FL ELFAS
Passage Cover Sheet

Title:	Pirating the Seven Seas
Stimulus ID:	6893CN
Source:	Commissioned
Grade Band:	6-8
Genre:	Informational Text
Text Type:	Historical
Word Count:	1192
Lexile:	1135
Lexile Range:	925-1185
Flesch-Kincaid:	9.0
Qualitative Ranking:	Complex

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Pirating the Seven Seas

When people think about pirates, they might visualize a man with a wooden stump for a leg, an earring hoop in one ear, and a parrot perched precariously on a stooped shoulder. He may gesture wildly with a cutlass[1] and say things like "Argh!" and "Yar." Thanks to popular literature and cinema, both the antics and dress of these nefarious[2] sailors are colorful and interesting to the general public. Billions of dollars in the entertainment industry prove people love pirates, but do these sources paint an accurate picture of real pirates in history?

THE EXAGGERATION

Not everything people love about pirate lore is true.

Speech

At the risk of disappointing audiences everywhere, "Shiver me timbers!" was not the typical verbiage of the common pirate. In fact, one can safely assume that pirates never uttered that phrase or its accompanying phrase "Ahoy, Matey." Although basically every pirate book and movie incorporates a distinct pirate language, the concept really fails to make sense. After all, pirates hailed from a variety of cultures and countries. They would have spoken their native language and figurative speech as well.

Plank Walking

Dramatic moments make a story exciting, but walking the plank is just that—theater. Pirates depended on a quick getaway to survive their chosen profession. They hardly had time to haul out a plank and coax the prisoner to walk off at the edge of a cutlass. When they captured a ship, however, pirates generally gave their prisoners a choice. They could join the cause or leave the ship. If

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[1] cutlass: a short, slightly curved type of sword
[2] nefarious: extremely wicked or villainous

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prisoners chose the latter, the pirates would simply toss them over the side of the ship or abandon them on an island.

X Marks the Spot?

The act of piracy was a dangerous one. Most pirates recognized that they probably had a shortened life span. The idea of burying treasure for a later date would have been ridiculous to them. First of all, pirates trusted no one, and burying a fortune alone would have been difficult. Secondly, a pirate's loot was rarely in the form of precious metals and gems. Most ships carried resources such as lumber, silk, exotic foods, and animal hides. Typically, as soon as pirates plundered a ship's cargo, they divided it up and spent it on more enjoyable pursuits. Captain Kidd supposedly buried his treasure on Long Island, New York. He was only one of a few, however, who may have actually buried treasures that he had looted.

THE FACTS (MOSTLY)

While most legends are based on fiction rather than fact, they still often have germs of truth in them.

Boarding a Ship in True Pirate Style

The music swells to a lively pinnacle as a crew of pirates use ropes to swing across onto the vulnerable ship, knives clenched between their rotting teeth. The bewildered men of the cargo ship valiantly fight back, and chaos ensues on the deck.

It is a scene from a blockbuster movie, but it was fairly uncommon during a real pirate attack. Since most ship captains owned their own cargo, they often insured it for the full amount. Knowing they would be reimbursed for the value of the stolen goods, captains generally surrendered their cargo to the pirates without a fight.

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The Infamous Eye patch
Life at sea performing perilous activities such as brandishing a knife, loading and firing a cannon, or fighting in a brawl might have injured an eye or two. The eye patch, however, was actually used for an entirely different function. Pirates were a crafty lot. They discovered that the eyes took several minutes to adjust from the bright sunlight on the deck of a ship to the darkness below deck where the loot was located. In this time span, a pirate could run into a wall or, worse, a defender's weapon while trying to adjust. Some legends suggest that pirates often wore an eye patch on one eye when they raided a ship. When they descended below deck, they simply switched the patch to the other eye, exposing the one already adjusted to darkness for use.

Not Just a Costume
Portrayals of pirates often show them wearing frilly shirts, bandannas, and earrings with long locks of hair flying about them. As silly as it may seem, this description is more accurate than not. During the golden age of piracy (1700–1725), male clothing contained elaborate embellishments such as embroidered coats and brightly colored shirts. Long hair was also the fashion. The upper class often wore wigs, while pirates took the more natural approach. They wore bandannas to keep hair from obstructing their view and sweat from running into their eyes. Their preference for hoop earrings, however, was due to a misconception rather than a fashion sense. Pirates believed precious metal piercings through the ear improved eyesight.

Raising the Colors
The flag with the skull-and-crossbones symbol emblazoned on a black background is well-known to pirate enthusiasts. Some pirates even individualized their flags in efforts to strike fear into the hearts of their victims as their ship approached. Henry "Long Ben" Avery was one of the first to do so by showing a skull wearing a bandanna and hoop earring.

The flags also provided a form of communication. Most pirate ships would fly a flag of a friendly nation so that unsuspecting ships would come closer. When the ship was close enough, the pirate ship would raise another flag, signaling the disaster about to come. While the skeleton derivations were fairly terrifying, the hourglass symbolized impending death. The color, though, really announced the pirate ship's intention. A black flag usually meant that the pirates were interested mainly in cargo and would let the helpless

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crew live. A flying red flag sent more of a dire message—survivors were unlikely. Though present-day usage refers to any pirate flag as the "Jolly Roger," historians believe the name actually came from *jolie rouge,* a French description of a red flag meaning "pretty red."

A Pirate's Life

While pirates are generally thought to have been outcasts of society, in fact most pirates came from respectable families. They entered the life of piracy with the support of their government. Countries like England often encouraged "privateers" to raid ships from other countries. The arrangement was mutually beneficial as these privateers shared their plunder with the government.

Some pirates gave up the life after a period of time to assume a mantle of reputable citizen. Pirate James Brown married a daughter of a deputy governor and eventually ran for public office. Henry Morgan, who raided ships under the protection of Spain, became knighted for his pirating deeds. He later settled in Jamaica and ended up actually prosecuting other captured pirates.

Even so, some famous pirates were actually the least successful. The accounts of their capture and trial or immediate death were publicly documented. Tales of their crimes were fully related and written down to become stories of legend. However, those who eluded capture were the best bandits on the sea, only to be rewarded with history's vague nod to their accomplishments. Regardless of individual fame, pirates have made their mark in both the past and present, whether they say "Argh!" or not.

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ELL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Piracy is an ongoing violent criminal activity that some ELLs might have heard about or even encountered. Explain that piracy continues in modern times, and that modern pirates have adopted modern technologies to perform their criminal acts.

- Contrast the popular image of pirates with the facts about pirates. Ask ELLs, for example, "Were pirates outcasts of society or were they respectable people?" (Most came from respectable families.) "Were the most famous pirates the most or the least successful?" (They were actually the least successful.)

- The popularized language of pirates poses a problem for ELLs. Review the pronunciation and meaning of language used in the passage: *Shiver me timbers; Ahoy, Matey.*

- There are many adjectives in the passage. Elicit descriptive phrases from ELLs by asking "What kind of _____?" and "Why _____?" For example, ask, "What kind of language did the pirates speak?" (They spoke their native languages.) "Why did pirates have a shortened lifespan?" (The act of piracy was a dangerous one.)

- Call attention to the following tier two and three vocabulary words in the passage for some pre-discussion. In addition, teachers may use the words below in a sentence or use synonyms or antonyms in the discussion.

Tier two words:

- eluded
- embroidered
- getaway
- impending
- precariously
- reimbursed

Tier three words:

- cutlass
- embellishments
- mantle
- nefarious
- pinnacle
- plundered
- verbiage

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