

Chapter 5: Estevanico Discovers New Mexico



Objective: Students will retell the major events of the Estevanico's discovery of New Mexico and explorations of southern parts of the current United States of America.

Vocabulary:

Al-Idrisi – A Muslim cartographer and geographer who popularized a legend of Cibola among the

Spaniards.

Seven Cities of Cibola – Legendary cities of gold settled by bishops who were trying to escape the rule of Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century.

Estevanico – A Morisco slave who led the way in exploring the southern parts of the current United States of America. He is credited for discovering New Mexico.

Morisco – Muslims who lived in Spain, but were forced to become slaves, be executed, convert to Catholicism, or leave Spain after the establishment of the Inquisition in 1492.

The Legend of the Seven Cities of Cibola

After Columbus had sailed to the Caribbean islands, Spain began their conquests to claim lands in the Americas. The first in 1519, led by Hernan Cortes, was the conquest of the Aztecs who lived in what is now Mexico City. From there, the conquistadors defeated the Mayans to take control of the Yucatan Peninsula, and then traveled south in to the western coast of South America, as well as north into the west coast of North America, which they called California.

As the conquests gained more land for Spain, and the Spanish began to travel to the Americas to start Spanish colonies, an old legend of the Seven



Golden Cities regained popularity. The legend is that when the Muslims conquered the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th Century, seven Catholic bishops decided to sail to a far away land to escape the presence of the Muslims and seek new lands. No one knew what had become of these bishops until a story by Al-Idrisi, a famous cartographer and geographer wrote a story, which became a legend. Al-Idrisi referred to a tale of eight brothers, who he called the Maghrurin or “adventurers.” He narrated that the brothers had built boats and sailed off the coast of Lisbon in Portugal. They were said to have discovered a mysterious island, where there was lots of gold. There, the wanderers met a king, who sent an Arabic translator to tell them that they had to leave. The king bound the wanderers and put them back on their ship. They landed on the coast of Africa, which was a two-month journey from their home. The legend says that each Bishop was said to have founded his own city on this island. As time went on, the Spanish began to refer to this island as, Antillia, or the Seven Cities of Cibola (Fritzinger, 2016).

News of Columbus discovery of the Americas and the conquests of Cortes brought about the revival of the legend. Spaniards became excited about the prospect of discovering these cities and discovering great wealth. The Spanish believed that the peninsula of what is now Florida was the



location of the mysterious island. They sent a viceroy named, Carbeza De Vaca to sail off the coast of Cuba and into the coast of modern day Florida in the year 1527. Although these men never discovered Cibola, they explored most of New Mexico and some of Arizona.

Who was Estevanico?

Estevanico was the first person from Europe to have reached New Mexico. He lived from 1503- 1539 and spent over eight years exploring the southern part of the current United States of America. In 1527, Estevanico and his owner, Andres Dorontes set sail for Cuba, where they joined the crew of



Pinfilo Narvaez, which consisted of about 600 other prospectors who were hoping to find the Cities of Cibola. The ship set sail for what is now Florida, but wrecked off the coast of what is now Tampa. Dorantes was appointed captain of the expedition. While the men walked on foot along the coast



of the Gulf of Mexico, the ships were ordered to follow the men and provide supplies. However, when the trip proved to be more difficult than originally thought, Narvaez began to make rafts and tried to

float back to Mexico, but he was soon swept away by the currents and disappeared in the Gulf of Mexico. Estevanico's raft, however, wrecked on in what is now Galveston along with about 80 other men (Edward, 2010). Most of these men did not survive the winter or were killed by the natives. Estevanico, Dorantes, Cabeza De Vaca, and Alonso del Castillo Meldonado survived, but were held as prisoners by the natives. While in captivity, Estevanico learned at least languages and customs of the natives. Estevanico convinced the natives that he had come in peace to heal them. He was given gifts such as gourds, feathers, and turquoise for healing them, which impressed the Spaniards (Savage, 1994).

After, escaping and traveling eight years to return to Mexico to tell his story, Estevanico was sold to Antonio de Mendoza and appointed by Fray Marcos de Niza to lead an expedition to find the lost cities of Cibola. Estevanico would go ahead of the group, make peace with the natives, and then signal to his companions to join when trust with the natives had been established. Convinced that the Cibola riches were located to their north, Marcos sent Estevanico to the Zuni Pueblo town of New Mexico. The natives warned him not to enter, but Estevanico did not heed the warnings and was killed. Marcos and his companions returned to Mexico City to tell their tale. They reported to have seen the wall of the smallest city of Cibola, but to have turned away from it in fear of meeting the same fate as



Estevanico. Marcos is said to have died in shame the he was not able to find the Cibola (Savage, 1994).

Was Estevanico a Muslim?

So how do we know that Estevanico was a Muslim? The truth is that there is little known about Estevanico's religious beliefs or practices because he was a Morisco slave. Estevanico, originally named, Mustafa Zemmouri, was born in Azemmour, Morocco between 1490 and 1500. He was sold into slavery in 1513. Although he was raised as a Muslim, many sources say that he converted to Catholicism. However, at the time Moors were forced to convert to Catholicism or be subjected to banishment or execution. Moors who had claimed to have converted or left Spain were referred to as **Moriscos**. Estevanico was referred to as Moor and a Morisco (Capet, 2010). Because Moriscos were forced to hide their religious beliefs, it may be impossible to know if Estivanico only superficially converted to Catholicism or maintained any Islamic religious rites.

Questions:

1. What were the Spaniards looking for when they explored Florida, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona?
2. What skills did Estivanico have that his slave owners did not?
3. Research the other names of Estivanico by searching the web. List them.
4. List the cities or landmarks that Estivanico traveled to in the order that he arrived there.
5. Why is there little known about Estivanico's personal life and his religious practices or beliefs?

Activities:

1. Describe the terrain and climate of the lands of Florida, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. List some of the challenges that Estevanico must of faced as he explored the area with regard to the terrain and climate.
2. Choose another explorer of your choice. This may be Columbus, or Cortes, Khashkhash ibn Saeed, Marco Polo, etc. Compare and contrast Estevanico to that explorer using a venn diagram. Be sure to



include at least three differences and three similarities in your diagram.

3. Make a foldable: Fold a piece of paper in half, then cut three flaps on one half of the folded paper. On the outside, write a cause and under the flap write the effect. The causes and effects are listed below. Match them to create the foldable.

Name.....		
Cause	Cause	Cause

- Estevanico is believed to have converted to Catholicism.
- Estevanico was appointed to guide the Spaniards to find Cibola.
- Estevanico is ordered to explore the Zuni Pableos who warn him not to enter their town.
- Estevanico learned the customs and language of the natives.
- The Inquisition required Moors to convert, be banished, or be executed.
- Estevanico is killed by the Zuni Pableos, and the Marcos returns to Mexico too afraid to follow him.
- Estevanico impressed the Spaniards with his ability to communicate with the natives.
- Estevanico was captured by natives.