikipedia and draw the sailboat just by using the description.

Section 6 – Chapters 16-18

Introduction: Evaluate Ramon’s definition of manhood (or adulthood).

Vocabulary: bereft, maypole

Questions:

1) What did the Sevillano intend to do to the Manta that was following them? Had he done it before?
2) Who is Gasper Ruiz?
3) According to Sevillano, why did the Salazar fleet get destroyed?
4) What did the Sevillano do as the manta got closer?
5) After being pulled in the wrong direction, what did the Sevillano decide? Why did Ramon want to help?
6) What happened to the Sevillano? What did Ramon end up doing?
7) What did Ramon do with the Black Pearl?
8) Why did Ramon become a man now and not when he had become a partner with his father or when he found the pearl?

Activity: How would you define adulthood? Write a one page paper with an introduction, body and closing statement answering this question. (As a Christian)
**Book Evaluation:**

Each student will write an evaluation of the book stating their personal opinion of the book and also whether or not the book should be used in the class. The paper will need to be supported by examples from the book and other research done throughout the unit. The students will be put into groups based on their opinions of the book and we will discuss their opinions.