



THE AZTEC CONQUEST & THE BIRTH OF A NEW RACE (MESTIZO)

Level: middle school, 7th grade
Course: social studies

Rationale

There will be many learning components taught in this unit plan. The Aztec life and the conquest by the Spanish will be introduced as the tool to teach these skills and learning components to the students. This portion of history is used because at this age level, students are intrigued by the violence and savagery often displayed in contemporary entertainment. The interest level by students therefore is easily attained. Once interest is accomplished, research, communications skills and higher level thinking will be introduced. This unit will also give students the opportunity to look at two sides of an issue, analyze it and then argue the side that they deem right.

The content taught in this unit is important because students will see where history began in North America-both showing Aztec life prior to European exposure, and then the conquest. The students will also understand how the creation of a new people (Mestizo) began. This is vital in understanding where Mexicans have come from, and who they are.

Summary

There will be three main lessons to this unit. The students will be researching all three segments of this portion of history. Students will write a research paper explaining Aztec life, focusing on warfare, agriculture, and Aztec civilization in general. The second

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portion of the lesson will be the conquest. Students will be required to write a play which describes the events that happened prior to the conquest and the conquest itself. This will be done in groups of four. Each group will be asked to perform their play in front of the class. Students will be asked to give the many reasons that allowed the Spanish to successfully conquer the Aztecs. The last portion of this lesson involves Dona Marina or La Malinche. She will be put on trial by the class. Some students will be required to defend her as a heroine, others will prosecute her as a traitor. The class will form the whole court as judge, jury, defense, and prosecution. As a closure activity, students will communicate on key pals with a middle school in Mexico city, and ask questions about what remains of Aztec culture or how La Malinche is perceived today by most Mexicans. There will also be a short historical fiction reading by Rudolfo Anaya's The Legend Of La Llorona.

Time Needed

Two to three weeks

Materials

Textbook - Latin America & Canada

6 books about the Aztec Culture

5 books about La Malinche (version by Elona Manna)

The Legend of La Llorona - class set or one book if reading to class

6 books regarding the conquest of the Aztecs

Internet access

Props and costumes for play and for court

Encyclopedia set

Procedures

Springboard

The first thing introduced will be a short lecture (5 minutes) on Aztec culture and warfare. Also the teacher will start reading the book The Legend Of La Llorona by Rudolfo Anaya, which is a short (105 pages) historical fiction novel regarding the conquest, and Hernan Cortes & Dona Marina's relationship. A chapter will be read everyday at the beginning of class. If your librarian can order a class set, students could possibly read them silently everyday.

Assignments

Students, in groups of four, will be given an assignment sheet that explains to them the following assignments:

- I. Write a two page report (or more) explaining what life was like prior to Spanish conquest. Focus on agriculture, warfare, and what made the Aztec civilization so complex. (Each source listed on the bibliography must be annotated).

2. Write a play on how Hernan Cortes and his army conquered the Aztecs. Include as many of the contributing factors that allowed Cortes to conquer the Aztecs as possible. Each student should be responsible for a portion of the play. For example, one or two students do the research another writes the play, and the last individual brings props and costumes. Use the vocabulary list of Nahuatl to write Montezuma's Malinche's dialogue in the play. At the end of the project each group will act out the play in front of the class.

3. Research Dona Marina's personal life and her role in the conquest, then list all significant events. Categorize each of these events in two sections, one in which she is a heroine, and in the other she is a traitor. Then we will have classroom court, with all students participating from Judge, to lawyers (defense & prosecution) and jury. Students who feel strongly about Malinche's being a heroine or traitor will be asked to be the lawyers. Each student after the trial will be asked to write a one page report explaining why they thought Malinche was a traitor or a heroine. There is a lesson plan on the internet which explains how to set up your classroom, please see my bibliography for information.

Mini Lessons

There will be mini lessons taught throughout the researching and writing of the project. Here is a list of some of the mini lessons: Overview of the main Aztec gods and polytheism; How to annotate a bibliography, book, magazine, and encyclopedia; Short lectures on Aztec warfare and culture.

Follow up Activities

Link up with a school in Mexico and ask students their questions regarding what is remaining of the Aztec culture, and what they think about Dona Marina and her role in the conquest (Internet key-pals). Suggestions of how to find key-pals are included in the following bibliography. Students will be asked to think about Mexicans today and write about what they think are positive contributions of mixing the Spanish and Aztec cultures together. A list of Nahuatl words that are used in Mexico today will be given to students to analyze.

Bibliography

Books

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Internet Sources

Courtroom Lesson on Internet

gopher://ericir.syr.edu:70/00/Lesson/Subject/SocialStudies/cecsst.06

Key Pal information

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Nahuatl vocabulary list

nahuatl-l@ACC.FAU.EDU