

UNIT INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS

Themes in Early California History: History Through Art, Art Through History

Readings in this unit show students how a painting or other work of art can be a window into another time period. Art is an exciting starting point for encouraging a student's curiosity and interest. It can bring a subject like history to life.

The first oil painting created in California, Ferdinand Deppe's, *Mission San Gabriel*, is the focal point of this lesson plan because it will be featured in the upcoming October 2017 and January of 2018 exhibition at the Laguna Art Museum: *California Mexicana: Missions to Murals, 1820-1930*. Other primary and secondary sources in this unit will provide further context on the painting. The resources can be used in combination or as stand alone documents, serving as a starting point for further inquiry and study, expanding students' knowledge of Mexican-era California.

BACKGROUND:

Before California became a part of the United States, it was called *Alta California (Upper California)*. It was a northern province of Spain from 1542 to 1821, and a northern province of Mexico for a twenty-five year period, from 1821-1846.

Spanish colonization through the missions, presidios and pueblos did not begin until 1769. At that time, the first Spanish settlers brought cattle, horses and sheep in numbers that were great enough to alter the ecology of California. The Franciscan fathers initiated and sustained a cattle hide and tallow trade in order to procure the goods needed to maintain the missions. This trade was sustained through Indian labor and along with the spread of disease, the consequences for native hunting and gathering were lasting and grim. This unit addresses the California History-Social Science Standard 4.2.5: "Describe the daily lives of the people, native and non-native, who occupied the presidios, missions, ranchos and pueblos."

The missions were central to economic and social changes that occurred during the first half of the Mexican-era, between 1821 and 1834. In 1834 privately owned Ranchos increased in size and number because the California missions were *secularized*. This means that 1) the Franciscan fathers were released from mission land grants as overseers, 2) vast mission lands were granted by the governor of Alta California to private ranch owners, rather than given to Indians who had lived at the missions, and 3) those Indians who had been living at the missions were released and often moved to ranchos for work or returned to native life patterns, in the further removed, inland areas of California.

THIS GUIDE

Focusing on Ferdinand Deppe's painting, *Mission San Gabriel*, this unit addresses the pre-secularization period of the missions during Mexican-era California, 1821-1834. The new California History and Social Science Framework adopted in July of 2016 provides a more complex interpretation of the mission period, leaving behind the more familiar era of making missions with store bought kits.

LAGUNAARTMUSEUM

Curriculum Developed by Michele Brewster