



California Missions

Goals 2000 - Partnerships for
Educating Colorado Students

In Partnership with the **Denver Public Schools**
and the **Metropolitan State College of Denver**

El Alma de la Raza Project



California Missions

by Irene Hernandez

Grades 8-10

Implementation Time
for Unit of Study: 4-5 weeks

Goals 2000 - Partnerships for
Educating Colorado Students
El Alma de la Raza Curriculum
and Teacher Training Project

Loyola A. Martinez, Project Director

El Alma de la Raza Series

California Missions

Unit Concepts

- Comparing English and Spanish processes of colonization
- The role of Spanish missionaries on the West Coast
- The purposes of Spanish missions on the West Coast
- How Spanish colonization changed the life of Native Americans

Standards Addressed by this Unit

Reading and Writing

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students will write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)

Students read to locate, select, evaluate, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

History

Students know that religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history. (H1)

Students understand political institutions and theories that have developed and changed over time. (H5)

Students know that religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history. (H6)

Art

Students know and apply elements of art, principles of design, and sensory and expressive features of visual arts. (A2)

Introduction

As the colonization of the East coast took place, the Spanish colonization of the West coast was also being established. As Charles Polzer wisely observed “...the New World was not just another world, but the whole world newly revealed.” Unfortunately, only the English colonization of the East coast is portrayed and hailed as the birth of the United States. While history was being made on both coasts, the colonization of the West coast remains virtually untold in U.S. history books.

The story of the Spanish colonization process begins with the Apostolic College of San Fernando in Spain. This institution was established by the Spanish monarchy to acquire new territories in New Spain through the use of missionaries. The monarchy endorsed using missionaries rather than soldiers to extend its frontiers because this method was considered less expensive and more productive. The missions, like the colonies on the East coast, were establishing territories for their European monarchies.

Beginning in Florida in 1565 with St. Augustine and continuing south into Mexico and North into the states of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, missions were central to the Spanish colonization plan. The California missions were an extension of the 29 missions already in place in Baja California. *El Camino Real* (The Royal Road) paved the way for European colonization on the West Coast. On this route used by the Spanish missionaries was left a legacy of twenty-one missions.

Before the arrival of the Spaniards in California there were over 300,000 Native Americans speaking between 60 and 84 different languages. The Spanish colonization of the West Coast introduced a new era for the Native Americans and the world.

Implementation Guidelines

It is recommended that this unit be taught in eighth grade social studies classes, but it can be adapted for use up to the 10th grade. The lessons begin at the knowledge level and progress to the evaluation level. Each lesson has an assessment piece and lesson six contains a scoring rubric. Although the unit is not written for the purpose of teaching reading and writing skills, reading and writing strategies are included in the lessons in order to strengthen these skills. If the strategies used in any lesson are unfamiliar to your students, the teacher should do some pre-teaching activities before attempting the lesson. The last two lessons are extensions and can be used as additional evidence of mastery.

Instructional Materials and Resources

The following books and resources are required for implementing this unit as written.

Lessons

- 2-3 *The California Missions* by Paul Johnson
- 4 *Latino Experience in U.S. History* by Globe Fearon
- 5 *Mexican American Literature* by Charles Tatum
- 6 Internet access

Extended Lessons

- 7-8 *Beautiful California Missions* by Lee Foster
- The California Missions* by Dorothy Krell
- The Golden Era of Missions: 1769-1834* by Paul Johnson
- The Missions of California* by Stanley Young

Lesson Summary

Lessons

- Lesson 1 **Establishment of California Missions**
The Spanish colonization of the West Coast in the context of events occurring during the same period on the East Coast.
- Lesson 2 **The Purpose of Missions**
The role of the mission in the process of Spanish colonization.
- Lesson 3 **Mission Life for Native Americans**
How Spanish colonization affected the culture and everyday lives of Native Americans.
- Lesson 4 **Spanish Borderlands**
The response of Native Americans to Spanish colonization.
- Lesson 5 **Comparing and Contrasting Perspectives**
The perspectives and observations of Junipero Serra, Cabeza de Vaca, and Fray Marcos de Niza.
- Lesson 6 **Using the Internet**
Definitions and descriptions of Key Words from this unit.

Extended Lessons

- Lesson 7 **Architectural Designs of Spanish Missions**
The architectural features of individual Spanish Missions.
- Lesson 8 **Clay Models of Spanish Missions**
Making a clay model of a Spanish mission.

Lesson 1

Establishment of California Missions

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students understand the chronological organization of history and know how to organize events and people into major eras to identify and explain historical relationships. (H1)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students use chronology to examine and explain historical relationships.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will understand that the historical events involved in the formation of a nation have a chronological order.

Students will understand that while events were occurring on the East Coast between England and the Pilgrims, the Spanish Monarchy was busy extending its northern territory through the Patronato Real Land Grants.

SPECIFICS

The Patronato Real were land grants given to the church in order to expand the borders of the Spanish empire.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Teacher-Directed Questioning
Direct Interaction

ACTIVITIES

After the teacher writes significant East Coast dates (leaving out the events) from the *Early U.S. History Timeline* on the board, fill in the East Coast events that occurred on those dates using your knowledge of U.S. History. After completing this task, use copies of the *Early U.S. History Timeline* to discuss the important historical events occurring on the West Coast in chronological sequence and in the context of events occurring on the East Coast.

VOCABULARY

Patronato Real

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Early U.S. History Timeline

ASSESSMENT

Informal assessment: Students able to give teacher the events corresponding to significant historical dates on the board.

Early U.S. History Timeline

West Coast: Spanish Missions Established in California

East Coast

1769–1774

1769 San Diego de Acala
 1770 San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo
 1771 San Antonio de Padua
 1771 San Gabriel Arcangel
 1772 San Luis Obispo de Tolosa

1769–1774

1770 Boston Massacre
 1774 First Continental Congress

1775–1780

1776 San Francisco de Asis
 1776 San Juan Capistrano
 1777 Santa Clara de Asis

1775–1780

1776 Declaration of Independence
 1776 Spain and England at war

1781–1785

1782 San Buenaventura

1781–1785

1781 Surrender of Cornwallis

1786–1790

1786 Santa Barbara
 1787 La Purisima Concepcion

1786–1790

1787 Constitution established
 1789 Washington becomes President of the U.S.

1791–1795

1791 Santa Cruz
 1791 Nuestra Senora de la Soledad

1791–1795

1791 Bill of Rights
 1795 John Adams becomes President

1796–1800

1797 San Jose
 1797 San Juan Bautista
 1797 San Fernando Rey de Espana
 1797 San Luis Rey de Fancia

1796–1800

1801–1816

1804 Santa Ines
 1817 San Rafael Arcangel

1801–1816

1803 Lousianna Purchase
 1810 Revolution in Mexico

1817–1825

1823 San Francisco de Solano

1817–1825

1823 Monroe Doctrine

Lesson 2

Purpose of Missions

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students use comprehension strategies.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will understand that the mission was not only a church, but an inexpensive colonial institution for Spain from the 15th to the 17th centuries.

SPECIFICS

Other purposes for missions were: to spread Christianity, “civilize” and educate the Native Americans, manufacture products, and establish trading posts.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Determining Importance in Text

Paired Reading

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Teacher should review pages 53–56 of *The California Missions* by Paul Johnson and create a key containing the main ideas and supporting details, using the *Taking Notes* worksheet. See next page for analysis of the first two paragraphs.

ACTIVITIES

As a large group, determine the main ideas and supporting details contained in the first two paragraphs of the reading selection (pages 53–56) from *The California Missions* by Paul Johnson. Observe how this information should be recorded on the *Taking Notes* worksheet. In pairs, determine and record main ideas and supporting details for the rest of the selected reading.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

The California Missions by Paul Johnson

Taking Notes worksheet

ASSESSMENT

Use teacher-made key to evaluate *Taking Notes* worksheets.

Taking Notes

Name(s) _____ Date _____

MAIN IDEAS	SUPPORTING DETAILS
Three major agencies of Spain used to extend its borders.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Missions2. Presidio3. Pueblo

Taking Notes

Name(s) _____ Date _____

MAIN IDEAS	SUPPORTING DETAILS

Lesson 3

Mission Life for the Native Americans

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students understand political institutions and theories that have developed and changed over time (H5)

Students know that religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history. (H6)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students know the history of relationships among different political powers and the development of international relations.

Students know how societies have been affected by religions and philosophies.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will illustrate their understanding of how the lives of Native Americans were changed after they were under the rule of priests by using a webbing strategy.

SPECIFICS

English pilgrims have been portrayed as colonists and seekers of liberty. Spaniards have been perceived as seekers of gold. In both cases, it was the Native American that was forced to change his way of life. Natives were schooled in the basics of roofing agriculture, and Spanish traditions. Padres (priests) were in most cases true to their congregations and believed that the changes that were forced upon Natives represented progress and were for the good of the Native Americans. Unlike the pattern on the East coast, where Native Americans were moved into reservations, Spaniards lived alongside the Native Americans.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Guided Reading

Questioning

Semantic Webbing

ACTIVITIES

Under the direction of the teacher, read pages 56–61 in *The Spanish Missions* by Paul Johnson. Participate in a semantic webbing activity that indicates how the lives of native Americans changed after the Spaniards arrived.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

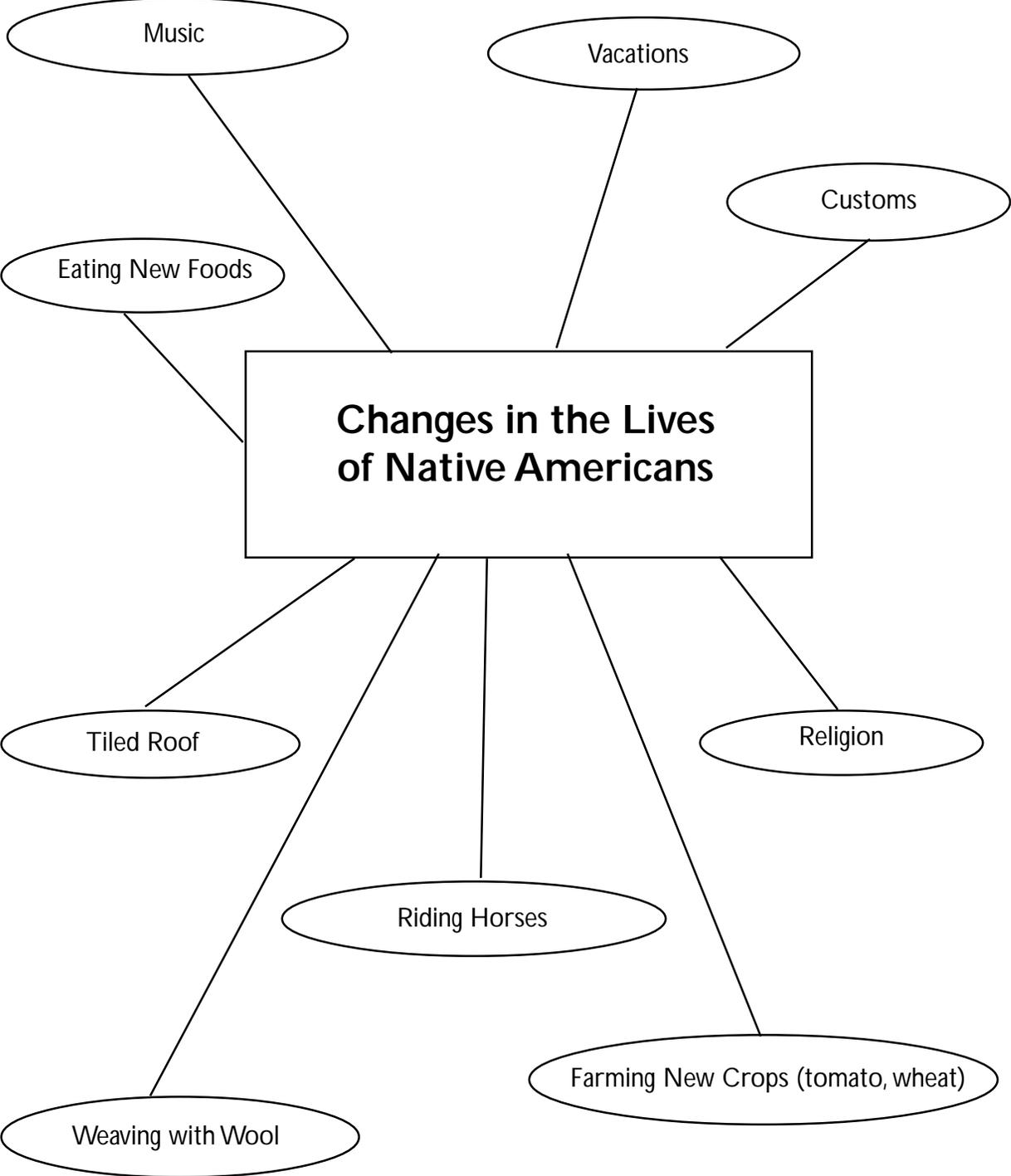
The California Missions by Paul Johnson

Webbing sample

ASSESSMENT

Informal assessment: Class webbing activity.

Sample Web



Lesson 4

Spanish Borderlands

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students know that religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history. (H6)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students know how societies have been affected by religions and philosophies.

Students prepare written and oral presentations using strategies.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will understand the principles of cause and effect when applying it to the events that shaped the future of the Native Americans and their subjugation by the Spaniards.

SPECIFICS

Analysis of the Native American plight and why they revolted in 1680.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Teacher-Directed Reading

Cause and Effect

Summarizing

Expository Writing

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

If students do not understand cause and effect, do this pre-activity. Write on the board an everyday occurrence like a car accident. List a few factors (causes) that can result in a car accident. Ask students to suggest additional reasons or causes. Use other occurrences such as a getting a failing grade on a report card or making the honor roll and go through the same exercise. When students appear to be making the connection between cause and effect, have them write a list of reasons why the Native Americans revolted. Remind them to recall the readings from the last two lessons. When they feel they have written enough reasons, they can begin to write their essay.

ACTIVITIES

Read chapter 5 in the *Latino Experience in U.S. History* with teacher. Analyze the Native American position. Write a one to two-page essay answering this question: If you were a Pueblo Indian telling your grandson/daughter about the revolt, what would you tell him or her as to why you finally revolted (cause and effect). Explain how choices we make can affect our future. Make sure you use grammatically correct language in your essay.

Lesson 4 (cont.)

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Latino Experience in U.S. History published by Globe Fearon

ASSESSMENT

Expository writing employing cause and effect strategy. Students need to use correct grammar in their essay.

Lesson 5

Comparing and Contrasting Perspectives

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students prepare written and oral presentations using strategies.

Students demonstrate correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will use compare and contrast strategies to explore the differences between the accounts of the same events as told by Junipero Serra, Cabeza de Vaca, and Fray Marcos de Niza.

SPECIFICS

Father Junipero established half of the missions in California. By reading his accounts, students will gain an understanding of his perspective.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Guided Reading

Compare and Contrast

Expository Writing

Summarizing

Subjective vs. Objective Views

Analysis

Read Alouds

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

If students do not understand the compare and contrast format for essay writing, do the following pre-activity. Review similarity and contrast in words, using synonyms and antonyms. Next review similarities and differences between points of view on the same topic or question, for instance, should students have to wear uniforms to school. Finally, ask students to write three paragraphs, the first two summarizing two points of view, and the third paragraph discussing the similarities and differences between them.

In order to provide the Native American point of view, read *Encounters* by Jane Nolen out loud.

Lesson 5 (cont.)

ACTIVITIES

With teacher, read the following selections from *Mexican American Literature* by Charles Tatum: “Junipero Serra, pps. 110–120; “Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America, pp. 79–93; and “The Story of the Discovery of the Seven Cities,” pp. 100–105. Write an expository essay comparing and contrasting the perspectives and observations of Junipero Serra, Cabeza de Vaca, and Fray Marcos de Niza. This essay can be one or two pages, depending on your grade level.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Mexican American Literature by Charles Tatum

ASSESSMENT

Expository writing, employing compare and contrast strategy. Students need to use correct grammar in their essay.

Lesson 6

Using the Internet

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students use information from their reading to increase vocabulary and language usage.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will expand their understanding of Spanish Missions and increase their vocabulary by using the internet as a resource.

SPECIFICS

Students will find many of the same terms on the internet that they studied in previous lessons.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Paired Groups

Determining Importance in Text

Student-Directed

Comprehension

Decoding

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Review the process by which students log on and retrieve information from the internet. If you ask students to cite the location of the words they select, demonstrate how to cite an internet address.

ACTIVITIES

Working in pairs, type in the URL address: <http://www.pressanykey.com/missions/>. An alternative strategy would be to search for “California Mission Churches” using a search engine. Go to the highlighted area called “California Mission Internet Trail” and press enter. Click on any church icon and read the information on that particular mission. If there is a word they think is important in understanding the history or architectural design of that church, write down the word and its definition/description. Repeat this process until you have five Key Words with their definitions/descriptions. Keep this page as an answer key and write the five Key Words (without their definitions/descriptions) on a separate piece of paper.

Sample Key Words and definitions/descriptions:

Presidio

Fort

Al Soday

Artist who drew the picture of San Rafael in 1934

Companario

Bell tower

Lesson 6 (cont.)

ACTIVITIES (continued)

Exchange your word lists (without definitions/descriptions) with another pair of students. Follow the same log on procedure. Search for the new set of words and their definitions/descriptions. When you find them, write them down. When you are finished, return the list to the pair of students who developed it. They will grade you on the accuracy and completeness of the definitions/descriptions you provided for their Key Words and you will grade the pair of students that provides definitions/descriptions for your Key Words.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Internet access

ASSESSMENT

Accurate and complete definitions/descriptions of Key Words.

Lesson 7 (Extended)

Architectural Designs of Spanish Missions

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students read to locate, select, evaluate, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students use information from their reading to increase vocabulary and language usage.

Students select relevant material for reading, writing, and speaking purposes.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will understand the architectural designs of individual Spanish missions.

SPECIFICS

Students will use a graphic organizer to connect architectural design features with specific Spanish missions. Organizers help students understand relationships between things.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Graphic Organizer

Comprehension

Decoding

ACTIVITIES

Review the meaning of typical architectural features of Spanish Missions described in the hand-out *Spanish Missions: Key Architectural Terms*. Using the *Architectural Design Organizer* provided by the teacher, indicate which architectural features are characteristic of specific missions. For help in completing the organizer, consult the following texts: *Beautiful California Missions* by Lee Foster, *The Missions of California* by Stanley Young, *The California Missions* by Paul Johnson, and *The Golden Era of Missions: 1769–1834* by Chesley Bonestall. The internet can also be used as a reference at <http://www/pressanykey.com/missions/>.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Beautiful California Missions by Lee Foster

The Missions of California by Stanley Young

The California Missions by Dorothy Krell

The Golden Era of Missions: 1769–1834 by Paul Johnson

Internet access

Spanish Missions: Key Architectural Terms

Architectural Design Organizer

Answer Key

Spanish Missions: Key Architectural Terms

Corredor

The hallway outside the structure that provided shade.

Campanario

Belltower

Espadana

Ornamental false front. This made the mission more imposing.

Ornamented Openings

Embellishments around the front entrance.

Quadrangle

The missions were usually built in a square with the plaza in the center.

Shape of a Cross/L-Shaped

Shapes of buildings.

Straight Line Configuration

Buildings are in a straight line.

Presidio

Fort.

Moorish Style

Capped piers, narrow fortress-like windows, arched doorways.

Facade

An exterior front or face of a building. Concealing something inferior. Much smaller than an Espadana.

Greco-Roman Facade

An exterior front or face of a building. Concealing something inferior with the Greco-Roman pillars.

Veranda

An exterior hallway usually with a flat roof. Unlike the Corredor that has adobe or plastered archways. Wooden beams replace them.

Lesson 8 (Extended)

Clay Models of Spanish Missions

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students know and apply elements of art, principles of design, and sensory and expressive features of visual arts.

BENCHMARK(S)

Students use elements of art, principles of design and style to create a work of art.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will mold a Spanish mission out of clay, using architectural designs specific to Spanish missions.

SPECIFICS

Students can select a particular mission to replicate or create their own original design using features typical of Spanish missions. Encourage creativity!

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

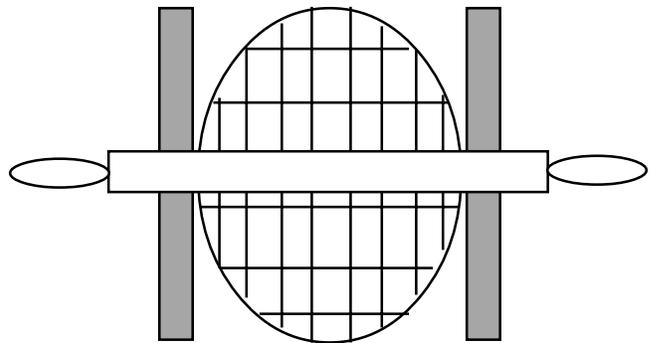
Creativity
Independent Practice
Tactile Activity
Representational Art Form

ACTIVITIES

Role out clay between 1 inch thick slats to make 1 inch thick flat slabs. Slice slabs into 1 inch strips. Cut across strips to make 1" x 2" bricks. Let bricks dry. Mix clay with water to make "slip." Mixture should be thick and sticky. Use this as mortar between clay bricks. Build a mission out of the clay bricks and mortar.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

25–50 pounds of white clay
two 1" thick boards, each 12" long
rolling pin or cut broom handles
dish of water
popsicle sticks or tongue depressors for tools
Beautiful California Missions by Lee Foster
The Missions of California by Stanley Young
The California Missions by Dorothy Krell
The Golden Era of Missions: 1769–1834 by Paul Johnson



ASSESSMENT

Consistency of clay model with characteristic Spanish Mission architectural features.

Unit Assessment

How will students demonstrate proficiency?

PERFORMANCE TASK

Divide into three groups: The first two groups will represent the perspectives of the Native Americans and the Missionaries/Conquistadors. The third group will be the Objective Observers. In the first two groups, write an essay answering the following group-specific questions.

Native American Group

- Should the group welcome the strangers (Spaniards)?
- Should they declare war on the Spaniards?
- Should they take a wait and see policy?

Missionaries/Conquistadors Group

- Should the group try to overtake the Native Americans?
- Should they try to win over the Native Americans?
- Should they take a wait and see policy?

Objective Observer Group

While the discussion and essay writing is taking place, the members of the Objective Observer Group should be visiting each of the other groups and taking notes on their discussions and arguments.

Once the essays are written, the groups representing the Native Americans and the Missionaries/Conquistadors will meet and choose one or more of the listed strategies as a “solution” to their situation. They will prepare an oral presentation providing the arguments for their group’s decision. Each group will choose a spokesperson to present their “solution.” The oral presentations should answer the following questions:

- Why did the group decide on their specific solution?
- What do they think the outcome of that decision will be?
- Were their beliefs and values reflected in the solution they chose?
- What were some possible alternatives to the solution they chose?

While the first two groups are choosing their strategies and preparing their oral presentations, the Objective Observers will meet in their own group to discuss and evaluate the arguments they heard in the other two groups.

The Native American group and the Missionaries/Conquistadors group will give their oral presentations and be graded (each by the other). While these two groups are discussing and grading the other group’s presentation, the Objective Observer Group will meet and prepare a summary of the arguments of the first two groups. They will also predict an historical outcome that will result from the solutions chosen by these groups. After the oral presentation of their summary and historical prediction, the Objective Observers will be graded by the other two groups, and the Objective Observers will get their chance to grade these groups.

Unit Assessment (cont.)

SCORING RUBRIC (for grading the Native American and Missionary/Conquistador Groups)

4. Both solution and future outcomes were presented and both were supported with strong and specific arguments. Creativity was evident.
3. Both solution and future outcomes were presented, but only the solution *or* the future outcomes were supported with strong arguments. The other had weak or no arguments.
2. Both solution and future outcomes were presented, but the arguments for both were weak.
1. Either solution or future outcomes were not presented.

SCORING RUBRIC (for grading the Objective Observers Group)

4. Accurate summary of solutions was presented, and predicted outcomes were supported with strong and specific arguments. Creativity was evident.
3. Accurate summary of solutions was presented, but predicted outcomes did not have supporting arguments.
2. Summary of solutions and predicted outcomes were presented, but summary was inaccurate.
1. Either the summary of the groups' solutions or the prediction of the future outcome was not presented.

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Grades 6–9. Biography of Father Junipero Serra, one of the best known Spanish missionaries who helped establish several missions in California.
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Grades 9–12. Twenty-one illustrated California missions, with a brief history and description of each mission.
- Fremont, Older. *California Missions and Their Romances*. New York: Cowar-McCann, Inc., 1938.
Grades 11–12. Description of how the missions were created by the Spanish missionaries.
- Jackson, Hunt. *Glimpses of California and the Missions*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1903.
Grades 11–12. Details the life of Native Americans at one of the missions run by Father Junipero. Also describes the missions as they are in the present with some historical background.
- Johnson, Paul. *The Golden Era of the Missions: 1769–1834*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1974.
Grades 7–12. Twenty-one illustrated California missions with a brief history and description of each mission.
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Grades 8–12. The Spanish exploration of California and the establishment of the missions. Lots of illustrations!
- Krell, Dorothy. *The California Missions*. Menlo Park: Lane Publishing Company, 1979.
Grades 8–12. An illustrated account of the journey down El Camino Real (The Royal Road) by the Spanish missionaries.
- Marinacci, Barbara and Rudy. *California's Spanish Place-Names: What They Are and How They Got There*. San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1980.
Grades 10–12. Historical explanations of Spanish place-names, from counties to geographical features.
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Grades 8–12. Account of Serra's journey and life in the California missions written in the form of a diary. Some illustrations of the Saints and artifacts found in the missions.
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Grades 10–12. Historical accounts of missionaries, explorers, adventurers, and settlers in California. Includes a timeline.

Young, Stanley. *The Missions of California*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988.

Grades 6–12. An illustrated account that follows the Spanish missionaries as they establish missions down the El Camino Real.

About the Author

Irene Hernandez was born in Pueblo, Colorado and graduated from the University of Colorado with a Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education. While attending the University, she was able to study in Jalapa, Vera Cruz for a semester.

Irene has served the Denver Public Schools for the past 20 years. She was an elementary school teacher for nine years, working in all grades except first. From there, she transferred to middle school where she taught in the Chapter 1 Language Arts Program for over four years.

After completing a Masters Degree in Counseling from the University of Phoenix, Irene took a position as student advisor in a middle school and then as counselor at the Denver School of the Arts. In 1997 she became the site coordinator for the University of Colorado Educational Program where she coordinated the learning experiences of student teachers as well as mentored teachers in her building.

During her twenty years with the Denver Public Schools, Irene has received the Distinguished Teacher of the Year Award and two fellowships from the National Endowments for the Humanities. She is currently holds the position of Curriculum Developer on the staff of the El Alma de la Raza Project.