

California Missions

Lesson Video: Grades 3-5

Overview

Teacher: Osvaldo Rubio
Grade: 4
School: Sherman Oaks Community Charter School
Location: San Jose, California

NCSS Standards-Based Themes: People, Places, and Environments; Culture
Content Standards: Geography, History, Physics

Video Summary

“How can I teach my students California’s state history, integrate technology, and support a bilingual class?” This question prompted fourth-grade teacher Osvaldo Rubio to develop the lesson shown in “California Missions.”

The California Framework for state history requires students to learn about the geography of California; the social, political, cultural, and economic life of its people during the mission period; and the consequences of the meeting between the Native American and Spanish cultures. In this lesson, students begin their research, display their initial findings in projects, and present what they have learned to their classmates. This lesson leads to in-depth research over the course of several weeks and the creation of art and multimedia exhibits for parents’ night, during which the students will serve as docents and explain to classroom visitors what they have learned.

Standards

Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies defines what students should know and be able to do in social studies at each grade level. This lesson correlates to the following standards for elementary school students:

I. Culture

Give examples of how experiences may be interpreted differently by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference; compare ways in which people from different cultures think about and deal with their physical environment and social conditions.

III. People, Places, and Environments

Use appropriate resources, data sources, and geographic tools such as atlases, data bases, grid systems, charts, graphs, and maps to generate, manipulate, and interpret information.

Content Standards: Geography, History, Civics

About the Class

Classroom Profile

“Learning is all about owning knowledge. One way of teaching is letting the students discover their own knowledge and helping decide what is important, because if it’s important to them, they’ll work that much harder.” —Osvaldo Rubio

Osvaldo Rubio teaches fourth-grade California history at the Sherman Oaks Community Charter School in San Jose, California. Adjacent to Silicon Valley, Sherman Oaks Community Charter School is a small, neighborhood school, serving a predominantly Hispanic population. Roughly 20 percent of the students are recent immigrants. The school’s charter focuses on bilingual immersion—all students take both Spanish and English—and on teaching with technology. Since nearly 75 percent of the families at Sherman Oaks qualify for free or reduced lunch, few have access to computers at home. All of the school’s classrooms are equipped with several computers and a range of technology resources.

The school’s focus on technology in the classroom meant that Mr. Rubio’s fourth-grade students were already familiar with searching the Internet, using digital cameras, and making multimedia presentations. Group work was also a regular part of Mr. Rubio’s class; students were accustomed to helping each other with everything from language barriers to lesson content.

Mr. Rubio’s class began the year by studying California’s civilization before Columbus, followed by units on the Aztecs, Native Americans, Mexican history, students’ own family histories, and life in early California. The unit on missions focused on the history of California’s 21 missions, immigration trends, the economy, the daily life and culture of the people, and the geography of the region. Students studied different trades and tools, located the missions on maps, and compared their own lives with how people lived in the past.

The lesson concluded with a field trip to a nearby mission, class presentations, and finally a school-wide exhibition in which students showcased their work on the California Missions unit for parents, visitors, and other students. As the unit fell near the end of the year, Mr. Rubio used the time left to explore how California has changed since the founding of the missions.

Year at a Glance
Pre-Columbian Civilization
The Aztecs
Native Americans
Mexican History
Early California
The Missions
California: Then and Now

Lesson Background

Read this information to better understand the lesson shown in the video.

Content: California Missions

Spanish troops and Franciscan missionaries moved to what is now California and into land occupied by Native Americans to protect the parts of Mexico that had been colonized by Spain and to spread Catholicism. In 1769, Father Junípero Serra founded the first Franciscan mission, Basilica San Diego de Alcalá. Over the next 54 years, 20 more missions were built along El Camino Real (the Royal Highway, or King’s Road), between what is now San Diego and Sonoma.

At each mission, a presidio (fortified garrison) was constructed to provide protection. A chapel served as the center of missionary activity, and farms or ranches were established for the livestock, flowers, grains, and fruits brought by the Spanish. Native Americans who were brought to the missions to learn European farming methods were often overworked, and were forced to accept the Catholic religion and abandon many of their own cultural traditions. Many Native Americans died from diseases brought to the New World by the Europeans.

Although traces of this period in California’s history remain—in the numerous Spanish place names, in the unique adobe architecture, and in the chapels, many of which still hold services—the missionary system ended in the 1830s. Native Americans either stayed on at the missions or returned to their villages. However, life was changed forever for both the Native Americans and the Spanish.

About the Class, cont'd.

Teaching Strategy: Technology as a Learning Tool

Technology can contribute to any learning environment. In Mr. Rubio's class, students use the Internet, digital cameras, and computers for editing student-produced movies, demonstrating how technology is changing the way today's students research, organize, and present their findings. Technology provides opportunities to make a learning environment more student-centered, collaborative, multi-sensory, inquiry-based, and reflective. But more important, technology is making information more accessible to students and teachers.

Watching the Video

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them in a group.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- Why do you think most states encourage the study of state history and geography? What subtopics do you think should be included in the curriculum?
- How do you prepare to teach students about controversial topics?
- How would you create a classroom climate that supports research, collaboration, and the effective use of multimedia by young learners?
- What issues do you think are important to consider when using technology in teaching?

Watch the Video

As you watch "California Missions," take notes on the instructional strategies Mr. Rubio uses to teach students about California missions, especially how he sets up research projects and prepares students for group work and presentations. Note what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

Watching the Video, cont'd.

Reflecting on the Video

Review your notes, then respond to the following questions:

- What struck you about the classroom climate, background information, lesson preparation, teaching strategies, and materials used in this lesson?
- How does Mr. Rubio get students interested in conducting research?
- How does Mr. Rubio draw all of the students into the assignment?
- How does Mr. Rubio support a learning community, and how is it important to the success of this lesson?
- How does Mr. Rubio encourage students to use technology in ways that facilitate learning?
- What will students know and be able to do as a result of this lesson?

Looking Closer

Here's an opportunity to take a closer look at interesting aspects of Mr. Rubio's lesson.



Developing Research Questions: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately three minutes into the video. Watch for about four minutes.

At the start of the video, Mr. Rubio and his students develop guiding questions for conducting research about the missions. As students come up with questions, Mr. Rubio writes them down on green poster board.

- How does Mr. Rubio give students ownership in the lesson?
- What are the benefits and challenges of having students determine what questions to research?
- How can a teacher ensure that state or local content standards will be addressed while still allowing students to determine their own research questions?



Dealing With Controversy: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately 22 minutes into the video. Watch for about three minutes.

After the student presentations, Mr. Rubio and his students discuss what they have learned.

- How does Mr. Rubio handle sensitive topics that emerge in the discussion?
- What do you think students are getting out of the discussion?

Connecting to Your Teaching

Reflecting on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them in a group.

- How do you help young students explore controversial issues related to history (in this video, issues of religion, cultural differences, and the treatment of Native Americans)?
- What determines when and how students will use technology in your classroom and as part of a lesson?
- After introducing a topic, how do you help students conduct in-depth research and refine projects and presentations?
- How is Mr. Rubio's class different from yours? How would you teach this lesson differently to your students?

Taking It Back to Your Classroom

- Ask your students to brainstorm questions they would like to research on a topic they're studying. Ask them to think of the different resources (including technological) they will use to conduct their research. Then have students decide what form their findings will take, as well as criteria for judging their work. After students have presented their findings, have them discuss ways to extend their learning and refine their final research products.
- Ask your students to brainstorm ideas for a Web site for their state. After discussing what information should be included, have students visit the official Web site for your state as well as sites for several other states. Then have them revise their original plan if necessary.
- Ask your students to collect newspaper articles for a month that relate to a topic they are studying in class. For example, students in Mr. Rubio's class might find articles about religious or cultural differences, or about minority issues in society at large—issues that they understand better after having studied the California missions.
- Ask your students to plan an event for sharing what they have learned about an important topic with another classroom or with parents and members of the community. Have students decide what information is most important to share, how to share it (incorporating the use of technology), and how to involve their audience to ensure active learning.

Resources

Print Resources for Students

Kuska, George, and Barbara Linse. *Live Again Our Missions Past: California Missions Through Children's Eyes*. Larkspur, Calif.: Arts Publications, 2000.

Nelson, Libby. *Projects and Layouts: California Missions*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Lerner Publications Company, 1999.

Van Steenwyk, Elizabeth. *The California Missions*. First Books: Examining the Past. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc. 1998.

Young, Stanley. *The Missions of California*. San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle Books, 1998.

Print Resources for Teachers

Anderson, Dale. *The California Missions. Landmark Events in American History*. Cleveland, Ohio: World Almanac Education, 2002.

Ovando, Carlos J., and Virginia P. Collier. *Bilingual and ESL Classrooms: Teaching in Multicultural Contexts*. 2d ed. Columbus, Ohio: WCB/McGraw-Hill, 1997.

Web Resources for Students

California Mission Internet Trail: http://www.escusd.k12.ca.us/mission_trail/missiontrail.html

Constructed by students, this site provides information about many different missions in California.

California Missions Interactive: <http://www.tsoft.net/~cmi/>

On this site, students can take an Internet "field trip" by following the route of two mission historians bicycling along the coast of California.

The California Missions Online Project: <http://www.cuca.k12.ca.us/lessons/missions/missions.html>

Using brief historical overviews and vivid photographs, the California Missions Online Project is an educational resource for all ages.

Web Resources for Teachers

California Mission Studies Association: <http://www.ca-missions.org/links.html>

The CMSA features annotated links, articles, book reviews, and an illustrated glossary of California Missions and early American culture.

California Missions: <http://missions.bgmm.com>

The California Missions site offers comprehensive descriptions and historical background on each mission in the state of California.

Video Resource for Students

Inside the California Missions. 60 minutes. Cultural Videos, 1995. Videocassette.

Notes
