EXPLORE Lesson Plan for California Teachers

Lesson Title: What’s in a Name?

Grade Level: 4

Lesson Objective:
- Students will research, record, and share information about California cities.

Big Idea: Names have significance.

Essential Question(s): Why are names important?

California Standards:
- HSS 4.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the physical and human geographic features that define places and regions in California.

Lesson Introduction:

Teacher shares a brief story about how he/she was named (first, middle, last, or nickname). Students share brief stories with a partner or small group. Teacher explains that most people are named by their parents or relatives, and some people change their names for various reasons.

Teacher asks Why are names important? Students share responses.

Learning Activities:

Teacher states that the names of places are also important, and relates this to the responses provided for the last question. Students are instructed to work in small groups to list as many place names in California that they can think of in 2 minutes. Teams should have one piece of paper to pass around the group. Each Student writes one place name and passes the paper to the next Student. There should be no talking and no repeated place names on the paper. After 2 minutes of listing names, ask Students to count and share the number of place names. Ask groups to underline the names of cities, circle the names of counties, and draw a box around names of communities. Ask for any other categories (e.g., street names, parks, beaches, etc.) found in lists. Explain the differences between communities, cities, and counties in California.

Teacher asks Who named these places? Why were they given these names? Explain that European explorers gave names to the places that they explored and mapped long ago. In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo claimed the region of San Diego for Spain and named it San Miguel because he sailed into the bay on September 28, 1542,
which is the Catholic feast day of San Miguel. Sixty years later, Spanish explorer Sebastian Vizcaino renamed the region San Diego after a Spanish Catholic saint, San Diego de Alcala. Vizcaino sailed into the same bay on November 12, 1602, which is the feast day of San Diego de Alcala.

Teacher asks How can we describe San Diego? What are some physical geographic features of this city? How would you describe San Diego’s climate? What are some human geographic features? What are some common activities for the people who live and work in San Diego?

Teacher refers students to their lists of place names and asks Who named the cities that you underlined? What can we learn about those place names? Students each select a city name to research. Students will use reference books and conduct internet searches to identify and record the following:

1. City Name
2. Date of Founding
3. Country responsible for naming the city
4. Meaning behind the name
5. Reasons for claiming this land
6. Name of California Indians living there during European exploration
7. Any information about when, who, and how the city was settled
8. Location of city on a California map and corresponding county name
9. Description of physical geographic features
10. Description of human geographic features

Students share their findings with the class. Students researching the same city can compare/corroborate findings.

Assessment:

10-point Scoring Guide
- 1 point for accuracy of information shared for items 1-10

Materials:
- paper & pencils
- reference books on California city names or access to internet

Credits: Lesson plan adapted from “What’s in a Name?” by Ortiz Knopp. Empires of the Wind NEH Seminar, June 2013.