



California Mission Vocabulary A-Z

Student Glossary & Reference Sheet | California Missions Teacher Tools



A-M | Architecture, religion, agriculture, and daily life

Name: _____

A

Adobe

A building material made from earth and water, often mixed with straw and formed into sun-dried bricks.

B

Bell / Bell Wall

Mission bells signaled worship, work, meals, visitors, and other parts of daily community life.

C

Convento

The residence and work area for Franciscan friars, usually located next to the mission church.

D

Dormitory

Shared sleeping quarters used by some mission residents. Housing arrangements differed by mission and time period.

E

El Camino Real

Spanish for "The Royal Road." Routes linked missions, presidios, pueblos, ranches, and other settlements.

F

Franciscan

A member of the Catholic Order of Friars Minor. Franciscan padres administered the Alta California mission chain.

G

Garden

Mission gardens grew useful and decorative plants. Larger fields and orchards supplied food and other products.

H

Herds / Livestock

Cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and other animals supported food production, transport, hides, tallow, and ranch work.

I

Irrigation

Channels and ditches carried water to fields, orchards, gardens, fountains, and washing areas.

J

Junípero Serra

Franciscan priest who led the early Alta California mission effort and founded the first nine missions, 1769-1782.

K

Kitchen

The food-preparation area of a mission complex; meals depended on local crops, livestock, trade, and Indigenous labor.

L

Lavandería

Spanish for a washing place. Some missions used water-fed basins or channels for washing clothes and other tasks.

M

Mission

A Spanish colonial religious settlement intended to spread Catholicism and extend colonial control among Indigenous peoples.

Student note: mission history includes Indigenous communities, Spanish colonization, Catholic religion, labor, resistance, and cultural change.





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N-Z | People, places, systems, and historical change

Name: _____

N

Neophyte

A historical mission-era term for an Indigenous person who had been baptized or entered mission religious instruction.

O

Orchard

An area planted with fruit or nut trees. Mission orchards could include introduced crops such as olives and other fruits.

P

Presidio

A Spanish military fort. Presidios protected colonial settlements and worked alongside missions and pueblos.

Q

Quadrangle

A four-sided group of buildings around a central courtyard. Many mission complexes developed this type of layout.

R

Rancho

A ranch or rural landholding used for livestock and agriculture. Ranchos became especially important in Mexican California.

S

Spiderweb - Robert Collado Motif

A contemporary visual motif used throughout Robert Collado's Teacher Tools. It is not a standard historic mission-era symbol.

T

Tile

Fired-clay roof and floor tiles helped protect buildings and became a recognizable feature of many mission structures.

U

Under Mexican Rule

After Mexico gained independence in 1821, Alta California missions came under Mexican government authority and later secularization.

V

Vaquero

Spanish for a cattle worker or cowboy. Vaqueros became skilled horsemen central to California ranching culture.

W

Workshop

Work areas supported blacksmithing, carpentry, weaving, leatherwork, tile making, and other trades.

X

Xolon

A Salinan name connected with the people and homeland around Jolon, near Mission San Antonio de Padua.

Y

Yerba Buena

The early settlement name associated with present-day San Francisco, near the presidio and Mission San Francisco de Asís.

Z

Zanja

Spanish for a ditch or trench. Zanjás and related irrigation channels moved water through farms and settlements.

Reference basis: California State Parks, National Park Service mission history resources, and Xolon Salinan community history.

