

Native Californians and the Portola Expedition

Central Historical Question:

What do diary entries tell us about the purpose of the Portola Expedition and about Native Americans in California at the time?

Materials:

- Native Californians and the Portola Expedition PowerPoint
- Portola Expedition Timeline
- Visual Analysis Questions
- Documents A-B
- Guiding Questions

Notes:

- This lesson was designed for use with younger students. Older students may not need all of instructional scaffolds included in the lesson.

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction. Explain to students that during this lesson they will be analyzing a series of historical documents to better understand the lives of Native Americans in California in the 18th century and the purpose of an expedition by Spanish explorers. Use the PowerPoint to establish background information on Native Americans in California and the first European explorers.

Slide 2: Native Americans in California before the Spanish. Native Americans have lived in the geographic area of California for thousands of years. Prior to the first Europeans arriving in what is today the state of California, there were approximately 300,000 Native Americans, constituting about 500 different groups (known as sub-tribes). There were about 100 different languages spoken across the area.

Slide 3: Spanish Exploration. Europeans began exploring the state in the 16th century, when an expedition led by Spanish conquistador Juan Cabrillo sailed up the California coast in 1542 and claimed the land for Spain.

Slide 4: English and Russian Exploration. It is important to note that the Spanish were not the only Europeans planning to establish a presence in California. In 1579, Sir Francis Drake, an English explorer, stopped in Northern California during his expedition around North and South America and claimed the area for England. Russia also had a presence in Alta California. Russian fur traders traveled the Pacific Coast and the Russian-American Fur Company established Fort Ross in Northern California in 1812.

2. Image Analysis. As a warm-up activity, students will analyze an image created shortly after the establishment of Fort Ross to begin to understand what life was like

for Native Americans in California in the first decades of the 19th century and to practice weighing the relative value of documents as historical evidence.

Slide 5: Image Analysis. Display Image A and have students complete the image analysis questions in small groups. Debrief as a whole class.

3. Explain to students that they are now going to explore two diary entries from Spanish explorers to gain a deeper understanding of Native Californians in the 18th century. Return to the PowerPoint to provide background information about the Portola Expedition.

Slide 6: The Portola Expedition. In 1762, King Carlos III of Spain appointed Gaspar de Portola governor of California. In 1769, he sent Portola to explore California and set up a system of missions. Missions were religious outposts established to help expand the Spanish presence in California and to convert Native Americans to Christianity. The expedition included soldiers, mapmakers, engineers, and Catholic friars (or Padres), such as Junipero Serra and Juan Crespi.

Slide 7: California Missions. The Portola Expedition set out from Baja California in 1769 and headed north. The Expedition established its first mission in San Diego and then headed further north in search of Monterey Bay, which Cabrillo had described in his voyage up the coast. The Expedition travelled as far north as present-day San Francisco before returning to San Diego. In the decades following the expedition, the Spanish built 21 missions across California, from San Diego to just north of San Francisco. During the expedition, the Spanish came into contact with several groups of Native Americans. Most of the Native Americans they encountered had never previously had contact with Europeans.

Timeline. Go through the Portola Expedition Timeline as a whole class.

Slide 8: Central Historical Question. Explain to students that they are now going to look at two diary entries written by members of the Portola Expedition that describe Native Americans. The question that we are going to explore is: What do Portola Expedition diary entries tell us about the purpose of the expedition and about Native Americans in California at the time? It may be helpful to explain to students that these diary entries were written with an understanding that they would be read by others as histories of the expedition.

4. Document Analysis.
 - a. Hand out Document A along with the Guiding Questions. Display slide 9 (Native Americans in California) so that students can reference it as they read the documents.
 - i. *Source:* Before reading the diary entry, have students source it by answering guiding questions 1 through 3. Share out responses.

- ii. *Guiding questions*: In small groups, have students read the document and answer guiding questions 4 through 8. Share out responses.
 - b. Hand out Document B.
 - i. *Source*: Before reading the diary entry, have students source it by answering guiding questions 1 through 3. Share out responses.
 - ii. *Guiding questions*: In small groups, have students read the document and answer the guiding questions 4 through 8. Share out responses.
 5. Final Discussion.
 - a. What do these two diary entries tell us about Native Americans in California at the time of the Portola Expedition?
 - b. What do they tell us about the expedition and the beliefs of the Spanish explorers?
 - c. How do the diary entries compare to the image?
 - d. Whose perspectives are missing from the documents in this lesson?
 - e. The diary entries in this lesson describe two groups of Native Americans. What are possible problems with trying to use these documents to understand life for Native Americans across all of California?
 - f. What other kinds of sources might we look for to learn more about Native Americans in California?
 - g. Where else might we look to learn more about how the Spanish and Native Americans interacted with each other?
 - h. Where else might we look to learn more about the Portola Expedition?
-

Sources

Image A:

“Bateau du port de San Francisco,” painted by Louis Choris. ca. 1815. California Cornerstones: Selected Images from The Bancroft Library Pictorial Collection. UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library. Calisphere. Retrieved from: <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/tf6p3008w7/>

Document A:

Costansó, M. (1911). *The Portola Expedition of 1769-1770, diary of Miguel Costanso*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, pp. 33-35. Retrieved from: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=txu.059173001308152;view=1up;seq=37>

Document B:

Crespí, J. (1927). *Fray Juan Crespi: missionary explorer on the Pacific coast, 1769-1774*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California press, pp. 220-221. Retrieved from: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015003943332;view=1up;seq=306>