

Lesson Plan: Life and Society in Golden Age Spain

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Date: 01/21/2008

Objectives:

- Students will be able to recognize some important aspects of life and society in Golden Age Spain (such as rules of behavior, clothing, food, entertainment, etc).
- Students will be able to understand the difference between their life and that of a person living during Golden Age Spain.
- Students will be able to understand how Golden Age Theater reflected the society of Golden Age Spain.

Content:

- **Social hierarchy** of Golden Age Spain (15th -17th centuries): At the top was the nobility, followed by the rest of the Spanish populations with the poor and homeless at the bottom. The minorities: Jews, Arabs and *gitanos* (gypsies), were often regarded with mistrust and discriminated against. People took great pride in having “sangre pura” (pure blood), that is, a purely Spanish ancestry.
- **Rules of behavior:** there were very strict rules of behavior, especially when dealing with nobility. There were specific expressions to be used, according to a person’s social status such as “excelencia” or “vuestra merced”. One was supposed to say “tú” to somebody of a much higher social standing, and “vos” to servants and vassals; kiss a lady’s hand and “pedir los pies” (offer to kiss the feet) of a lord. Honor was a very important value in Golden Age Spain. If a man or woman felt disrespected (for example, somebody did not treat them according to their social status), this could lead to duels and other things.
- **Clothing:** people dressed according to their social status. Noble women wore a *guardainfante*, a very large round frame composed of several wire

rings, over which they wore the *basquiña*, a long skirt. They wore tight bodices with wide sleeves, a large, black shawl, an *abanico* (fan) and lots of earrings and rings.

Men wore a leather *colete* (vest), a *ropilla*, and a cloak. The *gorguera* (fluffy collar) was replaced by a *valona* (a flat, shoulder-length, laced collar) at the beginning of the 17th century.

- **Professions:** Besides nobility, there were soldiers, students, scribes, priests, doctors, merchants, craftsmen, farmers, servants, etc. Each would dress according to their profession, so that it was easy to recognize a person's social status and treat them accordingly.
- **Education:** very few people could read in the Golden Age: clergy, nobility, intellectuals (professors, lawyers, scribes, doctors, painters), some merchants, government employees and servants of very important houses. Books were very expensive. A person that had 20 to 30 books would have been considered a scholar. Some of the most important Golden Age playwrights (Lope de Vega, Quevedo, etc) had up to 300. Besides religious books, the most popular literature of the time were the novels of knight errantry. A public reader would read books for people who could not read.
- **Food:** A normal meal started with fruits (oranges, green grapes, cantaloupes, etc) and was followed by lots of different meat types, olives and soup. The head waiter would cut the meat and serve it to the person of highest social status, and then to the others. During the meal servants would also serve almond milk with sugar, and lots of wine, to offset the many spices in the food. The dessert usually consisted of preserves, nougat candy (*turrones*), and sponge cake. After the meal it was usual for people from any class to use a toothpick to clean the teeth.
- **Religion:** Spaniards were very devout Catholics and the church was the social center of the society.
- **Love:** The strength with which the Golden Age man falls in love is often portrayed in literature and theater. It was hard for a man to have close contact to his beloved, since she was constantly and zealously guarded by parents, siblings, and servants. Often a lover would send a group of

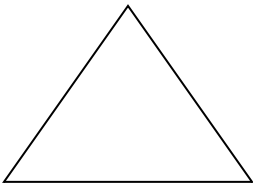
musicians to sing a *serenata* (serenade) for his beloved, send her gifts and poetry.

- **Entertainment:** The theater was the most popular entertainment, but people would also go to the running of the bulls and dances.

Materials needed:

- Picture of street scene in Golden Age Madrid
- Picture of Golden Age clothing with names of different clothing parts
- Picture of Golden Age professions
- Picture of different foods
- Picture of Golden Age theater
- Picture of Golden Age Catholic Church
- Picture of Golden Age Spanish lovers

Activities:

| Time | Procedure |
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| 0-05' | Warmup/Hook: What do you usually wear? Eat? Do for fun? What professions are common in our society? Who is able to read in our society? |
| 05-10' | Explain that Golden Age Spain was very different to our modern society, but still similar in some aspects. Show a picture of a street scene in Madrid, and ask students to speculate about the social status and professions of the people in the picture. |
| 10-15' | <p>Social hierarchy of Golden Age Spain. Draw the following picture and tell them to order the people according to their hierarchy:</p>  <p>king and queen, duke, marquis, knight, clergyman, doctor, farmer, homeless person, etc. Explain about the different minorities in Spain.</p> |
| 15-20' | Rules of behavior: Ask them if there are rules of behavior in our society. How are we supposed to treat the elderly, etc? Explain how |

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| | nobility was to be treated vs. the lower classes. What was the most important value Spaniards defended? (honor) |
| 20-25' | Clothing: Show a picture of Spanish clothing with arrows pointing to blanks. Give a copy of the picture to the students and a list of the different clothing names with their description. Tell them to fill in the blanks on the picture. Explain that dress reflected the social status of a person. Optional exercise: Ask them to draw a dama, a servant, etc. |
| 25-30' | Professions/Education: Show picture of different professions. Have students guess what professions those are. Point out the different professions in Golden Age Spain. Ask students: what would you have liked to be if you had lived in Golden Age Spain? Why? Point out that only very few people could read. Ask students to speculate who would have been able to read and why. |
| 30-35' | Food: Show a picture of different foods. What foods in this picture do you think Golden Age Spaniards would have eaten? Explain. Would you have liked to eat that? Have you ever tried it? |
| 35-37' | Religion: Show picture of church. What religion did Spaniards profess? Explain the great influence of religion in daily life. |
| 37-40' | Love: Show picture of lovers. Ask students what people usually do when they fall in love with someone. Explain about Golden Age lovers. |
| 40-45' | Entertainment: What do you do for fun? Explain what Spaniards did. Show picture of Theater. Explain that the theater reflected the society of the time. Have you ever seen a Golden Age play? If yes, what things of what we spoke about today, did you see in the play? |
| 45-50' | Assessment: fill out crossword puzzle about life and society in Golden Age Spain. Theater: watch Outreach presentation and write down things you saw in the entremés/convent play that we talked about in class. (clothing, values, professions, religion, etc) |