

Spanish Translation

Background: When the Native Americans were taken to live in the missions, the difference in language made it difficult for communication between them and the Spanish-speaking priests. They were expected to learn the language in order to carry out daily rituals and to learn the Roman Catholic religion.

Within a mission there were several different buildings built to serve several different purposes. In one building you might find Native Americans being taught the Spanish language. Children and adults were expected to learn the language in order to survive in the mission. Only a narrow window lighted the rooms.

What To Do:

- Pretend you are a Native American trying to learn the Spanish language.
- You are given blank paper, a pencil and copies from a Spanish dictionary.
- Using the dictionary pages, begin copying words in Spanish and then translate them into English.
- Copy as much as you can.
- Maintain total silence at this station.

Life in a Spanish Mission

The Dormitory

Background: The dormitory—a Latin word meaning “place to sleep”—was the area of the monastery where monks slept. It was located near the church because some of the religious services were held in the middle of the night. Often, there was a flight of stairs leading directly from the dormitory into the church.

The dormitory was usually divided into tiny rooms called cells. Each monastic cell contained only a straw mattress, a rough sheet, a blanket, a pillow, a table and a chair. The rooms were lit only by a narrow window. There was no need for a closet or a dresser because monks, who took a vow of poverty, owned nothing. Any items the monks needed—including their coarse robes and sandals—were the property of the monastic community. A monk used his room mostly for sleeping, which he did from 9:00 p.m. to midnight, and again from 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. Some monks also chose to use their cell for four hours of daily, private prayer.

What To Do:

- Pretend you are a monk in the dormitory at 9:00 p.m. Lie on one of the “beds,” close your eyes, and either go to sleep or rest.
- Place only your feet in the box for feet. At no time should your body touch another person’s body.
- Maintain total silence at this station.

The Workhouse

Background: St. Benedict, who founded the first western European monastery, believed that “idleness is an enemy of the soul.” As a result, the Rule of St. Benedict—a set of rules for monks to live by—described in detail the role of work in monastic life. St. Benedict made labor one of the three daily tasks of a monk, along with prayer and study. He felt that idle time led to sin and wickedness, and that organization and structure created the proper environment for a moral life. As a result, monks had to work hard and be very disciplined.

Another reason hard labor was important to monastic life was that the monks were set apart from society. If monasteries were to become “islands of peace”, they had to be self-sufficient. This self-sufficiency included building and cleaning the monastery, growing food, raising livestock, making wine and beer, and cooking. Monks were the agricultural experts of medieval Europe. They perfected farming, raising livestock, and wine-making techniques.

What To Do:

- Pretend you are a monk in the workhouse. You and your fellow monks are in charge of cleaning all parts of the room.
- Use the cleaning cloths to clean the desk seats, computers, shelves, file cabinet, overhead cart and chalkboard. Do not clean the top of the desks and do not disturb other groups. Pick up any trash that is on the floor. There should be NO rice or any type of seeds on the floor.
- You must make all parts of this station cleaner than when you arrived.
- Work diligently. Maintain total silence at this station.

Life in a Spanish Mission

Planting and Agriculture

Background: Agriculture was the main resource of every Spanish mission in Texas. A Spanish friar described an area along the San Antonio river, “The best site in the world, with good and abundant irrigation water, rich lands for pasture, plentiful building stone, and excellent timber.” Inhabitants of the mission were expected to maintain and cultivate crops and cattle in order to survive. This made daily rituals long and tiresome for the Catholic priests. Once the Native American was brought onto the mission, the job of maintaining crops and converting crops into useable food products no longer belonged to the priests in the mission.

What To Do:

- Cultivating—In this station you will find “plots” (boxes) of soil (rice). You need to dig with your stick (pencil) and remove all the seeds in the box. The more you find the better farmer you are. Put the collected seeds into the seed box.
- Planting—In this station you will find sticks (pencils), seeds and a container holding the fertile soil (rice). Use the stick in each “plot” (box) to make 4 or 5 rows about 1 inch deep in the soil. Then, place 1 or 2 seeds about 2 inches apart down the row. Make sure you go back and cover the seeds with soil (rice).
- Maintain total silence at this station.

Life in a Spanish Mission

Agriculture: Sorting Seeds

Background: Before the Native Americans could plant the seeds or grind the corn, they would often have to sort the crops into the different food groups.

What To Do:

- Sort the seeds.
- Separate the seeds into different containers.
- Keep the seeds that are mixed in one container.
- Maintain total silence at this station.



Life in a Spanish Mission

Kitchen Duties

Background: The diet of those living in a mission was very simple. Corn was easy to grow so it was used the most in cooking. To turn corn into flour, the cooks first had to find the corn and then turn it into flour by mashing it. The corn flour was used to make breads and cakes. They did not use many spices since they did not grow them. Also, since they believed in living a modest life, the monks believed that a bland diet would also help purify their souls.

What To Do:

- Pretend that you are a cook in a mission. For all to live and survive depends on you doing your best in the kitchen three times a day.
- Grind small amounts of corn in the mortars (bowls) with the pestles (grinders).
- Make sure to keep the kitchen clean at all times!
- Maintain total silence at this station.

Life in a Spanish Mission

The Chancel

Background: The daily life of a monk was divided into eight segments. Each of these periods was marked by the toll of a bell, and included communal praying, called offices. These offices took place in the chancel, a special part of the church used for praying. Monks arose before dawn for the first office. Other offices followed at three-hour intervals, and included prayers, Bible readings, and hymns. The monk's prayer did not, however, end at sundown. The entire monastic community was awakened after midnight for the most demanding period of prayer, which lasted for at least two hours. Much of the period was spent singing.

In most monastic churches a choir helped lead the chanting of prayers. Until about the year A.D. 800, church music held to an early Christian tradition of being a purely sung, or vocal, music. This type of vocal music is called plainchant. It did not include instruments and had a style that consisted of melody alone, without accompaniment. Sometimes plainchant is called "Gregorian chant", after Pope Gregory I, a scholar and a church leader. Gregorian chants are very simple melodies sung in Latin, which communicate the beliefs of the church.

What To Do:

- Pretend you are a monk in the chancel. Sit and listen to the Gregorian chant that is playing.
- As you listen to the music, think about how the Gregorian chanting helped bring monks closer to God.
- Maintain total silence at this station.

Reflection

At Mission San José in San Antonio, Father Morfi was impressed with the Native Americans:

“These Indians are today well instructed and civilized and know how to work very well at their mechanical trades and are proficient in some of the arts. They speak Spanish perfectly, with the exception of those who are daily brought in . . . They go about well dressed, are abundantly fed.”

Spend this time reflecting upon your daily experiences.

What To Do:

- Kneel at the computers and watch the PowerPoint presentation on missions.
- Maintain total silence at this station.

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