

BECOMING US

WHAT SHOULD THE PUEBLO PEOPLES DO ABOUT SPANISH OPPRESSION?

Student Deliberation Guide



BEFORE YOU USE THIS GUIDE, YOU MUST FIRST USE YOUR IMAGINATION.

This guide asks you to imagine yourself as a visitor to the past. You have traveled back in time to the 1600s, before the beginning of the United States. You are about to witness a gathering in which Pueblo leaders will weigh how to respond to the oppressive Spanish occupation of their lands.

You'll read more about their deliberations soon.

But first . . .

Imagine it is the summer of 1678. You are traveling to Ohkay Owingeh, New Mexico.

Ohkay Owingeh, which the Spanish colonizers call San Juan Pueblo, is a town about 25 miles north of Santa Fe, a city which at this time is the capital of the Spanish colony of *Nuevo Mexico*. Ohkay Owingeh is the home of a Native people that speak the Tewa language.



*Moccasins from Ohkay Owingeh,
National Museum of the American Indian,
Smithsonian Institution*



Taos Pueblo, by John K. Hillers, 1880, Courtesy of Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA)

When the Spanish forcibly colonized this land in 1589, the people of Ohkay Owingeh and other nearby villages had already been living here for thousands of years. The people live in towns, in connected multi-story buildings made from stone and adobe. The Spanish colonizers call all the people “Pueblos,” and call all the towns “pueblos,” because “pueblo” means small town in Spanish.

You are traveling to Ohkay Owingeh to witness a meeting of Pueblo leaders. Many feel that something must be done about Spanish oppression. For more than 80 years, the Spanish colonizers have forced Pueblo peoples to pay a crushing tribute of maize, blankets, and forced labor. Some 40,000 Pueblo people have died during the Spanish occupation. The Spanish also have punished many just for practicing their religion. The people have suffered so much that leaders have started to meet in secret to talk about how to end the oppression.

One of the most respected Pueblo leaders is a holy man named Po’Pay, who lives in Ohkay Owingeh. It is because of his leadership, as well as its central location, that Pueblo leaders have chosen Ohkay Owingeh to hold their deliberations. As you walk through the land that surrounds Ohkay Owingeh, you try to remember everything that you can about the Spanish occupation and how the Pueblo peoples have suffered because of it.

The Spanish Occupation

The Pueblo peoples have lived in southwestern North America for thousands of years. Before the Spanish invasion, there were more than 100 thriving towns, concentrated along the course of the Rio Grande. Sixty thousand people once lived in these towns.

Although the Pueblo peoples share many religious and cultural practices, they speak many different languages, including Keresan, Tewa, Tiwa, Hopi, Towa, Zuni, Tanos, Piro, and Tompiro. The speakers of each language have their own identity as a people. Each people inhabits multiple pueblos. Each pueblo is an independent community, free to do whatever its members believe to be good. Although independent, all pueblos are linked to each other through shared cultures, traditions, and experiences. Conflict between the pueblos is not unknown, but the people have sought to avoid war because it has caused hardship for both sides.





Pueblo bowl, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution



Helmets like this one were worn by Spanish conquistadores during the 17th and 18th centuries. Helmet, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Spanish explorers made first contact with the Pueblo peoples in 1539. The Spanish did not return until 60 years later when Don Juan de Oñate arrived in 1598 with 83 wagons full of settlers and thousands of farm animals. Oñate had been appointed governor of the new Spanish colony of *Nuevo Mexico*. He brought with him everything he needed to get the colony started. The settlers built the town of Santa Fe and made it the capital of the land they claimed.

As the Spanish moved through the Pueblo lands, they introduced new things to the Pueblo peoples, many of which seemed good at first. They promised protection, new tools, and new animals. Their holy men were Christian and preached about an everlasting heaven beyond this life.

The Spanish had come to conquer and colonize the land. Oñate declared that the people living in pueblos would now be subjects of the Spanish king and would practice Catholicism (a branch of Christianity) as their religion.

In 1599, as the Spanish soldiers attempted to conquer a northern pueblo, called Ácoma, the people of that village rebelled. They initially succeeded in ousting the Spanish from their village. But a month later the Spanish forces returned and conquered the pueblo, burning much of it, killing men, and forcing women and children into slavery. The Spanish made an example of Ácoma that the other pueblos did not forget.

For nearly a century, the cruelty and disease brought by the Spanish colonizers caused terrible suffering for many Pueblo peoples. They suffered from diseases like smallpox, measles, and influenza, brought over on the Spanish ships from Europe. These diseases spread throughout the pueblos, killing thousands of people.

The Spanish occupation also robbed Pueblo peoples of the food they needed to survive. Before the arrival of the Spanish, each pueblo had stored extra food from good harvest years. When needed, a pueblo could survive on stored food and through trade with its neighbors. As the Spanish conquered the land, they demanded that these stores of extra food be given to them in exchange for protection. This left most pueblos without food reserves to protect against bad harvests and resulted in famine. Whole pueblos disappeared because of disease and starvation. By 1678, fewer than 20,000 Pueblo people remained; one third of the population that existed when the Spanish settlers arrived.



Spurs, like these, were worn by horse riders during the Spanish conquest. In the 1500s the Spanish settlers brought cattle, sheep, and horses into northern Mexico. Iron spurs, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution



Many Pueblo people eventually adopted Catholicism while often maintaining their own Native religious practices. This blend created for many a new set of traditions that pulled from Spanish and Pueblo cultures. New Mexican Inlaid Cross, late 1800s, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution



Dipper/ladle, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution



Image of a Pueblo Flute Dancer, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution

Over these years of Spanish occupation, it became clear that the Spanish leaders did not value the religious practices of the Pueblo peoples. They brought holy men called Franciscans with them to convert Pueblo people to Catholicism and demanded that Pueblos stop doing sacred religious dances—dances that had been performed for countless generations as part of Pueblo tradition and culture. While many Pueblo people were interested in learning about Christianity, and some were even baptized, they wanted to keep their own religion too. So many dances and rites now had to be held in secret.

A crisis occurred in 1675, when a governor named Juan Francisco Treviño arrested and publicly whipped 47 Pueblo holy men, sentencing four of them to death. The Spanish called them *hechiceros*, or “sorcerers,” and blamed them for a recent drought and outbreaks of sickness.

In response, 70 Pueblo warriors forced their way into Treviño’s house and demanded that their holy men be set free. Treviño had no choice but to let them go. Peace was restored for the time being, but through this incident the Pueblo people learned that they could confront the Spanish leaders.

Po’Pay, one of the holy men Treviño had arrested and whipped, started discussions with other Pueblo leaders about what should be done to end the Spanish oppression.

These events led to this secret meeting in the Ohkay Owingeh pueblo. As a visitor to the past, you will witness discussions among representatives from other pueblos to decide what should be done about Spanish oppression.

SUMMARY OF FACTS ABOUT THE SPANISH OCCUPATION

1

The Spanish settlers have occupied Pueblo lands for the last 80 years.

2

The Spanish leaders have demanded tribute and forced labor.

3

The Spanish have brutally repressed the Pueblo religion and have forbidden traditional religious ceremonies.

4

Spanish cannons destroyed the rebellious pueblo of Ácoma at the beginning of the occupation, and terrible punishments were inflicted on the survivors.

5

Disease, hunger, and mistreatment have reduced the Pueblo population from 60,000 to 20,000 over the span of the Spanish occupation.

6

The Pueblo peoples still greatly outnumber the Spanish—with approximately 20,000 Pueblo to 2,000 Spanish, who are protected by fewer than 200 Spanish soldiers.

7

A demonstration of strength by Pueblo warriors forced Governor Treviño to release imprisoned Pueblo holy men three years ago without bloodshed.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?



Statue of Po'Pay in the U.S. Capitol, courtesy Architect of the Capitol, aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/popay-statue

The brutality of the Spanish conquest and occupation has driven many Pueblo leaders to say that something must be done. For more than two years, Pueblo elders and communities have deliberated about how to respond.

Many ideas have been proposed, but no clear consensus has been found. Now, with the appointment of a new Spanish governor, Antonio de Otermín, there is a new energy in the discussions. If Otermín turns out to be a more reasonable man than previous governors, there might be hope for a peaceful solution. But if he is as bad or worse than Treviño, then the time for bold action may be at hand.

“Po’Pay stood out as having the strongest vision and being the most knowledgeable among them ... At the same time, it was said that Po’Pay was not arrogant but always willing to learn, consider advice, and explain his decisions.”

Joe S. Sando, Historian from Jemez Pueblo

Three options for what to do about Spanish oppression have surfaced in previous discussions. Po’Pay and other Pueblo leaders have not made a decision yet and are encouraging deliberation about all three options. Below are the three options to be discussed at the secret meeting. The representatives at the meeting will try to decide which option is best. Pay close attention to each option as you also try to decide which approach to take. You should consider which examples of how to enact the options are most promising, and which of the tradeoffs that could come with them are most worrying.

OPTION ONE: GIVE THE SPANISH AN ULTIMATUM



*Painting of Taos Pueblo by Albert Lujan, or Xenaiua meaning "Weasle Arrow,"
National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution*

“The first plan of the Pueblo leaders, as they gathered more frequently to explore ideas about how to approach the Spaniards, was to deliver a reasonable ultimatum presenting their ideas for changing the system to respect Pueblo customs and traditions.”

Joe S. Sando, Historian from Jemez Pueblo ¹

The successful confrontation of Governor Treviño three years ago has shown that when the Pueblo peoples act together, they can force the Spanish colonizers to do the right thing. Knowing this, and guided by a sense of honor, one option is to present the Spanish with an ultimatum.

The ultimatum would state that if the Spanish settlers are to remain in the land of the Pueblo peoples, there must be an end to the forced labor and tribute, and the Pueblos must be allowed to practice their religion freely. The ultimatum should be translated into Spanish so that it can be understood by all the Spanish settlers. If the Spanish cannot abide by these terms, they will be forced to leave.

It would be wise to be fully prepared for war when the ultimatum is delivered. The Spanish leaders might well choose war, but with the ultimatum at least there is a chance for peace and prosperous co-existence. If the Spanish change how they treat the Pueblo peoples, both sides could benefit greatly through trade, alliance, and exchange of ideas.

Although delivering an ultimatum is dangerous, it would be unconscionable to continue tolerating the current conditions. So many Pueblo people are dying of hunger and overwork, and the proud traditions of the Pueblo are under assault every day. It would be unwise to launch an attack on the Spanish forces without seeking a peaceful solution first. This option reflects the Pueblo value of acting with openness and honor, even toward people who have treated them unfairly and shown them great disrespect.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

- **The ultimatum should state that forced labor and tribute must end.**
- **The ultimatum should state that Spanish churches and holy men may remain as long as Pueblo people may also freely and openly practice their religion. Pueblos will be free to attend the Spanish churches and practice the Spanish religion if they choose.**
- **The ultimatum should state that the Spanish governor may remain but shall exercise direct authority only over the Spanish settlers. The Pueblo peoples shall negotiate a treaty with him that shall govern trade and Spanish land claims. The treaty will also provide for mutual defense.**
- **Military preparations should be made before the ultimatum is delivered. If the Spanish leaders do not want to accept it, churches and the governor's house can quickly be occupied, and Santa Fe can be cut off from water and outside help. While this will drain Pueblo resources, it may force the Spanish to negotiate.**
- **The Pueblo leaders should tell potential allies like the Apache about the ultimatum to gain their support.**

CONSEQUENCES AND TRADEOFFS TO CONSIDER

- **The Spanish leaders could reject the ultimatum and choose to fight the Pueblo peoples. If this occurs, the Pueblos will have lost the advantage of launching a surprise attack.**
- **If the ultimatum is successful in establishing a new understanding with the Spanish settlers, life will have changed forever, and many Pueblo people may choose to leave the ways of their ancestors behind.**
- **Even if the Spanish leaders agree to the terms of the ultimatum, the Pueblo peoples may still live in fear. The Spanish could go back on their word and bring more troops from Mexico to conquer the Pueblo again.**

OPTION TWO: WORK PEACEFULLY FOR JUSTICE



Scholars believe that Native Americans made paintings like this after learning and adopting the style from the Spanish and other Europeans arriving in the area. The image is of Saint Anthony of Padua, a Catholic saint. Hide painting of St. Anthony, early 1700s, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

“War is not the way of our people; patience has been the first virtue of our people.”

Quote attributed to Po’Pay, a Pueblo leader and delegate from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo ²

Another option is to find peaceful ways to restore justice. The Pueblo peoples still greatly outnumber the Spanish settlers, and they should not need to threaten violence to achieve justice. There are only about 2,000 Spanish settlers living in Pueblo lands, and there are fewer than 200 Spanish soldiers. They do not have the ability to survive on their own. If all the pueblos agreed to stop paying tribute and working for the Spanish at the same time, the Spanish would be forced to change their behavior. They could not retaliate against all the pueblos at the same time.

This choice would be better than war or the threat of war. The Pueblo peoples cannot hope to win a war against the Spanish forces because the Spanish can bring as many troops, guns, and cannons up from Mexico as it takes for them to win. It makes no sense to turn away from the Pueblo tradition of following a peaceful path to fight an unwinnable war.

The peaceful path to justice may have a better chance of succeeding than ever before. Although Pueblo peoples have been subjected to cruelty and injustice by the Spanish, the Pueblo and the Spanish have been growing closer over the last 80 years. Some Spanish families have turned to Pueblo healers to treat their sick children, and to Pueblo midwives when a woman was going to give birth. These families have gained respect for Pueblo religion and medicine. Some Pueblo people have embraced Catholicism and have come to trust and respect a few of the Spanish holy men. Many in the younger generation have both Pueblo and Spanish ancestors and understand the ways of both peoples. Because understanding between the Pueblo and the Spanish has grown over the years, there is a real chance of progress through peaceful means.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

- **Cultivate friendships with influential Spanish officials, priests, military officers, and settlers who are sympathetic to the Pueblo peoples' cause and can help them achieve justice.**
- **Continue to practice religious ceremonies in secret and try to educate the Spanish settlers about the compassionate nature of Pueblo religion.**
- **The Spanish allow each pueblo to select a governor who often acts as an intermediary with the Spanish leaders. Pueblos should begin to choose governors who will more forcefully represent the interests of their communities.**
- **Organize all the pueblos to stop paying tribute to the Spanish. If just one pueblo did this, the Spanish forces would retaliate. But they cannot punish 20,000 Pueblo people at once, and it would be hard for the Spanish settlers to survive on their own. However, the Spanish forces still might attack one pueblo to punish the others.**
- **Ask allied Native peoples in neighboring areas not to trade with the Spanish settlers until they agree to improve their treatment of the Pueblo peoples.**

CONSEQUENCES AND TRADEOFFS TO CONSIDER

- **It could take many years to achieve positive results from this approach. In the meantime, Pueblo peoples will continue to suffer. Lives will be lost to starvation and mistreatment and Pueblos will continue to live in fear of the Spanish.**
- **Even if the Spanish settlers eventually come to respect the Pueblo religion, it will need to be practiced in secret until that day comes. But it is difficult and should not be necessary to keep large ceremonies secret. Younger people may find it easier to adopt the religion of the Spanish than to practice their own religion in secret.**
- **If this option succeeds, it is unlikely that the Pueblo peoples could return to their old way of life. There would still be a Spanish presence in the land, and, over time, the Pueblo might lose their cultural traditions.**

OPTION THREE: MAKE A SURPRISE ATTACK ON THE SPANISH



Old Time War Dance, Taos Pueblo, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution

“I suggest that we start to drive out the Casteras [Spanish] on the fifteenth of Agosto. That is the day of the Spanish feast in my village, and many padres and Casteras will be there.”

Quote attributed to a delegate from Zia Pueblo³

A third option is for the Pueblo to plan and carry out a surprise revolt. The Pueblo peoples are suffering too much to spend years peacefully resisting the Spanish. An attack that has been planned in secret would stand a better chance of success than delivering an ultimatum. The Pueblo people still outnumber the Spanish settlers ten-to-one. If they act in unison with the element of surprise, there is an excellent chance of success. As many pueblos as possible should be asked to join without telling the plan to anyone who might betray it to the Spanish. Pueblo leaders must make sure that only those who can be trusted will be told and must communicate in ways that do not create suspicion.

This option has the element of surprise, which may be the only thing that can help the Pueblo succeed against the weapons of the Spanish forces. The success of the plan depends on widely scattered pueblos all acting at the same time. Only then will the Spanish be overwhelmed. A date for the revolt must be chosen and strictly adhered to.

The longer they wait, the weaker the Pueblos may become. This option may provide the Pueblo peoples their best chance of surviving and maintaining their cultural traditions.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE:

- **Give more power to trustworthy war leaders who can organize all the pueblos who want to participate in a surprise attack on the Spanish, even if this diminishes the influence of holy men.**
- **Choose the best time for the revolt. It must be far enough in the future to allow adequate preparation, but too much delay carries a greater risk of discovery. It would be best to find a time when the Spanish would be vulnerable.**
- **Seek the support of potential allies, such as the Apache, if it will not create too much additional complexity and risk of discovery.**
- **Devote more time and resources to acquiring weapons, even if this negatively impacts the attention to farming now and the food supply for the coming winter. It must be done in ways that do not make the Spanish leaders suspicious.**

CONSEQUENCES AND TRADEOFFS TO CONSIDER:

- **This option will leave the Spanish with no choice but to fight and will likely cause many deaths on both sides: not only of soldiers but also of many civilians.**
- **If the revolt succeeds, the Pueblo peoples will need to stay ready to defend themselves. The Spanish forces could return at any time with more soldiers and weapons to retake the land. Friendly relations and trade with them would be very difficult for years after this action.**
- **Planning and executing a surprise attack will set a bad example of violence for young Pueblo people, who have always been taught to seek peaceful ways to solve problems.**

REVIEW OF OPTIONS

OPTION ONE: GIVE THE SPANISH AN ULTIMATUM

This option reflects the Pueblo value of acting with honor. It provides a chance for the Spanish leaders to choose peaceful co-existence.

The ultimatum will demand that forced labor and food payments to the Spanish must end, and that the Pueblo peoples may freely and openly practice their religion. If the Spanish leaders refuse, the only remaining option is war.

Extensive military preparations should be made before the ultimatum is delivered in order to encourage the Spanish to accept it.

OPTION TWO: WORK PEACEFULLY FOR JUSTICE

This option reflects the Pueblo value of finding nonviolent solutions to even the most difficult problems.

Cultivate friendships with influential Spanish officials, priests, officers, and settlers who are sympathetic to the Pueblo peoples' cause and who can help them achieve justice.

Organize a movement to stop paying tribute to the Spanish. Ask allies not to trade with the Spanish settlers until they agree to improve their treatment of the Pueblo peoples.

OPTION THREE: MAKE A SURPRISE ATTACK ON THE SPANISH

This option might give the Pueblo their best chance of surviving and maintaining their cultural traditions.

Set a date for the revolt. The success of the plan depends on widely scattered pueblos all acting at the same time.

Get as many pueblos to participate as possible without revealing the plan to anyone who might betray it to the Spanish leaders. Seek the support of potential allies, such as the Apache.

HOWEVER,

If the Spanish leaders reject the ultimatum and choose to fight, the advantages of a surprise attack will have been lost.

Even if the Spanish agree to the terms of the ultimatum, Pueblos might still live in fear that the Spanish could go back on their word as soon as more troops arrive from Spanish colonies in Mexico.

This option may take a long time to get results.

If this option succeeds, it is unlikely that the Pueblo peoples could return to their old way of life. There would still be a Spanish presence in the land and over time the Pueblos might lose their cultural traditions.

This plan may cause a high number of casualties on both sides, including civilians.

If the revolt succeeds, it is likely that the Spanish will send more troops to retaliate against the Pueblo peoples. Each pueblo would need to be ready to defend itself in the future.

Endnotes

- 1 Joe S. Sando, Historian from Jemez Pueblo, “The Pueblo Revolt” by Joe S. Sando, in *Po’Pay: Leader of the First American Revolution*, edited by Joe S. Sando and Herman Agoyo (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishing, 2005), page 22.
- 2 Attributed by Joe S. Sando, Historian from Jemez Pueblo, in “The Pueblo Revolt,” page 28.
- 3 Attributed by Joe S. Sando, Historian from Jemez Pueblo, in “The Pueblo Revolt,” page 26.