

LESSON PLAN — ALTA CALIFORNIA TODAY

David A. Bainbridge

Hacienda Secretary Gardoqui found Vicente Vasadre y Vega to be “*a man of talent and willing to work*” as well as “*one of the most skilled and knowledgeable men in commerce and in the things of America that I have dealt with.*”

News of Captain Cook’s voyage to the Northwest Coast in 1778-1779 led the Spanish to try fur trading in California. Vasadre was, by some accounts, a merchant in New Spain, but he must also have developed some very good connections in court. In 1784 he proposed a plan to exchange Chinese quicksilver (mercury used for gold refining) for California furs to the Viceroy and King Carlos III. The Spanish also founded two forts far to the north in 1792.

China had good mercury supplies and also a seemingly insatiable demand for sea otter furs, while California and Mexico were short of mercury for gold processing. Vasadre also highlighted the risk from the growing push to the south by the Russians and English. Instead of returning empty to San Blas from California each year, the ships could bring sea otter pelts to Acapulco for reshipment on the Manila galleons, and from Manila to China for mercury or money.

His arguments were well received but he was defeated by bureaucracy and surrounded by people with little imagination. Earlier Spanish efforts to establish forts on Vancouver Island and Neah Bay (Washington state) were neglected but could also have led to a much stronger hold on the Fur Coast.

Your task is to exercise your imagination and describe the different California and America we might see if Vasadre had succeeded. This could have created a powerful and economically strong California that might well have fended off the Russians and, more critically, the Americans. The fur wealth could have been used to upgrade ports, encourage merchants, support the navy and army and bring immigrants to the west coast from Mexico and Spain. What would it have meant — perhaps no Gold Rush or a very different one? Perhaps the Mexican Revolution would have failed? Provide your alternative view in about 4 pages and 1200-1500 words. Or make it a powerpoint with 10 slides.

Preparing your papers – citations and references are critical! The web, Fur War vol. 1 & 2, books, newspaper articles, and magazine articles can help get you started. Use scholarly books or edu websites as primary source materials. Use APA format. For citation format and research advice look at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html

PLEASE REMEMBER: Page numbers! Spell check! Grammar check! Minimum 6 citations with complete references per paper, no more than 2 from internet sources. TALK TO INSTRUCTOR ABOUT YOUR TOPIC AND SOURCES.

Perhaps the map would have looked like this?



GRADING CRITERIA FOR PAPERS

Innovation and thoughtfulness Analysis/understanding	30
Structure and order, focus	20
Grammar	10
Style-is it engaging, readable	30
Quality of citations and searches	10
Total score possible	100
No page numbers	-10
No word count	-10
Deductions for spelling errors	-5
Deductions for wrong words	-5
Citation/reference mismatch	-5
Deductions for incorrect margins	-5
Inappropriate topic (doesn't answer question asked)	up to -30
<i>One rewrite possible.</i>	

A typical talk outline

- ☼ Introduction,
- ☼ Key points
- ☼ Conclusion
- ☼ Simplify graphs and tables

GRADING CRITERIA FOR PPTS

1) Analysis/understanding	30
2) Structure and order, focus	10
3) Graphics, font, images	10
4) Style-is it engaging	30
5) Voice and presentation style, pacing, on time	20
Total score possible	100