



# INDIGENOUS WISDOM: CENTURIES OF PUEBLO IMPACT IN NEW MEXICO

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## First Encounters with Spanish Explorers: A Pueblo Experience

**Name:** Christine P. Sims

**Content Area:** Social Studies – NM History

**Grade Levels:** Middle School



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INDIAN PUEBLO  
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*Gateway to the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico*

## A PUEBLO-BASED EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM

**Name:** Christine P. Sims

**Title of Unit:** First Encounters with Spanish Explorers: A Pueblo Experience

**Content Area:** Social Studies – NM History

**Grade Levels:** Middle School

### **Rationale:**

New Mexico history textbooks have often relied on many different narratives written about Spanish explorations of the southwest and the individuals who played critical roles as Spanish explorers and settlers. Many of these narratives originate from historical accounts that often present only one perspective of settler colonialism. Moreover, while early Spanish records recount some of the more critical battles and events that occurred in what is now New Mexico, these accounts were often written as part of official reports to Spanish Viceroy and other authorities in Mexico to justify the expenditures of funds and supplies for exploratory ventures into the southwest on behalf of a Spanish monarchy. These written accounts included their descriptions of Indigenous peoples and their villages or pueblos. Ancestral Puebloan people had occupied the greater southwest for centuries, having built their homes in multistoried villages, planting waffle gardens to capture rainwater and developing irrigation systems to grow corn, beans, and other crops. Here, in their farming villages, Pueblo people raised their children, took care of their elders, and contributed to the life of their community throughout their lifetime. This all changed after 1598. The daily lives of all Pueblo families were disrupted by foreign military parties first arriving on horseback, conducting strange ceremonies in an unknown language with village leaders, and often demanding supplies and food that had been carefully cultivated, harvested and stored for their own winter use.

These first encounters and armed conflicts with Spanish expeditions were experienced by many Pueblo villages. Most notable is the experience of Acoma Pueblo, where in 1598, they fought to protect their village and attempted to drive out these intruders. This lesson draws upon both the historical record and the oral and cultural traditions of Pueblo people to examine how such intrusions abruptly and cruelly upended some of the most significant areas of Pueblo life. Using visuals, students are challenged to think about what family and community life meant to Acoma people and how devastating it must have been to see one's village destroyed and its people taken captive by foreign intruders. Using this lens from a Pueblo perspective, a better understanding of contemporary controversies surrounding the memorialization of historical figures such as Juan de Oñate, who played a major role in the crimes committed against the Acomas, will hopefully be better understood.

### **Guiding Questions:**

1. What was the historic impact of Spanish contact with Acoma Pueblo in 1598, on their daily life? On their community life? Upon multiple generations?
2. What were the circumstances surrounding the trial and Oñate's punishment of Acoma people?
3. How should historic figures such as Oñate be memorialized, if at all, in New Mexico considering the legacy of these encounters?



# A PUEBLO-BASED EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM

## Lesson Title: First Encounters with Spanish Explorers

**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Grade Level:** Middle school Grades 6-8, adaptable to high school levels.

**Lesson Objectives:** Students will be able to:

1. Recount the circumstances of first contact with Spanish explorers at Acoma Pueblo in 1598.
2. Develop an understanding and appreciation for the way of life that existed in Pueblo villages before the arrival of foreign intrusions.
3. Consider the historical legacy that Spanish military attacks and sentences left upon Pueblos such as Acoma, a Pueblo that still exists today.
4. Gain a better understanding of the unique features of Pueblo life that were impacted by the arrival of Spanish explorers into their homelands during the 1500s.

### Prerequisite Skills and Knowledge

1. Students should be able to work in teams or small discussion groups
2. Students should be able to analyze written text and make inferences from visual sources.

### Materials and Resources:

Powerpoint of First Encounters with Spanish Explorers

### Procedure:

1. (5 minutes) Start this lesson by showing students a current map of New Mexico (Handout #1) Pueblos and nations. Ask if students are acquainted with these tribes. Have they visited any of these Pueblos, perhaps on their public feast days? How many different languages are spoken among these tribes? How long do they think these villages have been here in New Mexico? What do they think is meant by this phrase, "New Mexico's first inhabitants?"
2. (10 minutes) Pass out individual copies of Handout #2 A brief overview of NM Pueblos. Have students read the introduction in pairs and see what facts they have discovered about the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico. Share these facts briefly before proceeding to the powerpoint.
3. Explain that in today's lesson they will learn about a particular time in history when one Pueblo, Acoma, encountered Spanish explorers for the first time and how this encounter ended tragically for the Acoma people in 1598.
4. (30 minutes) Have students view the powerpoint developed by Dr. Sims and have students complete the Think, Pair, Share discussion exercises embedded at the end of the powerpoint. The teacher can identify a note taking strategy appropriate for the class to use in discussing and sharing their thoughts, reactions and responses.
5. (10 minutes) Close the lesson by asking students to think of ways in which they can inform others about the history they learned from today's lesson. Rather than displays of public statues depicting historic figures such as Oñate, what other way could important historic facts and stories be presented to the general public?



## A PUEBLO-BASED EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM

### Assessment:

1. Response to Think, Pair, Share Discussion questions. Recorders can be chosen among small groups and notations can be turned in to the teacher using appropriate note taking strategies that are appropriate .
2. A writing/research assignment can be used to also determine how much information students have learned as a result of this lesson and how much more they can research on their own.

### Modifications/Accommodations:

- Pair students needing help with a designated reader for the written text (Handout #2)
- Read aloud portions or all of the texts, including the powerpoint captions used in this lesson.
- Provide a printed copy of the powerpoint slides for students to review and use for assignments.
- Provide extra time to complete any of the assignments included in this lesson.

### Notes to Teacher:

#### Book Source:

*Acoma, Pueblo in the Sky*, Revised Edition by Ward Alan Minge.  
University of New Mexico Press (2002).



## A PUEBLO-BASED EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM

### Handout #1: New Mexico Map of Pueblos

Identify which of the 22 New Mexico Nations on this map are Pueblo Indian Nations.



## A PUEBLO-BASED EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM

### Handout #2:

#### Pueblos of New Mexico

Some of the oldest inhabited Native American villages in this country are villages and ancestral lands of Pueblo people, located in the American southwest. In New Mexico, these villages and cultures are the state's original Native inhabitants, and most all exist in the same place or near their original sites when Spanish explorers first encountered them. Of the more than three hundred pueblos that existed at the time of first contact, 19 remain today.

There are 22 different tribes in New Mexico, 19 of which are Pueblo Indian communities. Pueblo is a term that first used by 16th century Spanish explorers to describe the indigenous people they encountered upon first contact. Each of these Pueblos were independent self-governing villages. Pueblo people lived in apartment-style houses and in centralized villages often surrounded by cultivated fields that would be harvested each year for winter use. Today, as in the past, each of the pueblos had their own governance systems, their customs, traditions, and language. At least five major language groups were represented among the Pueblo peoples: the Tiwa language (still spoken today in Taos, Picuris, Isleta, and Sandia); the Tewa language (spoken in Ohkay Owinghe, Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, Nambe, Pojoaque, and Tesuque); the Towa language spoken in Jemez; the Keres language (spoken in Acoma, Laguna, Santa Ana, San Felipe, Santo Domingo, Cochiti, and Zia); and the Zuni language spoken only in Zuni. There were also Piro and Tano speaking peoples that lived in their villages at the time of first contact with Spanish explorers, however many of these would eventually be abandoned by the time Spanish settlers returned a second time in 1690s.

While battles with and attacks on Pueblo villages and people also took place throughout the decades of the late 1500s and 1600s, the historical battle with the Acomas, and the subsequent sentencing of Acoma people by Juan de Onate, was an example of how Spanish explorers intended to establish their dominance over indigenous people early on. And while Acoma proved to be one of the worst examples of crimes committed against indigenous peoples of New Mexico, all of the other Pueblos also suffered an often tumultuous history of oppression and attempts to destroy and eliminate their cultural ways and practices while under Spanish rule.

Ultimately, in 1680, after decades of ill treatment by Spanish authorities and military campaigns, and the persecution of Pueblo religious leaders who continued to practice their own ceremonial life, Pueblo people rose up against Spanish rule. They successfully drove out the Spanish and were free from their rule for about a decade, until Spanish colonists returned to resettle New Mexico.

