



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Assignment Description (For Teachers)

Title: Medieval Spain – Meeting Place of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Cultures

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Purpose/Connection to the Curriculum: This lesson is designed to meet high school World History and Geography standards by discussing relations across regions (Middle East/North Africa – Europe) and religions (Muslim – Christian – Jewish) in medieval Spain.

Overview: This lesson will explore the rich cultural interactions that occurred in Al-Andalus – the Iberian Peninsula during centuries of Muslim political and cultural domination (711 CE until the late 11th century or, in some parts, 1492). Students, especially those who speak or are studying Spanish, may be shocked to learn that 8% of Spanish words are of Arabic origin and that Arabic is the second largest influence on Spanish, ranking only behind Latin. Muslims introduced into Spain (and Western Europe) intellectual innovations (chemistry, algebra), the game of chess, the use of a modern way of writing numbers replacing Roman numerals, the number zero, and the philosophy of Aristotle (at the time, forgotten in the rest of Europe). Spain’s music, food, place names, family names (Medina, Alvarez, etc.) and some architectural masterpieces also show strong North African Arab influences. Jews also played an important role in “Islamic Spain.” Jews translated Arabic books, as well as Greek and Hebrew ones into Spanish and other romance languages. They contributed to Spanish (and European) math, science, poetry, philosophy and medicine. Students will explore the rich cultural and intellectual diversity during the period of “convivencia” and the impact of this cultural fusion on world history.

Lesson Summary: Following a general overview on al-Andalus (presentation provided), students will do a short research project creating a file of cards about famous people and inventions/innovations. Students then divide (or are divided) into groups and given a topic to present in a creative format of their choice. (They use the card files created earlier to provide content.) The students then share their work with the class.

Important Questions:

- Why are borderlands significant? How do connections across regions and cultures lead to the development and spread of inventions and innovations?

- How do religious and political conditions encourage or inhibit the spread of ideas (cultural diffusion)?

Grade Level: high school

Time: 4-5 class periods (to cover info on a number of required world cultures/interactions)

Targeted Skills - Based on Arizona State Standards:

High School Social Studies: World History Strand:

Concept 2: Early Civilizations

PO 2. Analyze the development and historical significance of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

Concept 3: World in Transition

PO 1. Contrast the fall of Rome with the development of the Byzantine and Arab Empires (e.g., religion, culture, language, governmental structure).

PO 4. Describe the interaction of European and Asian civilizations from the 12th to the 16th centuries:

- a. Crusades
- c. impact on culture

Concept 4: Renaissance and Reformation

PO 1. Analyze the results of Renaissance thoughts and theories:

- a. rediscovery of Greek and Roman ideas
- d. Middle Eastern contributions (e.g., mathematics, science)

High School Social Studies: Geography:

Concept 2: Places and Regions

PO 1. Identify the characteristics that define a region:

- b. human processes such as religion, political organization, economy, and demographics

PO 3. Examine geographic issues (e.g., drought in Sahel, migration patterns, desertification of Aral Sea, spread of religions such as Islam, conflicts in Northern Ireland/Ireland, Jerusalem, Tibet) in places and world regions.

PO 4. Analyze the differing political, religious, economic, demographic, and historical ways of viewing places and regions.

PO 5. Examine how the geographic characteristics of a place affect the economics and culture.

PO 6. Analyze how a region changes over time.

Concept 4: Human Systems

PO 2. Analyze push/pull factors that contribute to human migration.

PO 3. Analyze the effects of migration on places of origin and destination, including

border areas.

PO 8. Explain how ideas, customs, and innovations (e.g., religion, language, political philosophy, technological advances, higher education, economic principles) are spread through cultural diffusion.

Suggested Procedures

- Day 1:

Required materials:

- powerpoint - [documents 2a & 2b](#) – and notes to the powerpoint – [document 2c](#)
- technology to show a powerpoint
- slips of paper with people and inventions (for students to draw out of a hat) [document 3a](#) ([Document 3b](#) is your master list on which to write who is doing what.)
- photocopies of the card-creating guide (1 for each student) – [document 4](#)
- a large index card or ½-sheet of construction paper for each student

1. As a class, go over the introduction/overview to al-Andalus.
2. Afterwards, have students randomly draw a slip of paper from a hat, thereby choosing the person or concept they are assigned to research. If it is a big class (30 or more), make 2 complete sets of research subjects. Each student draws either an invention/innovation to research (and relate to al-Andalus) or a famous person. (You may want to record who is researching what, just in case they “forget” by tomorrow.) **Be sure to warn them that many of the names are transliterated from Arabic – or the people were called different names in Arabic-speaking lands, Spain, and the rest of Europe. So they shouldn’t worry if the names are spelled in a slightly different way or if they find one form of the name but not another. (They should use common sense, however. If they find someone with a different spelling of the name who is not connected to medieval Spain, then they can assume it’s the wrong person!)
3. If time, they can start on creating their information card – I let them use smart phones if they have them. (2 people may be working on the same invention or person – but they shouldn’t work together – unless there is someone without a smart phone.)

Day 2:

Required materials:

- extra slips of paper with people and inventions, card-creating guide, and blank cards for students who were absent yesterday (or for students who forgot)
- photocopies of the sharing chart (1 for each student) – [document 5](#)

1. Have students finish their information cards.

2. Have students move about the room and share their card with 6 other students (one at a time). Each student should fill out information they learned from other students on their sharing charts.

**3. At the end of class, collect all the cards. Divide the cards into 2 separate sets so that neither set has duplicates in it.

Day 3 + homework -- or Days 3 and 4:

Preparation before class:

- Divide students into groups of 2-3 (ideally, for a large class, you'll want 12 groups; for a small class, 6 groups).
- Taking photocopies of the assignment sheet (1 for each student) – [document 6](#), write the group assignment on the place indicated at the top of the page. (Note: You can let the groups sign up for a topic of their choice on a first-come, first-served basis, OR you can assign the topics.)

1. As students enter the classroom, give them their assignment of groups and topics.
2. Using the previously created card files as their research tools (much easier and more time-effective than reinventing the wheel!), they must do one of the activities and prepare to present it in class the next day. (Note: If there are two groups doing the same topic, be sure you assign each group to a different card file – so that they won't have trouble finding the right materials.)

Day 4 or 5:

Required material:

- Presentation materials for students that require them.
- Students demonstrate or display their work.

Extending the Lesson:

- Students may individually or as a class watch the abridged (47-minute), online version of the movie "Cities of Light": <http://video.pbs.org/video/1825311011/>
- Students may individually or as a class read the novel in blank verse *The Apprentice's Masterpiece*, a compelling story of two teenage boys (one a Jewish "converso", another Muslim), who have to work together to survive during the Inquisition.