

# California Missions Activity Workbook

## 4th Grade History Adventure

Native Peoples • Missions • Vaqueros • El Camino Real



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Welcome, 4th-grade explorers!  
Get ready to discover California's  
missions, Native Peoples, and vaqueros  
through fun activities and projects.

## Key Vocabulary

### Must-Know Words for 4th Graders

- Neophytes – Native people who lived and worked at the missions
- Vaqueros – Skilled Native cowboys who managed cattle
- El Camino Real – The 600-mile “Royal Road” connecting the missions
- Acequias – Hand-dug irrigation ditches used for farming
- Native People – Ohlone, Chumash, Kumeyaay, Tongva, Luiseño
- Diorama – A 3D model (of a mission)

Activity Idea:

Create illustrated vocabulary cards.



## EL CAMINO REAL

The Royal Road of California Missions

### ☀️ **What Was El Camino Real?**

El Camino Real means “The Royal Road” in Spanish.

It was a 600-mile road that connected all 21 California missions, from San Diego in the south to San Francisco Solano in the north.

### **This road helped people travel between missions to:**

- Deliver food and supplies
- Share messages
- Visit other missions

### 🔔 **Mission Bells Along the Road**

Along El Camino Real, you would find bells placed to guide travelers.

### **These bells:**

- Marked the path
- Helped people know they were on the right road
- Still exist today as historical markers

## **What Was It Like to Travel?**

Traveling El Camino Real was not easy!

### **People:**

- Walked long distances
- Rode horses or mules
- Traveled for days or weeks

## **What Would You Experience?**

### **While traveling, you might see:**

- Missions
- Farms and crops
- Animals like cattle and horses

### **Hear:**

- Bells ringing
- Animals
- People working

### **Smell:**

- Cooking food
- Fresh plants
- Dusty roads

 Think About It

Would you enjoy traveling El Camino Real?  
Why or why not?

## Fun Facts

- California had 300,000–340,000 Native people before the missions
- Some missions had 27,000 cattle (San Luis Rey!)
- Missions produced 123,000 bushels of wheat per year
- Father Serra walked over 5,500 miles despite a leg injury
- The Chumash built ocean boats called tomols

Challenge:

Pick your favorite fact and explain why it surprised you.



# Father Serra

Father Junípero Serra was a Catholic priest and missionary who helped bring the Christian faith to parts of what is now California. He was born on November 24, 1713, on the island of Mallorca in Spain. As a young boy, his name was Miguel José Serra. He was a good student and loved learning about God. When he grew up, he became a Franciscan priest and chose the name Junípero after a joyful saint.

Fr. Serra felt called to be a missionary, which means he wanted to travel far away to teach people about Jesus. He journeyed across the ocean to Mexico, which was part of New Spain at that time. Later, he traveled north to California, even though the trip was very long and difficult. He walked many miles and sometimes suffered from pain in his leg, but he trusted God and kept going.

In California, Fr. Serra started a series of missions. Missions were places where people could live, learn about God, and build communities together. He founded nine missions, including Mission San Diego and Mission San Carlos Borromeo. At the missions, Native People were taught about Christianity, farming, music, and other skills. Fr. Serra wanted the missions to be places of faith, prayer, and learning.

Fr. Serra worked hard to protect the Native American people. He spoke up for them when they were treated unfairly by soldiers or others. He believed that all people are children of God and should be treated with respect and kindness. Even though life at the missions was not always easy, Fr. Serra tried to help and guide the people with care.

Fr. Serra died on August 28, 1784, at Mission San Carlos Borromeo in California. Many people remembered him as a man of strong faith who loved God and worked hard to share the Gospel. In 2015, the Catholic Church declared him a saint, and he is now known as Saint Junípero Serra.

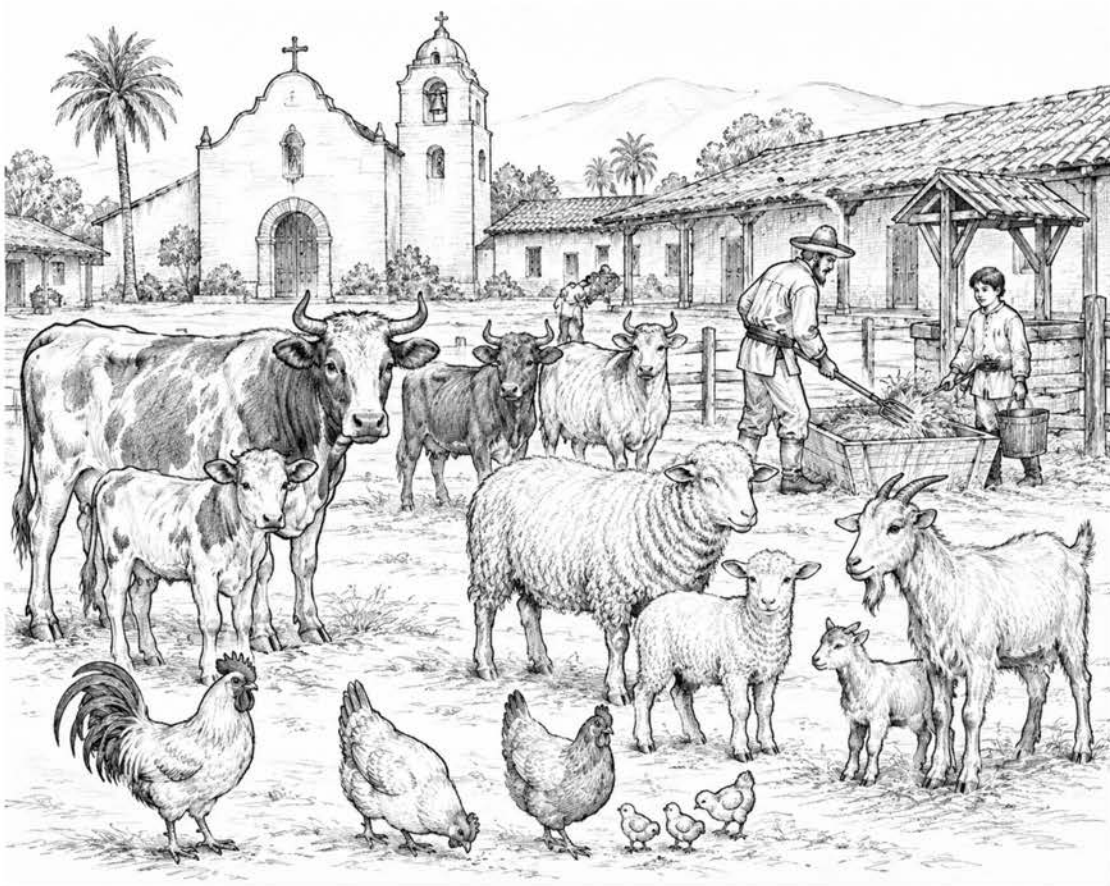
Today, Fr. Serra is remembered for his courage, faith, and dedication. His life teaches us to trust God, help others, and never give up, even when things are hard.

# Farming

When the California missions were first built, farming was very important. The missionaries and Native people worked together to grow food and take care of animals. This helped everyone at the mission have enough to eat and live each day.

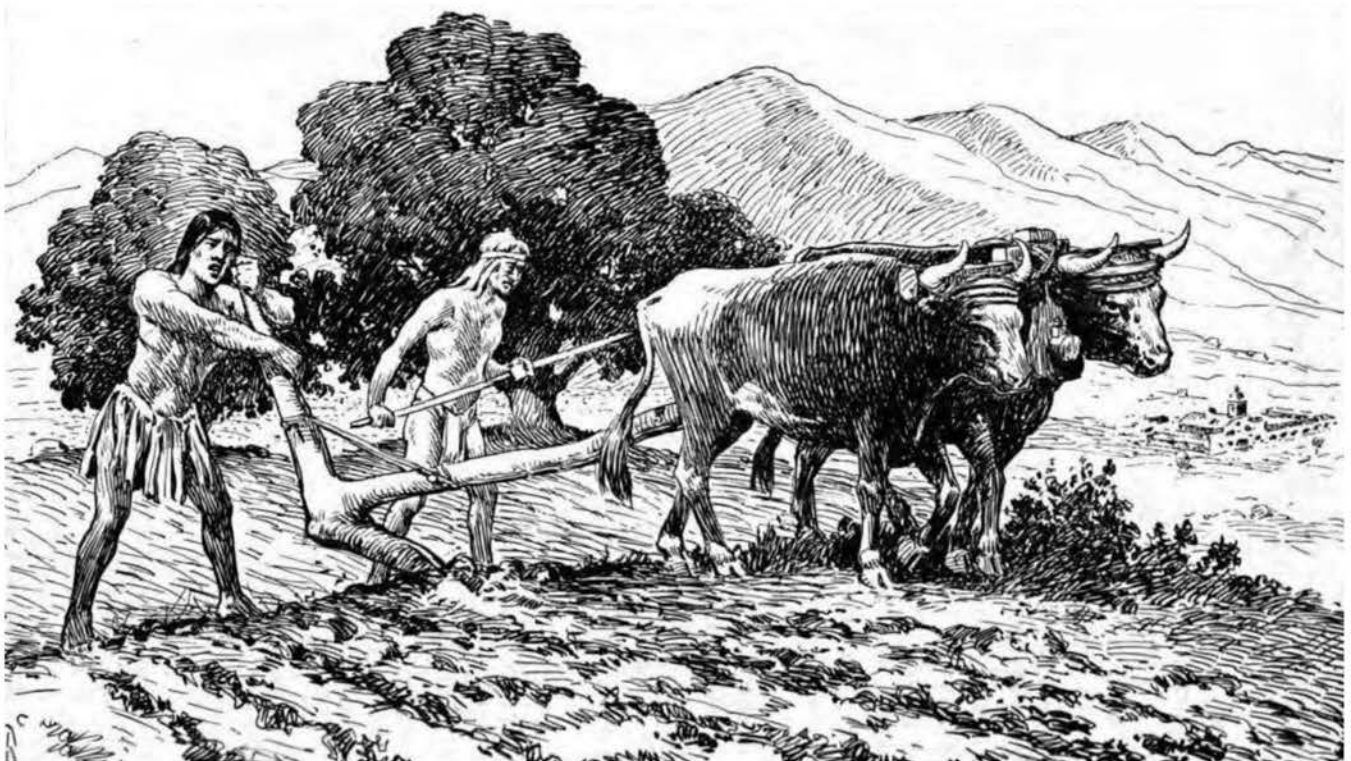
The land around the missions was used to grow many kinds of crops. They planted wheat, corn, beans, and vegetables like squash. They also grew fruit such as oranges, grapes, and apples. The missionaries taught the Native people new ways of farming, like using tools and planting in rows. They also showed them how to water crops using simple irrigation systems, which helped plants grow even in dry areas.

Animals were also an important part of mission life. The missions raised cattle, sheep, goats, and chickens. Cows provided milk, meat, and leather. Sheep gave wool, which could be used to make clothing and blankets. Chickens laid eggs for food. Taking care of animals was a daily job, and many people helped feed and protect them.



Farming at the missions was hard work. People woke up early in the morning and worked until the evening. They had to plant seeds, water the crops, pull weeds, and harvest food when it was ready. Even though the work was difficult, it helped the missions grow into strong communities. The food grown at the missions was shared by everyone. It was used to make meals like bread, soups, and stews. Farming helped the missions become self-sufficient, which means they could take care of themselves without needing food from far away.

Farming at the California missions taught people how to work together and care for the land. It was an important part of daily life and helped the missions survive and grow.



# Native Peoples

When the California missions were first built, many Native Peoples already lived in the area. These Native Peoples had their own homes, languages, and traditions long before the missionaries arrived. When the missions were started, many Native People came to live and work there. The missionaries taught them about Christianity and new ways of living, while the native people shared their knowledge of the land.

Different Native Peoples lived near the California missions long before the Spanish arrived. The **Kumeyaay** People lived near Mission San Diego, the first mission in California. The **Luiseño and Juaneño (Acjachemen)** Peoples lived near Mission San Luis Rey and Mission San Juan Capistrano. The **Tongva**, also called the **Gabrielino**, lived near Mission San Gabriel, while the **Tataviam** lived near Mission San Fernando. Along the California coast, the **Chumash** People lived near Mission Santa Barbara, Mission Santa Inés, La Purísima Mission, and Mission San Luis Obispo.

Farther north, the **Ohlone** Peoples lived near Mission San Francisco de Asís, Mission Santa Clara, Mission San José, and Mission San Juan Bautista. The **Mutsun** People, part of the *Ohlone language group*, were closely connected to Mission San Juan Bautista. The **Esselen** People lived near Mission San Carlos Borromeo in Monterey, while the **Salinan** People lived near Mission San Antonio de Padua and Mission San Miguel. The **Awaswas** People lived near Mission Santa Cruz, and the **Chalon** People lived near Mission Soledad.

In Northern California, the **Coast Miwok and Plains Miwok** Peoples lived near Mission San Rafael Arcángel and Mission San Francisco Solano. The **Patwin, Pomo, and Wappo** Peoples also became connected with the northern missions. Other Native groups involved with the California mission system included the **Yokuts, Serrano, Cahuilla, and Karkin** Peoples. Each Native group had its own language, traditions, and culture, and all played an important role in the history of the California missions.

At the missions, Native People helped build buildings, farm the land, and take care of animals. They learned new skills like making tools, weaving cloth, and cooking new foods. The missionaries also taught them prayers and about the Catholic faith.

Life at the missions was very different from the Native Peoples' traditional way of life. Before the missions, many Native Peoples moved with the seasons and lived close to nature. At the missions, they stayed in one place and followed a daily schedule of work, prayer, and rest.

It is important to remember that this time in history was not always easy for Native People. Many faced challenges, such as losing parts of their culture and dealing with illness. Even so, Native Peoples played a very important role in the missions. Their hard work and knowledge helped the missions grow and survive.

Today, we remember the Native Peoples of California for their rich cultures, strong communities, and important contributions to the history of the missions



# The 21 Missions

*Here is a list of the 21 California Missions, including their founding dates, the main priest (usually Saint Junípero Serra or later missionaries), and the Native American tribes connected to each mission.*

## **1. Mission San Diego de Alcalá (1769)**

Priest: Fr. Junípero Serra

Native People: Kumeyaay

## **2. Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo (1770)**

Priest: Fr. Junípero Serra

Native People: Esselen, Ohlone

## **3. Mission San Antonio de Padua (1771)**

Priest: Fr. Junípero Serra

Native People: Salinan

## **4. Mission San Gabriel Arcángel (1771)**

Priest: Fr. Junípero Serra

Native People: Tongva (Gabrielino)

## **5. Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa (1772)**

Priest: Fr. Junípero Serra

Native People: Chumash

## **6. Mission San Francisco de Asís (Mission Dolores) (1776)**

Priest: Fr. Francisco Palóu

Native People: Ohlone

## **7. Mission San Juan Capistrano (1776)**

Priest: Fr. Junípero Serra

Native People: Acjachemen (Juaneño)

## **8. Mission Santa Clara de Asís (1777)**

Priest: Fr. Junípero Serra

Native People: Ohlone

### **9. Mission San Buenaventura (1782)**

Priest: Fr. Junípero Serra

Native People: Chumash

### **10. Mission Santa Barbara (1786)**

Priest: Fr. Fermín Lasuén

Native People: Chumash

### **11. Mission La Purísima Concepción (1787)**

Priest: Fr. Fermín Lasuén

Native People: Chumash

### **12. Mission Santa Cruz (1791)**

Priest: Fr. Fermín Lasuén

Native People: Ohlone

### **13. Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad (1791)**

Priest: Fr. Fermín Lasuén

Native People: Esselen, Salinan

### **14. Mission San José (1797)**

Priest: Fr. Fermín Lasuén

Native People: Ohlone

### **15. Mission San Juan Bautista (1797)**

Priest: Fr. Fermín Lasuén

Native People: Mutsun (Ohlone)

### **16. Mission San Miguel Arcángel (1797)**

Priest: Fr. Fermín Lasuén

Native People: Salinan

**17. Mission San Fernando Rey de España (1797)**

Priest: Fr. Fermín Lasuén

Native People: Tongva, Tataviam

**18. Mission San Luis Rey de Francia (1798)**

Priest: Fr. Fermín Lasuén

Native People: Luiseño

**19. Mission Santa Inés (1804)**

Priest: Fr. Estévan Tápis

Native People: Chumash

**20. Mission San Rafael Arcángel (1817)**

Priest: Fr. Vicente de Sarría

Native People: Coast Miwok

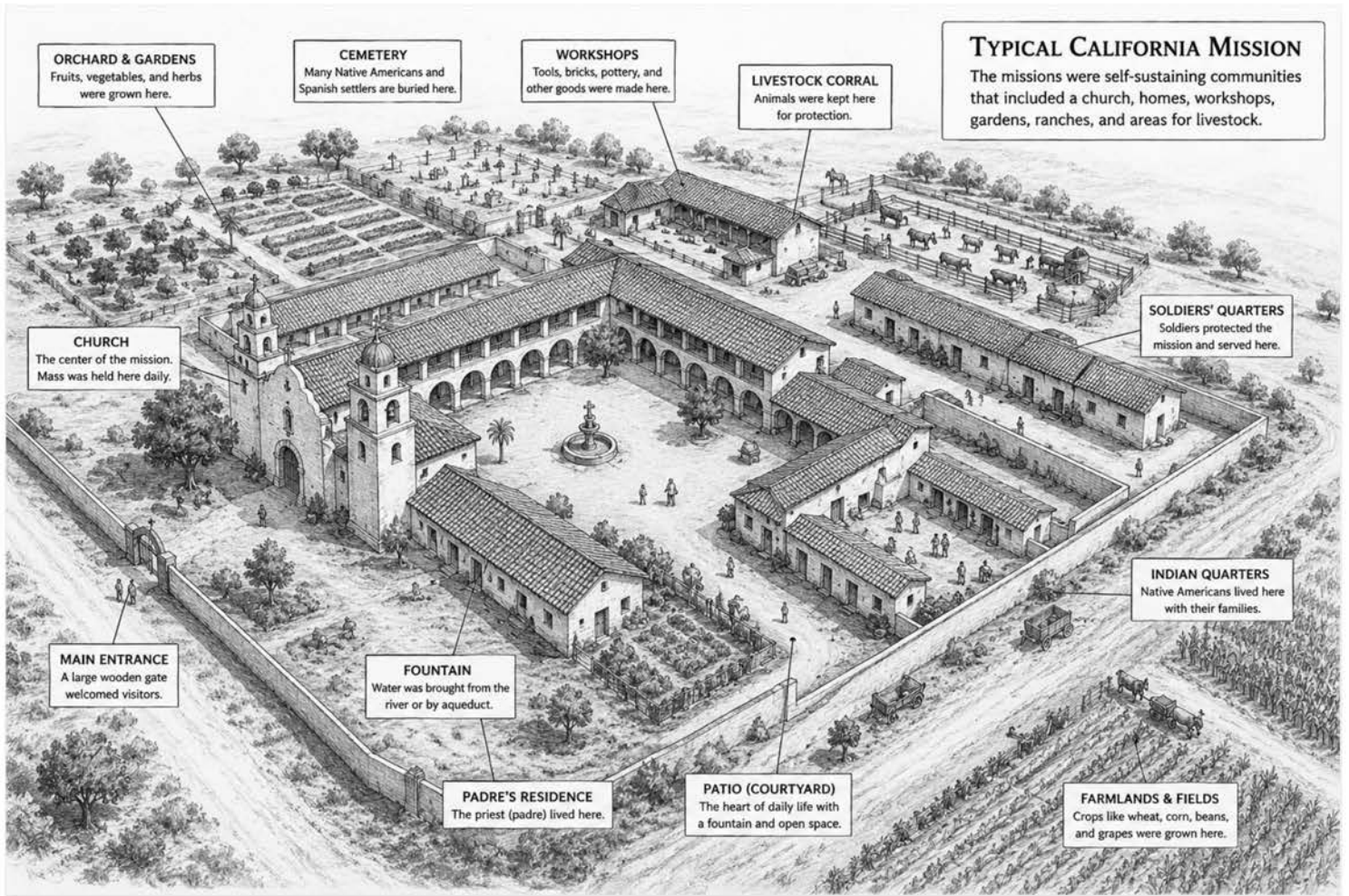
**21. Mission San Francisco Solano (1823)**

Priest: Fr. José Altimira

Native People: Miwok, Pomo

This list shows how the missions spread across California and how different Native People were connected to each one.

# A Mission from Above



Fr. Junípero Serra did not have modern tools like cars, GPS, or measuring devices to find distances. Instead, he used simple and practical ways to measure how far he traveled between missions.

One main way was by counting the time it took to travel. People in those days often measured distance by how many hours or days it took to walk, ride a horse, or travel by mule. For example, if a trip took one full day on horseback, they knew it was a certain distance.

Another way was by estimating miles based on travel speed. Experienced travelers knew about how many miles they could go in one hour. So, by keeping track of time, they could make a good guess about the distance.

Fr. Serra and other missionaries also followed natural landmarks like rivers, hills, valleys, and the coastline. These landmarks helped guide them and showed them where to place the next mission. **Many missions were about a day's journey apart**, so travelers could rest safely at each one.

They also used maps and notes from earlier explorers. Spanish explorers had already traveled parts of California and made simple maps. Fr. Serra used this information to help plan where missions should go.

So, instead of exact measurements like we use today, Fr. Serra used time, experience, and the land around him to figure out distances between the missions.

## Hands-On Activities & Projects

Mission Diorama Project (Required in many classrooms!)

Create a 3D model of a California mission.

### *Materials:*

- Cardboard
- Styrofoam
- Clay
- Paint
- Small figures or LEGO
- Include:
  - Mission buildings
  - Gardens and crops
  - Cattle and horses
  - Bells
  - Native vaqueros

 Tip: Use images from mission pages for inspiration!

# Mission Diorama Template

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## MY CALIFORNIA MISSION DIORAMA

– Design Your Mission! Use the template below to plan your diorama before you build it. –

**Sky**  
(Draw clouds, sun, or birds.)

**Trees & Plants**  
(Add trees, shrubs, or flowers.)

**Buildings**  
(Mission church, quarters, storage rooms, etc.)

**Animals**  
(Cattle, horses, sheep, or other animals.)

**Crops**  
(What is growing on the mission farm?)

**Courtyard**  
(Add a fountain, path, or garden.)

- IDEAS TO INCLUDE**
- Mission Church with bell tower
  - Living Quarters for missionaries
  - Fields and Crops (wheat, corn, grapes, olives)
  - Animals (cattle, horses, sheep, chickens)
  - Courtyard with fountain
  - Trees, Plants, and Flowers

- OTHER ELEMENTS YOU CAN ADD:**
- Well
  - Supply Wagon
  - Cross
  - Outdoor Oven
  - Mission People
  - Horse
  - Chickens

**MY MISSION NAME:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**I CHOSE THIS BECAUSE:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

After planning your diorama, gather your materials and build your mission! Be creative and have fun!

## **Location List** (*Label on map below*)

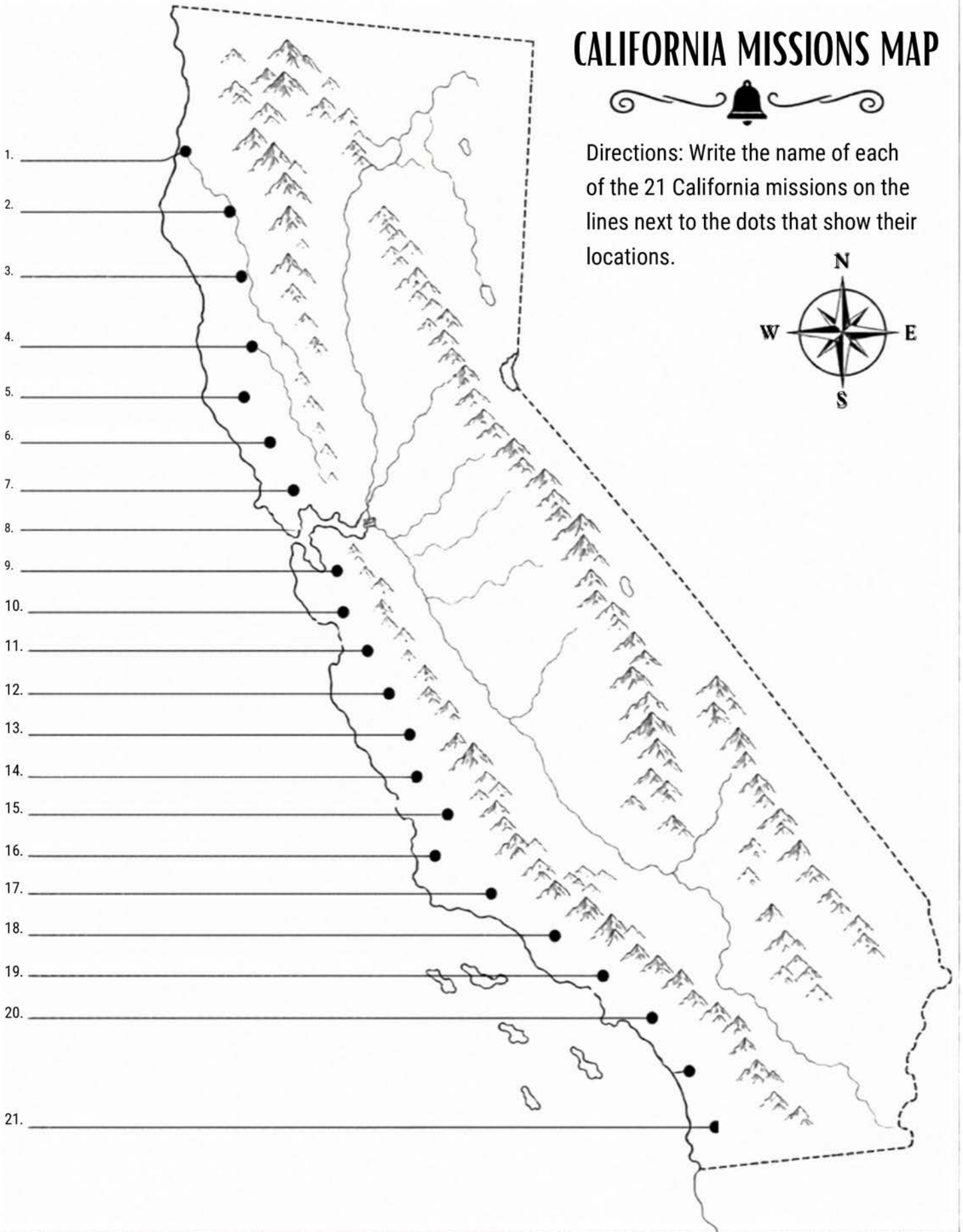
South → North:

San Diego  
San Luis Rey  
San Juan Capistrano  
San Gabriel  
San Fernando  
San Buenaventura  
Santa Barbara  
La Purísima  
San Luis Obispo  
San Miguel  
San Antonio  
Soledad  
San Carlos  
San Juan Bautista  
Santa Cruz  
Santa Clara  
San José  
San Francisco  
San Rafael  
San Francisco Solano

# CALIFORNIA MISSIONS MAP



Directions: Write the name of each of the 21 California missions on the lines next to the dots that show their locations.



# TIMELINE WORKSHEET

## California Missions Timeline

Fill in the timeline from 1769 to 1823

Timeline Line (Draw across page)

1769 ----- 1823

Fill in These Missions

1769: \_\_\_\_\_

1770: \_\_\_\_\_

1771: \_\_\_\_\_

1776: \_\_\_\_\_

1797: \_\_\_\_\_

1823: \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think missions were built over many years?

# California Missions Review Questions

1. What was El Camino Real?
2. Name two Native American tribes that lived near the California missions.
3. What kinds of animals did the missions raise?
4. What jobs did Native vaqueros do at the missions?
5. Why are the California missions important today?