

ELLA-KARI LOFTFIELD: CONQUEST: CONFLICT, COOPERATION, AND COMPROMISE



Desiderio Hernández Xochitiotzin: La historia de Tlaxcala y su contribución a lo mexicano

Building a unit of study regarding the conquest of Mexico for students in New Mexico poses a bit of a challenge. Obviously Cortés and Columbus never came to New Mexico. These names are mentioned only briefly in the standards. But the same system of expansion used on the Mexica people in what is now Mexico was put to use in New Mexico as well. Since there are greater resources available for studying the conquest of Mexico than of New Mexico, a strong foundation in the patterns of conquest will enable students to “read between the lines” of the New Mexico sources. Students will analyze the patterns of Spanish expansion in the Americas by defining it, describing the primary characteristics of it, and creating analogies by explaining it to other people. The unit is designed to allow students to “be” historians, look for patterns in history that are larger than the individuals who participated in them, and challenge different interpretations.

- ❧ Mythbusters
- ❧ People, Places, Patterns
- ❧ Indigenous Pictorial History

Ella-Kari Loftfield
History 686: The Conquest of Spanish America
Professor Kimberly Gauderman
Summer 2009

Name of Unit: Conquest: Conflict, Cooperation, and Compromise

Suggested Grade Level: 7th Social Studies and Language Arts

Essential Question: How are historical events larger than the people in them?

Primary Objective: Students will analyze the patterns of Spanish expansion in the Americas by defining it, describing the primary characteristics of it, and creating analogies by which to explain it to other people.

Guiding Questions: Here is a sampling of the guiding questions:

- What do we already know about the conquest?
- Who was involved in the conquest?
- What patterns in Spanish behavior emerge from the story?
- How do we know about the conquest?
- How were the Spanish able to defeat the Mexica?
- How should we evaluate sources?
- What are the primary characteristics of Spanish expansion in the Americas?
- What was Spanish expansion like?

Overview and Rationale for the Unit:

Building a unit of study regarding the conquest of Mexico for students in New Mexico poses a bit of a challenge. Obviously Cortés and Columbus never came to New Mexico. These names are mentioned only briefly in the standards. But the same system of expansion used on the Mexica people in what is now Mexico was put to use in New Mexico as well. Since there are greater resources available for studying the conquest of Mexico than of New Mexico, a strong foundation in the patterns of conquest will enable students to "read between the lines" of the New Mexico sources.

Because of the increasing demands placed on teachers to adhere to strict timelines for teaching and following prescribed content, I worry that students get little time to "be" historians themselves. As presented in history textbooks, history is a done deal. It is not open to interpretation and the influence of new sources and ways of thinking. The unit is designed to allow students to "be" historians, look for patterns in history that are larger than the individuals who participated in them, and challenge different interpretations.

State Standards: Pertinent state standards have been cited in each lesson. But there is a heavy emphasis on understanding NM State Benchmark I-D: **Research historical events and people from a variety of perspectives.** The theme of conquest, and the richness of resources related to the conquest of Mexico make this an ideal opportunity to address this benchmark.

Reflection on Graduate Assignment:

The unit that I present in the following pages would not have been possible prior to my taking this course. From things as simple as names to concepts as complicated as culture, I have a far greater depth of knowledge than I had. Much of what I knew regarding the conquest did withstand Restall's myth busting but not all of it. A fan of Michael Wood's PBS series *Conquistador*, I was willing to believe that Moctezuma and the Mexica fell awed at the feet of their returning gods. Now, instead of watching this documentary for the historical truths it presents, we will watch it for the historical interpretation it presents and contrast that to other scholarly materials.

I was so taken by Matthew Restall's *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, that I structured my entire unit around the concept: students begin with a pretest and constantly refer back to it as they build their understanding through examination of the resources. When our lack of expertise limits our ability to do the history ourselves, we will look at the conclusions that secondary sources have drawn and compare the arguments made in them to each other.

I was familiar with many of the Spanish sources regarding the conquest but had no idea that there was such a rich collection of indigenous voices to be heard regarding the conquest. I think that the images presented in the various codices will really appeal to my students. It also presents a perfect opportunity to contrast how much we don't know about indigenous response in New Mexico. Applying concepts of universalism, though, students may come to an understanding that indigenous *conflict, cooperation and compromise* in New Mexico was motivated by similar concerns.

Although I have had students construct concept maps of Spanish Expansion in the past, I had never built my unit around that assessment per se. I have always had a commitment to understanding patterns, and the role that individuals versus groups play in history but I have never articulated it as precisely as I can now. I think that my newfound commitment to the concept will help me communicate it to my students.