Lesson Plans
Lesson 3: Spain the 16th Century Superpower

Introduction
The Spanish Empire served as the world’s only superpower during the 16th century. Although the discovery of the New World played a vital role in the rise of Spain’s dominance, numerous other factors also contributed to its success. However, the empire overstretched its resources and became involved in numerous conflicts throughout Europe, which eventually led to its decline. This activity has students consider the major factors that influenced the Spanish Empire’s rise and decline. As an optional extension of this lesson, students can compare Spain with other historical empires.

Main Tasks
- Create a series of three visual representations that illustrate the relationship among factors that led to the rise and fall of the Spanish Empire.

Process
1. To introduce this project, show the Story of Isabella and Ferdinand video clip. Review as a class the main factors that led to the rise of the Spanish Empire, including the consolidation of Spain, reconquest of Granada, and the discovery of the New World. Analyze the importance of each factor and ask students to categorize these ideas into political, economic, and cultural categories.
2. Break the class into groups of 3 to 4 students, and label each group Cluster 1, Cluster 2, or Cluster 3.
3. Each cluster number represents one of the monarchs that ruled during the height of the Spanish Empire: Isabella and Ferdinand (Cluster 1), Charles V (Cluster 2), or Philip II (Cluster 3).
4. Ask students to use the provided resources to research each of the factors as it related to their monarch. In a short summary they should:
   - identify the importance of the event or idea;
   - explain how it contributed to the rise or fall of the empire; and
   - categorize it as a political, economic, or cultural factor.
5. Now, have students create a visual representation of the factors with a graphic organizer or mind map. They should use a large piece of paper or a computer-based graphic organizer application, such as Inspiration (client), Webspiration (online), or Gliffy (online). Label whether each item contributed to Spain’s rise or fall AND whether it was a political, economic, or cultural factor.
6. Students should indicate the relationship between factors AND make connections across the three cluster groups.
7. After the students have completed the graphic organizer, discuss their findings. Use the following questions to start the discussion:

   How was Spain’s eventual decline based upon factors during Isabella and Ferdinand’s reign?

   If you were an advisor to each monarch, what advice would you give that might have helped prolong the empire?

   Which one factor most influenced Spain’s rise? Its decline?

8. Show the Spain’s Development video clip. Discuss the historical implications of the fact that the people of Spain ultimately gained little from their nation’s empire.

Resources

Video:
   The Story of Isabella and Ferdinand
   Charles V / Need for Gold
   Faith of Philip
   Importance of the Mine at Potosi
   Spanish Defeat
   Spain’s Development

Website Articles:
   Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand
   Charles V
   Philip II
   Chapter 2: The Old World Family Tree
   Chapter 3: How Contact Changed the Old World
   Chapter 5: The King and the Prophet
   Chapter 6: The Fall of the Spanish Empire
   The Spanish Empire: In the Name of God and King

Optional Extension
The fall of the Spanish Empire illustrates how a superpower can become a victim of its own success. This optional extension activity asks students to compare and contrast the fall of empires in world history, as well as to analyze the future of the United States as a superpower based upon their findings.

1. In groups, students select or are assigned a major superpower in world history (e.g., Ottoman Empire, the Mongols, the Soviet Union, the British Empire).
2. Research and identify the major factors that led to each empire’s collapse as a superpower.
3. Using a Venn diagram, compare those causes with the decline of the Spanish Empire.
4. As a class, discuss the commonalities and dissimilarities between the different empires.
5. As a class, analyze the current condition of the United States. Are there any factors present in the United States that have been attributed to the decline of Spain or the other empires? Discuss the importance of these potential issues and whether or not that may have an impact on our future. What must we do to maintain our current status as a world power?

Cluster Group 1: Isabella and Ferdinand
- Development of racial hierarchies
- Crusader mentality
- Marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand
- Support of Columbus
- Reconquest of Granada
- Founding of the Holy League
- Arranged marriage of children

Cluster Group 2: Charles V
- Death of Philip I, Ferdinand, and Maximilian I
- Charles crowned as the Holy Roman Emperor
- Ottoman siege of Vienna
- The “juro”
- Muslim pirates in the Mediterranean
- Defeat of the Mexicas and Incas
- Spanish settlement in the New World
- Founding of the Potosi mine in Peru
- War with the Schmalkaldic League

Cluster Group 3: Philip II
- Conquest of the Philippines
- Revolt in the Netherlands
- Defeat of the Spanish Armada
- Spanish debt to German and Italian bankers
- Silver (treasure) fleets
- Harvest declines