The Mission Complexes of San Antonio, Texas

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For World and Physical Geography – freshman and sophomore college courses.
Two weeks – 6 fifty-minute classes or 4 ninety-minute classes.

Introduction:

The purpose of this lesson is to learn about the native Americans and the San Antonio mission complexes established on the far northern frontier (or fringe) of New Spain. Using several sources, the students will identify the indigenous people present when the Spanish arrived. The students will see how the mission complexes transformed the lives of indigenous people and Spanish inhabitants. The students also will consider the fate of those Indians who did not enter the mission system. The unit will conclude with a field study at Mission San Francisco de la Espada.

San Antonio, Texas is a part of Indian history as well as Spanish colonial history. What was named San Antonio by the Spanish, was populated by indigenous peoples many years before the Spanish explorers arrived. San Antonio remained a part of the Spanish colonial empire, and then Mexico, until Texas declared and won independence in the 1830s. The Spanish government also financed explorers and Spanish citizens from the Canary Islands to colonize San Antonio, and as part of Nueva Espana, experienced many of the upheavals of the Spanish colonial past. Thus, there are pieces of Indian history and colonial Spain which are part of San Antonio’s cultural landscape. For example, the mission complexes, now part of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, present definite stylistic references to churches in Spain and Mexico. But the missions were built with indigenous labor – Indians who entered mission life and became known as Mission Indians. In order to fully understand Spain’s presence in the “New World”, one must consider Spain’s efforts at control and empire, including the establishment of missions. To appreciate San Antonio’s past and its present, one must examine the places where “Mission Indians” lived, were converted and assimilated into the Spanish way of life.

Basic Understandings

- There were numerous groups of indigenous people living in Texas when the Spanish arrived.
- The Spanish sent missionaries to convert the indigenous populations and teach them how to become good Spanish citizens.
- There were multiple purposes behind the establishment of the frontier mission complexes --religious, social, and economic.
- The mission complexes were contentious institutions, with some Indians embracing the communities while other Indians attacked the colonizers’ institutions.
- The mission complexes transformed the lives of the Indians, as well as those of the colonizers.
• The mission complexes contributed to the cultural imprint of present-day San Antonio, Texas.

Essential Questions:

• Why did the Spanish set up missions?
• Why did Spanish missionaries consider North American native groups uncivilized?
• Was life for the natives living in missions better or worse than their lives before?
• What happened to the Indians who did not enter the missions?
• Why did different physical characteristics of the frontier create a unique cultural landscape?
• Why would someone from Spain be interested in exploring the frontiers (fringes) of New Spain?
• Why did “fringe elements” of Spanish society seek to accompany missionaries into the frontier of New Spain?

Key Vocabulary:

• Acequia– irrigation ditches (which, in Mission Espada, directed water from the San Antonio River to the missions and to fields)
• Aqueduct – a conduit for carrying running water
• Camposanto – cemetery
• Convento - Priestly residence and church office
• Granary - a storehouse for grain
• Spanish colonial workshops – places used by Franciscan missionaries to teach skills like architecture, blacksmithing, loom weaving, spinning and masonry to mission Indians
• Labor – cropland
• Rancho de las Cabras – ranch outside of Floresville, TX where cattle were raised
• Encomienda – institution whereby Spanish overseers received free Indian vassals with work or tribute obligations, in return for the Indians' protection and evangelization
• Presidio- fort or fixed military installation
• Hacienda – large agricultural estate

Concepts:

• Assimilation – to absorb into a cultural tradition; to make or become similar
• Cultural Diffusion – process by which knowledge and achievements of one area are spread (diffused) to another/ other areas
• Cultural landscape – forms and artifacts placed on the natural landscape by the activities of various human occupants.
• Cultural ecology – branch of cultural geography that studies the relationship between human societies and natural environments
Actors:

- Lipan Apaches
- Mescalero
- Tonkawa
- Coahuiltecans – scattered bands of Indians living in part of New Spain (present day South Texas).
- Mission Indians – Indians who lived in the mission complexes and adopted the Catholic faith and the Spanish language
- Franciscans – Catholic order of priests and brothers who established mission complexes, including Mission Espada
- Comanches - members of an American Indian people ranging from Wyoming and Nebraska south into New Mexico and Texas
- Chichimeca – term applied to Indians who ranged across a broad expanse of territory from Saltillo, Mexico in the north to the Rio Lerma in the South

Activity 1
Map Activity: Identify South Texas Indians

Map Study of Indian groups in Texas – Early 18th century

Study the attached map identifying the groups of Indians that lived in Texas during Mission period, as well as the map on this website: [http://www.lsjunction.com/places/indians.htm](http://www.lsjunction.com/places/indians.htm)
Locate the San Antonio/Mission Espada area.
List the names of the Indian groups located in the San Antonio/Mission Espada area

On the attached map, use the following colors to highlight the map information.

1. Use a black pen or pencil color to emphasize the political boundaries of the states.(present day United States)
2. Use a blue pencil color to trace over the rivers indicated.
3. Use an orange pencil color to underline the names of the rivers.
4. Use a red pencil color to underline the names of the Indians groups.
5. Use a green pencil color to circle the cities with mission complexes.

What does the map tell you about the presence of Indians in Texas when the Spanish arrived?

Activity 2
Texas Almanac Activity: Reading South Texas Indians

Read from the Texas Almanac, “American Indians in Texas.” Go to the following web address and from the left hand menu, chose and click on American Indians. The article will appear. [http://www.texasalmanac.com/topics/culture/american-indian/american-indian](http://www.texasalmanac.com/topics/culture/american-indian/american-indian)
Answer the following questions.
Which group or groups of Indians entered into the Mission complexes? (Name the group or groups)

What happened to them? (totally assimilated?)

How did Mission Indians assimilate? Give several examples: weaving, religion, language, names.

What Indians foods, if any, survived?

How did the Spanish entrada transform the lives of the Mission Indians? Do the Mission Indians identify as Indian, Mexican, Mexican-American or Spanish?

Did the Spanish missionaries achieve their goals of assimilating the Mission Indians?

Was this a good thing or a bad thing from your perspective?

Study the pictures of the descendants of the Mission Indians during the field study at Mission Espada. Of what does their dress remind you?

Why were some Indians willing to enter the Mission complexes and assimilate into the Spanish/Mexican culture?

Name two groups of Indians (with a few individual exceptions) whose members did not enter the Mission complexes.

Why did these indigenous groups chose not enter the Mission complexes?

Name two groups of Indians that raided the Mission complexes?

What eventually was the fate of these groups? (removal?)

Which Indians still remain in Texas? Name the reservations available to these groups. Do you know economic activities that keep these groups financially stable?

What famous warrior was housed in the tower at Ft. Sam Houston before being transferred to Florida?

Activity 3

Research Mission Espada

Find out about Mission Espada:
• Go to the National Park Service site.  www.nps.gov
• Search for national parks in Texas; then select San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.
• Look at the names of the four missions.
• Go to the map and study the positions of the four missions along the San Antonio River.
• Print a copy of the map.
• With a blue pencil, trace the course of the San Antonio River.
• With a black pencil, write the names of the four missions which line the River.
• Locate Mission San Francisco de la Espada
• Find and mark the Espada Aqueduct with a red pencil
• Find and mark the acequias with a red pencil.
• From the left hand margin on the web site, select History and Culture.
• Read the information provided on these two topics.
• From the left hand margin, select the topics Nature and Science.
• Read the information provided on these two topics.
• Complete handout using the information provided in the History and Culture sections.  (See handout below)
• Complete handout using the information provided in the Nature and Science sections.  (See handout below)

Activity 4
Question Sheet about Mission Espada

Use the Mission Espada page of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park website (linked with the National Park Service website – nps.gov). In the left hand margin, select the History and Culture sections. Answer the following questions with information found in these sections. Submit Handout at the next class meeting for a class grade.

1. From where does the word acequia come?
2. What is an acequia?
3. Why was the acequia system so important to Mission Espada and the other mission complexes?
4. Who built the acequias?
5. Why do you suppose that San Antonio has 50 miles of acequias?
6. Is the acequia system still in use today?
7. Should the acequia system (what remains) be preserved?  If so, how can the system be preserved?
8. Which Mission acequia was recently opened?
Activity 5
Definitions and Questions.

Use the Mission Espada page of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park website (linked with the National Park Service website – nps.gov). In the left hand margin, select the Nature and Science sections. Define the following terms with information found in these sections. Submit Handout at the next class meeting for a class grade.

1. Ecosystem

2. Biosphere

3. Non-native species

4. Riparian

5. Habitat

6. Invasive species

7. Disturbed land

8. Caminos Reales

9. Cochineal bug

10. Scrubland

11. Why were the missions founded?

12. Why was the concept of a medieval town used?

13. What are two trees the Spanish brought to provide fruit?
14. Where were livestock raised?

15. What were four crops the Spanish raised?

16. What were four native crops brought from Mexico City?

Activity 6
Field Visit: Mission San Francisco de la Espada of San Antonio, Texas

Directions for completing the field guide. Please try to complete the following field activity as a member of a group of two, three or four other students. If it is not possible to coordinate your schedules, you may complete the field activity as a single student. If you complete the field activity as part of a group, please be sure that all members of the group contribute to the final product. Please include the names of all the group members on the final product. Answers to the following questions must be typed on a separate sheet of paper. Each group member must have a copy of the Field Guide Form to record answers and observations. Each group member should be prepared to turn in his notes and observations with the final product. Work may be divided among group members, but each person in the group must contribute to the final product. At the end of the project, I may distribute forms so that you may evaluate the contribution of each team member. Unless otherwise advised, each member of the team will receive the same grade. Refer to the grading rubric as you work.

Field Guide Form

1. Visit Mission Espada, which is located off H410 approximately five (5) miles east of the Palo Alto campus.

2. Study the maps at Park headquarters. Can you see the locations of the structures of the mission complex? Can you locate the acequia system and the aqueduct on the maps?

3. Walk to the acequia behind the chapel at Mission Espada. Describe what you see.

4. Who built the acequias, and why were they built?

5. Look across the street. Describe what you see. Can you imagine how the site and the surrounding area may have looked in 1731?

6. Describe some examples of human impact on the landscape.
7. Do you recognize any grasses, trees or other vegetation that are native to this area? Non-native? Give two examples of each. (You may need to ask the docent or the park ranger for assistance).

8. What kinds of crops were cultivated? From where did the livestock come? What kinds of fruit trees were grown? (See your answers on Handout 2).

9. What skills were taught at Mission Espada? Which skill was unique to Mission Espada? (See the information in the museum at Mission Espada).

10. Using the map of the layout of Mission Espada distributed in class walk to and locate the following places: Indian Quarters, Spanish colonial workshops; Granary; Church and Sacristy; Convento; Camposanto; Museum.

11. Walk to the Museum. Study the pictures of descendants of Mission Indians on the walls. Are you surprised some descendants still live in the community or the area? Why do you suppose some of the descendants of the Mission Indians still live in the neighborhood surrounding Mission Espada?

12. Locate the looms and spinning wheels in the museum. Can you tell anything about the kind of fabric woven by the Mission Indians?

13. Look at the farm and ranch tools in the museum. Where were cattle raised – in what present-day town?

14. What is your overall impression of Mission Espada? Did the field visit give you a sense of the Spanish legacy in this part of Texas? What components of Spanish culture remain as part of San Antonio’s cultural landscape?

15. Do you have suggestions for improving the field guide?

Rubric for Grading Field Experience:

Were all the questions answered? 25 points
Were complete sentences used? 20 points
Was there adequate detail or elaboration, i.e. more than yes or no 25 points
Was attention paid to grammar/mechanics/sentence structure/spelling 15 points
Were directions followed: Was the paper typed? 10 points
Was there evidence in the elaboration that the Person went to the Mission? 5 points

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100 points
Extension

Have students visit the following web site and look at the chart with the different Coahuilteco speakers. Answer the following question: Why are all of these groups categorized as Coahuiltecan? Share your answer with the class.

UT-Austin web site: Texas Beyond history
http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/st-plains/images/hel5.1

Resource List

Books:


Web Sites:


San Antonio River Authority web site – www.sara_tx.org


UT-Austin web site Texas Beyond history
http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/st-plains/images/hel5.1

Texas Almanac – http://www.texasalmanac.com/topics/culture/american-ind
Map 1.
Texas and the Southern Plains
Early 18th Century
Fig. 75.—Texas and the Southern Plains, early 18th century.