

# The Encounter: Exploration, Evangelization, and Ethnohistory

## **Lesson 1: Introduction**

*Grade Level:* High school

*Time:* 45-50 minutes

*Objectives:* 1) To help students begin to think about linguistic and cultural isolation  
2) To introduce students to the historical context of early Spanish exploration and native societies in the Gulf Coast region

*Lesson Set-up:* As a homework assignment given one week before the class, students will build an awareness of confronting the unknown by completing one of the following activities:

- Visit an ethnic grocery, buy a product they're not familiar with, and discuss its use with someone in the store
- Attend a church service in another language or of another religion
- Eat in an ethnic restaurant they are not familiar with and order a dish that is new to them
- Communicate with someone with whom they do not share a language about the person's first day in an English-speaking environment

Students will write a paragraph detailing the "encounter."

### Opening Discussion (15 minutes)

- 1) Engage the students in conversation about their first "encounters." What experiences were similar? Which ones were different? Was the "encounter" positive or negative?

### Setting the Historical Context (20 minutes)

- 1) Introduce the historical figure of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and give a description of his life and the expedition of which he was a part.
- 2) Show a map of the route that the expedition followed.
- 3) “Step back” and describe the historical enterprise of Spanish exploration and missionary efforts. Be sure to discuss the historical factors that propelled the Spanish to the Gulf Coast region.

### Watch first scene(s) (approximately 10-15 minutes)

- 1) Provide students with handout titled “Things to Ponder Thoughtfully Throughout the Film”
- 2) Watch the “raft scene” (minutes 3:46--7:57) and the scene in which the friar burns the chests (minutes 15:40--19:05).
- 3) Students will answer the following **viewing questions**:
  - Why does the captain abandon one of the rafts?
  - Why do you think the priest wants to burn the chests?
  - What is the result of the burning?

Homework: Read the passage from Cabeza de Vaca’s *Narrative* in which he recounts how he healed an injured Amerindian by blowing on his wounds and reciting the Lord’s Prayer and the Ave Maria. (Chapter 15)

### Resources for this Lesson:

[http://www.bruceruiz.net/PanamaHistory/age\\_of\\_exploration\\_time\\_line.htm](http://www.bruceruiz.net/PanamaHistory/age_of_exploration_time_line.htm)  
(very good timeline of exploration)

<http://www.crusades-encyclopedia.com/andrealecture.html> (detailed explanation of the significance of the Crusades to world history -- has a good section on how they influenced early Spanish explorers / conquistadores)

<http://www.educ.ar/educar/site/educar/lm/1187895338599/kbee:/educar/content/portal-content/taxonomia-recursos/recurso/cb590d6d-2f5f-4d92-b67f-39db9a2b2afe.recurso/4e4dcf02-ac83-4e99-8982-fadfe74a004c/naufragios.pdf> (Spanish edition of *Naufragios*.)

*The Journey of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and His Companions from Florida to the Pacific, 1528-1536* -- is available for free at Google Books (numerous inexpensive editions have been published)

## Lesson 2: Encounters

*Grade Level:* High school

*Time:* 45-50 minutes

*Objectives:* 1) To explore the themes of evangelization and religious syncretism  
2) To promote critical thinking skills  
3) To compare and contrast the Cabeza de Vaca's written account with the cinematic depiction

### Opening Discussion (approximately 10-15 minutes)

1) Discuss the homework reading. Be sure to point out how Cabeza de Vaca "healed" the wounded Amerindian (what he learned from the other healers and what he added from his Christian heritage).

### Watch the scenes (25-30 minutes)

1) The first scene today will show Cabeza de Vaca's time as a slave to the Amerindian healers (minutes 26:09--29:40).  
2) Freeze frame for discussion after the quote: "I'm more human than you....I have a world! In my world, you would have been impaled long ago!" ("Impaled" in this context refers to a typical punishment by the Inquisition of heretics.) Discuss the irony of the quote as Cabeza de Vaca is passing judgment on his captors. What does he mean by "more human?" (minutes 31:50--32:41) Ask the students to consider moments in which they pass judgment on people who are different than them.  
3) Skip to the scene in which Cabeza de Vaca "heals" the wounded man by blowing on him (minutes 42:45--47:50).  
4) Freeze frame for discussion: compare and contrast the movie's depiction with last night's homework reading.

Homework: Begin to work on Final Project (due in 2 or 3 days). Suggested Final Projects could include:

- Students imagine themselves as an Amerindian who discovers a member of the expedition. Write their own script that outlines several scenes in which they figure out how to deal with him. This could be a group project and the students could perform their scenes (in English or Spanish!).
- Select a passage from the *Narrative* not discussed in class and generate a work product based on the passage (it could be visual, musical, poetic, etc.).
- Write and perform a debate between a member of the expedition and an Amerindian leader in which they argue the merits of their respective religious and cultural heritages.

### Lesson 3: The Healing

*Grade Level:* High school

*Time:* 45-50 minutes

*Objectives:* 1) To discuss films and the written word as a methods of storytelling.

2) To explore the issue of religious syncretism.

Watch the scenes (25-30 minutes)

1) Tell students background information: the men have been rescued by a friendly Amerindian group and Cabeza de Vaca slips back into the role of healer.

2) Watch the scene in which Cabeza de Vaca resuscitates an Amerindian girl (minutes 1:15:35--1:23:07).

3) Students should answer the following **viewing questions**:

- Is the healing of the girl a Christian miracle or witchcraft or something else entirely? (Teachers should point out to the students that the Ave Maria prayer is a part of what Cabeza de Vaca says.)
- What is the role that Dorantes plays in this scene?
- Has Cabeza de Vaca “crossed a line” or “gone over the edge”? If so, how?
- Was the girl dead?

Closing Discussion (remaining time)

1) Have students share some of their answers and teacher will guide class discussion of the scene.

2) Possible discussion questions: What is the filmmaker’s purpose in presenting this scene? How do you think Cabeza de Vaca would tell this story and why?

Homework: Students should be working on their Final Projects.

## Lesson 4: Resolution?

*Grade Level:* High school

*Time:* 45-50 minutes

*Objectives:* 1) To examine how the Cabeza de Vaca expedition fits in the larger narrative of Spanish exploration.

### Watch the Final Scene (15 minutes)

- 1) Teacher will set up the final scene: the four men find Spanish slave traders and re-enter the Spanish-American sphere of influence.
- 2) Watch the final “party” scene (minutes 1:36:10--1:43:50) in which Dorantes spins his own version of the encounter.
- 3) Students should answer the following **viewing questions**:
  - Why do the Spanish slave traders assume that Cabeza de Vaca will help them collect slaves?
  - How the Spanish react to the four men (specifically Cabeza de Vaca and Dorantes)? What do they want from them?
  - Are the Spanish at the end of the film interested in converting the Native Americans? Why or why not?

### Closing Discussion (remaining time)

- 1) Return to handout from the first day (“Things to Ponder Thoughtfully Throughout the Entire Film”), have the students write down their responses, and use that as the basis for the final discussion of the movie.
- 2) If time permits, teacher will summarize the subsequent careers of the four men, especially of Cabeza de Vaca and Estebanico (using maps of their routes).

Homework: Finish Final Projects and be ready to present them.

## **Lesson Five: Student Presentations**

*Grade Level:* High school

*Time:* as needed

*Objectives:* 1) Students will present their individual or group projects to the class for debate and discussion

# Resources



## Additional Resources

### Websites

<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/teach/images/devacalesson.html> (a lesson plan, designed for elementary to junior high students, about an incident that occurred during the Cabeza de Vaca expedition)

<http://web.me.com/gillespie.jeanne/>

[La presencia hispana en el Golfo de México/Bienvenidos.html](http://web.me.com/gillespie.jeanne/La_presencia_hispana_en_el_Golfo_de_México/Bienvenidos.html) (a detailed website on the Spanish exploration of the Gulf Coast and the indigenous presence in that region -- in Spanish, so a good resource for a Spanish course)

<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/teach/images/devacareadings8-06.pdf>

(a short, interesting selection from the *Narrative* in which Cabeza de Vaca recounts meeting one of the numerous Amerindian groups that his group encountered)

### Books

Burkholder, Mark A. and Lyman L. Johnson. *Colonial Latin America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. (first chapter includes a fairly detailed survey of Iberian and Amerindian cultures before 1492)

Chasteen, John Charles. *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001. (a very readable survey of Latin American history -- probably accessible for high school students -- second chapter surveys Spanish and Amerindian societies on the eve of the encounter)