

Teaching Materials

Teaching Strategies

As a collection, these works describe the shifting meaning of the historical figure known today by three names: doña Marina, Malintzin, Malinche. The source documents range widely across time and media, from the 16th to the 20th century—from chronicle to poetry, essay to sculpture. This collection therefore begs the methodological question: what lends historical authority to an image or written text? For instance, how, or why, can a painting become a viable historical source? No writing or visual image is known today that records doña Marina’s own words or thoughts. It will therefore be useful to ask what perspective on doña Marina each of these sources creates. Reading comparatively, one can look across a selection of these sources with an eye to the events and vocabulary they underscore. Just as one might read texts for their particular emphases or omissions, images can be read in terms of composition and descriptive language (where Malintzin appears, what she wears, what environment or setting she occupies, with what degree of care or inattention each figure is rendered). The 16th-century sources offer an opportunity to weigh distinct ways of representing the Spanish conquest of Mexico and its participants. The 20th-century materials invite further reflection on the legacy of this conquest, the Chicano movement, feminist expression in the United States, and border histories. Attending to the nuances of visual and verbal language in recent sources—“code-switching,” from English to Spanish, or the materials and compositions used to portray Malinche—opens conversations about the way a historical figure accrues or sheds meaning over time.

Discussion Questions:

- Consider how 16th-century sources describe doña Marina, Malintzin. What do their similarities (and differences) suggest about her historical role and reputation in the first decades after the Spanish conquest?
- In what ways do the perspectives expressed in 20th-century images of and writings about Malinche differ from those of the 16th century? What do these differences suggest about historical “accuracy”: whose perspectives on this woman are most binding—those of the conquistadors who knew her, or 20th-century feminists who see her as a role model, or painters and sculptors who render her in visual terms?

Lesson Plan: Dona Marina/Malinche: Traitor, Victim, or Survivor?

Time Estimate

Three 50-minute class periods.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. read and analyze a variety of sources, both primary and secondary, including poetry and examples of visual art.
2. determine the point of view of the creators of the sources, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each.
3. interpret and evaluate the sources, especially the role of women as seen in these sources.
4. reach a possible conclusion as to the accuracy of the portrayal of Malinche by the various sources.
5. determine what other sources would be useful (i.e., a map showing the location of those who hated the Aztecs and were willing to join the Spaniards to fight their enemy).
6. consider how the interpretation of historical information changes over time.

Materials

- Sufficient copies of the following two excerpts for the hook:
 - *The New York Times*, March 1997
 - *El Ojo del Lago*, December 1997
- Sufficient copies of the following sources (in this sequence):
 - Source 3: Painting, Mexican Manuscript
 - Source 4: Painting, Florentine Codex
 - Source 7: Painting, The Dream of Malinche
 - Source 11: Sculpture, Durham
 - Source 1: Letter, Hernan Cortes
 - Source 2: Personal Account, Bernal Diaz del Castillo
 - Source 5: Nonfiction, Florentine Codex (Spanish)
 - Source 6: Nonfiction, Florentine Codex (Nahuatl)
 - Source 8: Nonfiction, Octavio Paz
 - Source 9: Poem, Como Duele
 - Source 10: Poem, La Malinche
- Sufficient copies of Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Images
- Sufficient copies of Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Texts
- Blackboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers

- Paper and colored pencils for less advanced students

Strategies

- **Hook:** Hand out and read the two excerpts. Have students discuss what it means to be a traitor, a victim, or a survivor. On the board, create three columns, one for each term. Then list the points made by the students beneath the appropriate term. Lead a discussion on the types of sources needed to make a reasoned, rational judgment. Discuss what students know about the Conquest of Mexico and the role of women in that region during the 16th century. Read *Doña Marina, Cortés's Translator Introduction*. [See Resources Below.]
- **Images:** Create a chart that has three columns: Traitor-Victim-Neither. This chart will help the students decide between different perceptions of Dona Marina/Malinche and will assist them later in the lesson when a trial is held based on the sources.

Distribute copies of the image sources: ([Source 3: Painting, Mexican Manuscript](#), [Source 4: Painting, Florentine Codex](#), [Source 7: Painting, The Dream of Malinche](#), [Source 11: Sculpture, Durham](#)) Distribute four copies of [Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Images](#) to each student. Divide the class into two groups. Have students examine these sources carefully, noting that two are from the 16th century and two are from the 20th century. As the documents are read and evaluated, each group decides how valid it thinks a document is, what image is projected of Dona Marina, what changes occurred to her image over time. Students should decide which role is suggested by each source, (i.e., the personal account of Diaz del Castillo suggests reasons to believe that Dona Marina was a victim, while the painting from the Florentine Codex implies that she was a collaborator.) Students should complete a worksheet for each source.

Students should also consider the following questions:

- What can we infer about the painters? (What does indigenous mean? Does the name Ruiz suggest anything about the painter's background?)
- What can we infer about the painters' point of view?
- What does each painting tell us about Dona Marina?
- What details suggest her role?
- What similarities or differences are there between the works of the two different time periods?
- What does this tell us about the interpretation of history?

- How valid is each image as a source of historical knowledge?

Students should try to decide if the paintings portray Dona Marina as a traitor or a victim, using the criteria listed on the board to help make decisions. Note reasons for the choices made.

- **Texts:** Distribute copies of the following two sources: [Source 1: Letter, Hernan Cortes](#), [Source 2: Personal Account, Bernal Diaz del Castillo](#). Distribute two copies of [Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Texts](#) to each student. Have students read the sources documents silently. Complete a worksheet for each of these primary sources.

Students should also consider the following questions:

- Who are the authors?
- When were they written?
- How are they alike?
- How are they different?
- Both men knew Dona Marina. Circle the words used by each to describe her. Why would Cortes be so abrupt in his description of a woman he knew intimately? Why is Diaz del Castillo's account more detailed? How valid is each man's assessment of Dona Marina?
- What are the strengths/weaknesses of each account?
- Where would each student place these two documents on the Traitor-Victim-Neither chart? Why?

- **Texts:** Distribute copies of the following two sources: [Source 5: Nonfiction, Florentine Codex \(Spanish\)](#), [Source 6: Nonfiction, Florentine Codex \(Nahuatl\)](#). Students read aloud the two versions, one in Spanish, one in Nahuatl, of the Spanish entry into a private home and what happened. Note the author and date of the original source and the translators and source for the later edition. Compare the two (Spanish and Nahuatl) versions of the event.

Students should also consider the following questions:

- What is different in them? Write specific examples of these differences. What does this tell us about translations of sources?
- Look back in the Images sources and find the one that is also from the Florentine Codex. How well does the painting reinforce the account or does it?
- What do we learn from the three examples taken from the

Florentine Codex about the role of women?

- Would Dona Marina be a typical example of women of her time and place?
- Where might these two sources go on Traitor-Victim-Neither chart? Why?
- **Homework:** Distribute copies of **Source 8: Nonfiction, Octavio Paz**. This is an essay by Octavio Paz to be read and evaluated at home. In addition to the worksheet activity, students should keep a running list of questions raised by their reading, and they should look up unfamiliar terms. The essay is lengthy, has sophisticated language and complex concepts. The reading will take a considerable amount of time and thought. Some questions to consider as the students read the essay, or for discussion on the following day, are:
 - What is meant by Mexican hermeticism?
 - How do Europeans characterize Mexican/Mexico?
 - How does Paz characterize the Mexican work ethic? the servant mentality?
 - What "vestiges of past realities" create struggles for Mexicans?
 - Who does Paz define as *la chingada? hijos de la chingada?*
 - What are some of the many meanings of *chingar*?
 - What is meant by the phrase, "*I am your father.*"?
 - What vision of God does the Mexican venerate? Why?
 - Who is Chauhtemoc?
 - Who is the symbol of the "violated Mother?" Why?
 - What does the adjective *malinchista* mean?
 - What is meant by the frequent shout, "*Viva Mexico, hijos de la chingada!*"?
 - What does the essay tell us about the role of women in contemporary (1985) Mexican life?
 - What does Paz tell us about Malinche (Dona Marina)?
 - What does this document add to the Traitor-Victim-Neither chart and where should it go?
- **Discussion:** The homework assignment of the Paz document should be thoroughly discussed. Why is this essay "now a touchstone and point of departure for revisionist work on Malinche, particularly by feminist, Chicana writers, artists and activists"? What is there in Paz' interpretation that would lend itself to revision?

- **Poetry:** Distribute Source 9: Poem, *Como Duele* and Source 10: Poem, *La Malinche*. Have students read these aloud and discuss the meaning of each. Who wrote the poems and when? Define the concept *la raza* (the people). Discuss other language as needed. What phrases are used by Tafolla to characterize Malinche? What was Malinche's fate according to Sosa-Riddell? What technique does Sosa-Riddell use to weave the story of both indigenous and Chicana people? What do we learn about the image/role of women from the poems?
- **Trial of Dona Marina:** The two groups previously selected will work together in class to prepare for a treason trial of Dona Marina. One group will select the Defendant, Defense Attorney, and any witnesses needed for the case. The other group will select the Prosecutor and such witnesses needed for the case. (Witnesses could be Montezuma, Cortes, Aztec persons, neighboring indigenous people, a priest, a Spanish soldier etc. Their testimony must be based on information from the sources. The number of witnesses is optional.) The two groups work to prepare the presentation—Dona Marina's opening statement is NOT the work of one student, but all in the defense group will decide what she is to say. This is true of every speaking role. The jury will have an equal number selected from each group and should be encouraged to render a verdict based on the presentation of the sources. If this fails to bring in a verdict, the "judge" (teacher) renders a decision.

Students should select from the documents in the chart those arguments which best fit their charters. In their statements, students should explain why the sources used are valid ones (i.e., eyewitness account, and in the concluding summation, the weakness of the opponents' arguments should be noted (i.e., too much time elapsed)).

The trial begins with the judge addressing Dona Marina ... is she guilty or not guilty of treason?

Dona Marina reads her opening statement. The prosecution delivers an opening statement of intent to prove guilt. The defense delivers an opening statement of intent to prove victimization, not treason. Prosecution calls witnesses. Defense calls witnesses. Each side has a summation. Jury deliberates and reaches a verdict. Discussion by the entire class follows to determine how the image of Malinche changed over time. How were the contemporary sources different from the ones from the 16th century? Which sources do the students consider the most effective or "correct"? Which voices are the most believable, those from the 16th or those from

the 20th century?

Differentiation

Advanced Students Have students read from the bibliography (below) about this fascinating woman and the various interpretations of her historic role. What additional sources would be helpful? Advanced students will also take a day to write the DBQ.

Less Advanced Students: Have students create a drawing of Malinche when they have completed activity 2. Omit activity 5, homework. Compile the worksheets and create an outline for these students to use while writing the DBQ.

For additional information on Dona Marina/La Malinche see the following sources:

1. PBS Conquistadors series
2. Frances Karttunen. *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors*. (Piscataway, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press: 1994).
3. Malinche, <http://onesun.cc.geneseo.edu/~kintz/Malinche.html>
4. La Malinche: Creator or Traitor, www.tihof.org/honors/malinche.htm
5. Reinterpreting Malinche by John Taylor, <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~epf/2000/jt.html>
6. This essay is an excellent resource for the teacher, but for those who feel some language censorship is needed for young students, some editing may be necessary before distribution to the class. There are extensive notes and links to other sources at the conclusion of the essay.
7. Sandra Messinger Cypess. *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*. (Austin, University of Texas Press: 1991).

Document Based Question (Suggested writing time: 40 minutes)

Directions: The following question is based on the documents included in this module. This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents. Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
- Uses all or all but one of the documents.
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
- Takes into account both the sources of the documents and the authors' points of view.
- You may refer to relevant historical information not mentioned in the documents.

Question: Using the documents and images from the Dona Marina: Cortes' Translator module

- *Describe* the role and reputation of Dona Marina that emerges from an analysis of the early (16th century) sources. Were these eyewitness accounts? Did the author/artist know Dona Marina personally? Describe the changes to Dona Marina's role and reputation evident in the later (20th century) sources. Why can history be seen differently over time?
- *Evaluate* Dona Marina's status as traitor, victim, or survivor. Express a thoughtful opinion, and in doing so, evaluate the validity of the sources. Which sources seem the most reasonable to use to draw conclusions? Why are there stark differences in the perception of Dona Marina/La Malinche over time? What can these sources really tell us about the lifestyle of women in 16th century Mexico?

Be sure to analyze point of view in at least three documents.

What additional sources, types of documents, or information would you need to have a more complete view of this topic?

Bibliography

Alarcón, Norma. 2003 “Traddtora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism.” In *Perspectives on Las Américas: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation*. Matthew Gutmann, et al., eds. 33-40. London: Blackwell Publishing. [First published in *Cultural Critique*, Fall 1989, pp. 57-87].

This essay discusses how and why Chicana writers and thinkers have reinterpreted Malinche. Alarcón assesses the role and reputation assigned to Malinche by 16th-century chroniclers, Octavio Paz and other male writers. She compares Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe, and she summarizes important Chicana revisionist work. Alarcón’s essay is at once historically and theoretically grounded, an important model of feminist and Chicana scholarship.

Candelaria, Cordelia (1980). “La Malinche, Feminist Prototype,” *Frontiers* 2 (Summer): 1-6.

This essay represents one of the first reassessments of Malinche published by a Chicana writer. Reviewing 16th-century sources, Candelaria finds Malinche’s “usefulness” to the Spanish extended beyond her work as translator. She was also (and no less importantly) a valued guide, advisor, strategist and interpreter of indigenous customs. The essay concludes by arguing Malinche should be viewed as a Chicana, feminist prototype: she defied traditional roles and expectations of women by creatively and strategically adapting to a historical situation she did not choose.

Cypess, Sandra Messinger. 1991. *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

A study of the different ways literary works—primarily theatrical plays and poetry—have interpreted Malinche. Cypess emphasizes the 19th and 20th centuries, although she also discusses 16th-century chronicles. This volume addresses works in English and Spanish, presenting a good overview of shifting political and literary landscapes.

Díaz del Castillo, Bernal. 1965 [1585]. *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, 1517-1521*. Translated by A. P. Maudsley. Noonday Press.

The most extensive 16th-century written descriptions of doña Marina known today comes from Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s narrative of the conquest of Mexico. His eyewitness account in many instances elaborates events and details that Cortés and other chroniclers merely summarize. Even so, this history was written decades after the conquest, and thus represents the memories of an aged conquistador. As with the letters of Cortés, it is also a politically-motivated rendition of past events: Bernal Díaz sought to “set the record straight” and “correct” other, competing accounts of the conquest. This is an English translation of the original Spanish.

González Hernández, Cristina. 2002. *Doña Marina (la Malinche) y la formación de la identidad mexicana*. Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro.

In this book, González summarizes historical information on doña Marina—her name,

her place of origins, and her role in key conquest events. She also analyzes the symbolic role played by doña Marina in the development of Mexican national identity. Questions related to mestizaje are particularly well covered. In Spanish.

Karttunen, Frances. 1997. "Rethinking Malinche," in *Indian Women of early Mexico*. Ed. Susan Schroeder et al., 291-312. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

This essay presents an excellent summary of the historical information known about Malinche. Karttunen draws upon both written and pictorial sources from the 16th-century, with particular attention to indigenous Nahua perspectives. This essay stresses the importance of Malinche's resolve and ability to survive in adverse circumstances. It also ties the fate of her reputation to intellectual and political changes wrought by Mexican independence.

Lockhart, James, editor and translator. 1993. *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

This book transcribes 16th-century Nahuatl accounts of the Spanish conquest and provides English translations of these texts. Book 12 of the *Florentine Codex*, which describes the conquest of Tenochtitlan in detail, appears here in Spanish, Nahuatl and English; in this text Malintzin surfaces repeatedly. The volume includes a very useful introductory essay by Lockhart explaining key features of 16th-century Nahuatl accounts of conquest and their modes of expression.

Pagden, Anthony, Translator and Editor. 1986. *Hernán Cortés: Letters from Mexico*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

This book translates five letters Hernán Cortés penned between 1519 and 1526 and sent to Charles V, the King of Spain. Written from the Americas, the letters offer eyewitness descriptions of the conquest of Tenochtitlan and other indigenous communities, the defeat of Motecuzoma, the expedition Cortés led to Honduras (with doña Marina), and other conquistadors' actions. These reports "from the field" were written, at least in part, to justify the conquistador's actions and serve his ambitions. This volume includes two very useful introductory essays about the historical period and Cortés' letters as historical documents.