

Reflection- What's In Our Names  
Kimberly Fryman

I felt that this lesson went quite well. The students were excited about using the internet and were eager to learn how to use the TIDES website. They quickly learned how to navigate the website, and began to find information from the maps very quickly. It did not take the students long to begin to recognize familiar cities, rivers, and geographic landmarks in the state. They immediately recognized the Spanish names and began to draw the conclusions I had hoped for. They found that the early maps of our state were completely in Spanish and discovered that this area had been explored, mapped, named and settled by Spanish and later, Mexican settlers. This provided me the opportunity to expand the lesson to include other items that later Anglo settlers adopted into their culture. It was enjoyable to change student perception. For example, many students believe that the cowboy lifestyle is a completely American cultural phenomenon. They were surprised to know that even the cowboy hat was a copy of the Mexican cowboy's original. In addition, I learned right along with my students. We discovered together that some of the names we thought were Anglo, like the Sabine River, had actually been Anglicized. Many more names were of Spanish origin than even I had realized.

This was the first lesson that I taught, so there were a few problems and areas I needed to improve on or change. First, we had to use the Computer Science teacher's classroom, and I was unfamiliar with the projector. I had trouble displaying the step by step navigation and as a result, some students struggled to keep up. I needed to work out the hardware issues in advance. Also, the Google Earth maps I had hoped to use as a reference for Spanish names in the whole western U.S. didn't load on every computer without installing special software to read them. The extension to include other states was frustrating for those students who couldn't find useful maps. I later explained the early exploration patterns in the western U.S. to the class as a whole and gave them examples like the names of well-known states and cities with Spanish names. I should have completely checked out the computers to be sure they would display what was needed in advance of the lesson.

Overall, this lesson was a great introduction for my students to the TIDES site. They enjoyed searching the site for resources and were excited for subsequent lessons. In the lessons that followed they had no difficulty navigating the site for the information they needed. I was also quite pleased with the much more engaging way of teaching this valuable cultural and historical lesson. Real historic documents sparked the students' interest.