

# Teaching Spanish Heritage in the Context of the Ancient Mediterranean

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ESPANOLA, NEW MEXICO

**Subject:** Bilingual World History (bilingual classes)

**Level:** Grades 9–12

**Length of Unit:** Four weeks

## Readings for the Teacher:

- Armento, Beverly J. *Eclos del Pasado*. Capítulos 3, 7, 11–15. Boston: Houghton, 1992.
- Bass, G. F. “Oldest Known Shipwreck” (see General Bibliography).
- Bikai, Patricia M. “The Phoenicians” (see General Bibliography).
- Casson, Lionel. *The Ancient Mariners* (see General Bibliography).
- Krieger, Larry S. *World History: Perspectives on the Past*. Chapters 3, 5–8. Lexington: Heath, 1997.
- Roberts, Calvin, and Susan Roberts. *A History of New Mexico*. Chapters 4–7. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004.

## PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Espanola is a geographically large school district in northern New Mexico with ten elementary schools spread throughout a basically rural, at times mountainous, area with pockets of settlement, some still without electricity until the early 1950s. The elementary schools feed into a regional middle school where different community identifications and loyalties come into conflict on a daily basis. The male students in particular either make the transition into larger group acceptance before leaving for high school or they remain identified by their community subgroup and throughout their high school years stick with this negative, isolationist point of view, self-enforcing a “group thing” and denying themselves many new experiences and fresh input. Social promotion usually catches up with students by tenth grade, and we have a very high drop-out rate. Contributing factors are lack of effective intervention techniques and the scarcity of courses that offer alternative vocational training for those frustrated by rigid course requirements. The community as a whole is not academically oriented nor is there much parental involvement in the schools after grades 1 and 2. The teaching

staff tends to come from the same community and the overall vision is very parochial, with not much support or interest in outside innovation. The level of expectation seems to be very low in comparison to other communities I have observed in my training.

Our student body is 85% Hispanic (descendants of original families who settled in the area beginning in 1580). The majority speak a mixture English and Spanish, but tend to score low in nationally normed academic test of English reading comprehension, writing, math, science and social studies. We have 10% Native American (Pueblo) students, also with language interference from the home language, who are mainstreamed into academics but keep apart socially, and until recently were the outcast group. Now the negative focus has shifted to our growing number of students from Mexico, both legal and undocumented, and we are witnessing more overt acts of prejudice from both staff and student body.

I teach two broad categories of students throughout the day. I have NEP (Non-English Proficient), recent arrivals to the U.S. who cannot read, write, or speak English. The second group, LEP (Limited English Proficient), is either immigrants with some social English but who need alternative teaching and assessment techniques or local Hispanic students (the larger number) who are U.S. citizens, their families having been in the area since the 1600s. They score below the fortieth percentile in Reading and Language Arts and are designated “At Risk.” This is due to isolation, home language interference, and low community/home/school expectation.

The community was largely agricultural until the opening of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in World War II. Slowly, more and more residents are leaving the farm and working in support services or being trained for blue collar positions under federal mandates to hire in line with Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action. Outreach programs exist at the high school in order to locate more skilled Hispanic and Native American candidates, but the self-deselection process mentioned above that begins in the middle school unfortunately limits the number of students these programs reach. We do have a steadily growing number of graduates going on to college, and slowly changes are being made in the community consciousness regarding at least the financial value of a good education. These college-bound young people are not the students I work with.

## LESSON PLANS

In addition to the tenth grade “At Risk” students, I am assigned for World History, there are many juniors and seniors who still lack credits for graduation. These students either have gone to summer school or have taken correspondence courses in an effort to make up for not passing the course in previous years. They start the academic year already burned out from summer study. History is required for graduation but these are the students who have already sat through one or two years of history without passing and so they come to me unenthusiastic about yet another history course. Also in the class are non-English speakers whom counselors rationalize I will be able to help pass history since I already need to go more slowly for the repeat group. I have no set of text books that I can use for both groups, and so I have to become the text and a highly animated one in order to simply try to generate an interest in history. In the past I tried the traditional approach beginning the year’s instruction with the prehistoric era and hoping to show the students through chronological, ordered progression how this all ends up where we are today, and how the U.S. didn’t just spring into existence out of nowhere. But I see my feedback in by students’ faces, how they try to go along with it because they like me or want to humor me into passing them. History itself doesn’t have any relevance for them other than a credit they need in order to “get outta school.”

With all of the above in mind and with the Institute behind me, I have been thinking about how to “grab them [my students] where they’re at” today, in their little teen world of Espanola, New Mexico. I have decided to bring them backwards in time to a place they have in common (Spain) whose influence affected all three of the cultures I see sitting before me. I am hoping that this will help them to comprehend history’s impact more tangibly.

My plan is to start with New Mexico history, trace it back to its origins in Spain, and then bring in the subject matter of the “Cargoes” Institute, placing Spain in the context of the ancient Mediterranean world. I want my students to learn, for example, the Phoenicians went to Spain in ancient times, and that because of this they may have Middle Eastern blood in their veins. I plan not to teach about Spain in a vacuum, but rather to explore with my students the questions “What is a Spaniard?” and “What is a Hispanic?” One reason why I want to emphasize this point is that many of my students take great pains to insist they are “Spanish” and not Mexican (pejorative). When students realize that history did affect their parents’ and their grandparents’ lives in New Mexico, I will journey backward in time to Spain and ultimately to the civilizations of the Mediterranean—all of which run through their veins. Seeing the diversity of cultures and of cultural interchange throughout the ancient Mediterranean region may help my students to become more tolerant of other with different backgrounds from their own.

The concept of trade and “cargoes from three continents” is an excellent medium for teaching about the ancient Medi-

terranean world and making connections with the world my students live in today. All the patterns in their families’ histories are there: migration for economic reasons, exchange of ideas, conflict of cultures, mixing of races, and the ways in which these factors have changed cultures over time. These connections will not be researched in great depth by these students, but they will be many and constant. I believe that by the end of the course the students will be making parallels on their own and will have a new view of what history is and how it can still serve us if we take time to make the connections and learn from them. I hope to help my students become a bit more tolerant as they learn how differences contribute to our world.

As a teacher I have generally been more comfortable with an ordered, chronological approach. Starting in modern times, as I plan to do, and going backwards in time is not the traditional approach to teaching history. I have decided to try this because in the final analysis the most important thing for me is to have students who enjoy history, see its relevance to their lives, and want to learn more. Through the internet and other technologies, students have access to more material than ever before. They can go into depth on their own if I can manage to pique their interest. Having had the good fortune to travel the world, I am struck by the shared humanity, in spite of differences, of diverse cultures. If starting with today and going backwards makes students see the relevance to their own lives of what went on “back then” among “guys” who did not react very differently to the same types of problems my students and their families are having today, then maybe they will be more awake (literally!) and receptive.

## PART TWO: THE TEACHING PLAN—RESULTS

During the school year following the Cargoes Institute, I used the entire fall semester to move backwards from New Mexico to Spain. The annual Santa Fe Fiestas, celebrated in September, helped me move into this theme. I ended up spending more time on New Mexico and on its relation to the U.S. when it was part of Spain. Then I turned to Mexico, once part of our “Manifest Destiny,” and to the War with Mexico and subsequent events. I was able to include the concept of revolutions—in the U.S., France, Latin America—and the ways in which these affected New Mexico statehood as, in our region, the role of Mexico diminished and the role of the United States grew.

When I then began to teach Spanish heritage (Mediterranean culture, language, history, trade, migration), I was able to hold students’ attention and pique their interest longer than usual. We then, in January, returned to a more traditional format, and began an in-depth study of Egypt, the Middle East, Greece, and Rome. These civilizations made more sense to the students when they realized their own connection, via Spanish heritage, to these heretofore obscure and distant civilizations.

## LESSON PLANS

I hope to develop a social studies/history unit to be used by teachers in the Bilingual Program. We have a great need for culturally relevant and low reading level/high interest supplemental materials at the secondary level. Most textbooks are published in the eastern U.S. and stick to a white Protestant point of view with only passing reference to Native American or Spanish presence in the Southwest. (Did you know the first Thanksgiving was not celebrated by the Pilgrims in 1620 but by Juan de Onate, who founded Espanola in 1598? And we will have a new U.S. postage stamp commemorating it!) I also hope to assemble handouts to be shared among teachers attending our annual Bilingual Education Conference at the state level. Now that I know this type of instruction plan is not as far-fetched as I once thought, I will try to expand on it by incorporating more local archaeology speakers, and museum or even field site visits if we can get funds.

During the year, we had interesting classroom discussions about comparisons students were able to make between the spread of civilization from Greece and Rome into Europe, comparing it to the spread of European culture and Christianity in the New World by Spain and the resultant enduring influence. Students could really connect with that. The Native American students were able to contribute their point of view that all the "positive" effects of "civilization" were not necessarily considered to be so by the conquered. We were able to make the study of Current Events timelier by comparing present-day labor practices in third World countries and the Assembled in Mexico ("Maquilladora plant") phenomenon, with ancient slavery and trading practices.

### PART THREE: RECURRING EVENTS AS APPROACHES TO LESSONS

At the outset of teaching the Institute material, I planned to group my themes occasionally around events in the school year calendar (for example, the Santa Fe Fiestas in September).

The list below contains examples of themes based on recurring events, which can easily be connected with the study of ancient Mediterranean trade and can serve as the jumping-off point for lessons.

September: We celebrate Santa Fe "Fiestas," a three day weekend commemorating the bloodless "reconquest" of native Pueblo Indians by the Spanish. Most students don't know why it is a state event, and know even less that it is not even politically correct as done, so giving a background of the historical even will be the perfect link to Spain.

October: National Hispanic Heritage Month and Columbus Day. This leads into a discussion of trade connections, the spread of Spanish language and customs, and the ethnic make-up of "Spanish-ness" (Iberian, Celtic, Phoenician, Greek Roma, Arab, and Jewish), and the beginning of our study of the Mediterranean area.

December: The Christmas season leads into a study of religions (paganism, myths, monotheism, polytheism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam). There are many descendants of Spanish Jews (Conversos) now coming out about their lineage after centuries of believing they were Catholics.

February: Black Awareness Month which leads to a study of Africa and the archaeological origin of mankind, Nubia, Egypt, slavery, and civil rights.