Spanish Missions in Texas

Since the earliest days of Spanish exploration in the Americas, a highly successful mission system was put in place. In the southeastern United States it extended from Florida up to North Carolina, and in the southwest from Texas to California. Through this system, Catholic priests received financial and military support from the Spanish Crown to build missions where the priests could convert the indigenous people not only to the Catholic faith, but also to the Spanish way of life. The priests were protected by Spanish soldiers as new lands were claimed, although very often these two groups disagreed about the best way to treat the new converts. The priests were the protectors of the indigenous, and taught them religion as well as valuable vocational skills.

1 In 1690, the first Spanish mission in Texas was founded: San Francisco de los Tejas. Several other missions were established shortly thereafter and in close proximity to each other. All were in East Texas, an area that was plagued by disease, drought, constant attacks from indigenous inhabitants who rejected the Spaniards’ presence, and threats from the French who fought for power in the same region. For these reasons, the missions were closed and four were relocated along the San Antonio River in what is now the city of San Antonio. By 1731, there were five missions established around this area: San Antonio de Valero (1718), San José (1720), San Juan Capistrano (1731), Concepción (1731), and San Francisco de Espada (1731). The dirt road that linked all the missions was known as El Camino Real, a route that began in Mexico City and continued up through the northernmost territories of Nueva España, as Mexico was then called. Today these territories are the west and southwest regions of the United States.

2 The oldest and best known of these missions is San Antonio de Valero, named for the Spanish viceroy of Mexico, el marqués de Valero. It is also known as the Alamo, one of the most famous landmarks in Texas history. The original building was made of sticks and
straw, but these flimsy building materials made it an easy victim of attacks. Subsequent construction of this and other missions was made with sturdier materials, such as sandstone, which could be cut into slabs for floors and walls, or certain clay soils, which were made into tiles and bricks. Although some of the missions were more elaborate than others, their overall architectural style was simple and practical.

4 The mission of San José was the best fortified and most successful, and soon became an important social and cultural center. It was also considered the most beautiful. San José was founded by Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús, a Franciscan priest who was born in 1657 in Valencia, Spain. While still in his early teens, Margil expressed interest in becoming a Franciscan and at the age of twenty-five he was ordained. Soon thereafter, he was on his way to the New World as a missionary. After serving in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Mexico, he went on to help establish missions in East Texas. These missions are considered the cornerstone from which other missions in Texas grew.

5 As protectors of the indigenous, the Franciscans opened workshops in the missions in order to teach them trades. Under the priests’ guidance, the indigenous learned such skills as carpentry and masonry in order to enhance the construction of the missions, as well as blacksmithing, which was needed to repair farm tools. The mission of San Juan Capistrano became a major supplier of agricultural products in the region, along with wood, iron, cloth, and leather goods that the indigenous produced in the mission’s workshops.

6 The mission of Concepción (full name: Misión Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Acuna) is the best preserved of the San Antonio missions, with 45-inch thick walls. It has what many consider to be the oldest fully preserved church building in the United States. Concepción was well-known for its religious celebrations.

7 The mission of Espada is unique because of its irrigation system, the oldest still in use in the United States. Missions depended on a steady harvesting of crops for the survival of its residents. Because rainfall was irregular in this part of Texas, an irrigation system was a top priority. Irrigation was so important that settlers measured the farmland in suertes, which is the amount of land that they could water in a day.

8 Today, the Alamo is a visitor’s center and museum. The other four missions—San José, San Juan, Concepción, and Espada—are functioning Catholic parishes and are open to the public. All are popular tourist destinations.
1 Which of the following trades was not taught to the indigenous in the missions?
   A masonry
   B blacksmithing
   C printing
   D carpentry

2 In the early 1700s, what was the name of the land that today is Mexico?
   F San Antonio
   G El Camino Real
   H Nueva España
   J San Francisco de los Tejas

3 In paragraph 4, what does the word cornerstone mean?
   A end
   B foundation
   C adobe
   D building material

4 In paragraph 7, what are suertes?
   F a kind of farming system
   G luck
   H a kind of land measurement
   J crops

5 Why do you think the missions are so popular with tourists? Use information from the reading and your own ideas to support your answer.

6 Father Margil was in his early teens when he made his commitment to become a priest. What personal qualities do you think are necessary for a person that young to make a commitment that is so serious? Do you think that it would be much more difficult today for a person so young to make such a decision and commitment? Why or why not?
¡Bienvenidos a la calle Olvera!

1 Si vas a Los Ángeles, debes visitar la calle Olvera, que está en el centro viejo de la ciudad y que tiene una atmósfera totalmente mexicana. En el año 1930, esta calle se transformó en un mercado mexicano donde puedes comprar toda clase de productos mexicanos y comer platos mexicanos auténticos. Los fines de semana muchas personas comen en los restaurantes y los mariachis tocan música en la plaza cerca de esta calle.

2 La calle Olvera lleva el nombre de Agustín Olvera, quien vivió en una casa delante de la plaza en el siglo XIX y fue uno de los primeros oficiales de la ciudad. Esta calle es una de las más viejas de la ciudad y tiene mucho interés histórico. Allí están muchos de los lugares más viejos como Casa Pelanconi, en donde está situado el Café La Golondrina, el primer restaurante en Los Ángeles de comida mexicana auténtica.

3 Si estás en la calle Olvera en un día de fiesta mexicana, puedes observar tradiciones y ceremonias muy importantes de la cultura mexicana. Algunos de los días de fiesta mexicana más populares se celebran en la plaza cerca de la calle Olvera. El Cinco de Mayo conmemora la victoria de los mexicanos sobre los franceses en Puebla en 1862. El 16 de septiembre se celebra el Día de la Independencia de México porque ése fue el día en 1810 en que los mexicanos declararon su independencia de España. El dos de noviembre se celebra el Día de los Muertos, el día en que las familias mexicanas van a los cementerios para conmemorar a sus familiares muertos. Cada noche del 16 al 24 de diciembre se celebran las posadas, una fiesta que conmemora los nueve días cuando la Virgen María y San José buscaron un lugar para descansar con el Niño Jesús.

4 Hoy la calle Olvera forma parte del Monumento Histórico del Pueblo de Los Ángeles. Si la visitas, vas a tener una experiencia muy interesante. Casi dos millones de personas visitan la calle Olvera cada año para participar en las actividades culturales, comer en los restaurantes y aprender más sobre la historia de Los Ángeles.
In the article, three of the following are mentioned as ways in which Olvera Street resembles a community in Mexico. Which one is not mentioned?

A  Vendors sell Mexican products.
B  Restaurants serve authentic Mexican food.
C  Mariachis provide entertainment.
D  Visitors bargain for the products they would like to buy.

What does *siglo* mean in paragraph 2?

F  address
G  number
H  century
J  building

Three of the following statements are false. Which one is true?

A  Olvera Street was named in honor of Agustín Olvera, Los Angeles County’s first official.
B  Olvera Street is the oldest street in Los Angeles.
C  Olvera Street is the site of some of the oldest buildings in Los Angeles.
D  Olvera Street is located just outside of Los Angeles.

Which of the following statements best describes how the celebration of *las posadas* differs from the other celebrations mentioned?

F  It takes place over a period of several days and commemorates a religious event.
G  It commemorates a famous event in Mexican history.
H  It commemorates a famous tradition celebrated in Mexico.
J  It takes place only once a year.

¿Qué impacto crees que las diversas comunidades de los Estados Unidos tienen en lo que llamamos “la cultura estadounidense”? Usa detalles e información del artículo en tu respuesta.

Piensa en un lugar en tu comunidad o en otra comunidad que es similar a la calle Olvera. ¿Qué hacen las personas de esa comunidad para celebrar su cultura?
Test 16

Nombre: ___________________________ Fecha: _______________________

1 A B C D 2 F G H J 3 A B C D

4 F G H J

5

READ THINK EXPLAIN

6

READ THINK EXPLAIN