

# Lesson 5: Mexican Rule in California

## Focus Questions:

What is a rancho?

What did the ranchos contribute to the economic development of California?

What was life like on a rancho?

## History/Social Science Standard 4.2:

5. Describe the daily lives of the people, native and nonnative, who occupied the ...ranchos...
7. Describe the effects of the Mexican War for Independence on Alta California, including its effects on the territorial boundaries of North America.
8. Discuss the period of Mexican rule in California and its attributes, including land grants, secularization of the missions, and the rise of the rancho economy.

## Historical and Social Science Analysis Skills:

- Students place key events and people of the historical era they are studying in a chronological sequence and within a spatial context; they interpret time lines. (CST 1)
- Students explain how the present is connected to the past, identifying both similarities and differences between the two, and how some things change over time and some things stay the same. (CST 3)
- Students use map... skills to... interpret information available through a map's symbolic representations. (CST 4)
- Students pose relevant questions about events they encounter in historical documents...(REPV 2)
- Students distinguish fact from fiction by comparing documentary sources on historical figures and events with fictionalized characters and events. (REPV 3)
- Students summarize the key events of the era they are studying and explain the historical contents of those events. (HI 1)
- Students identify the ... physical characteristics of the places they are studying.... (HI 2)

The Mexican War for Independence began in 1810. Prior to this time, California was under Spanish rule. Mexico took control over California in 1822, beginning the Rancho period. The processing and exporting of cow hides and tallow (fat used in the making of soap and candles) was the primary economic activity of the Californios (the name given to the people living in Alta California during this time period).

This pastoral economy flourished, especially after the new government opened the ports of Monterey and San Diego to foreign trade. The Mexican governors began to distribute the large tracts of land to people of influence. Ranching conditions were almost perfect. The climate was mild enough to allow animals to live throughout the year with little shelter. The small band of 200 cattle brought to California by Gaspar de Portola's expedition, and the few that survived the overland trek with Anza's party, provided the original stock from which the local herds developed. These cattle yielded hides and tallow in abundance for export. No widespread planting of crops occurred on the ranchos.

Additional background information is included throughout the text of the lesson.

## Activity #1 *Diseno*, a hand-drawn map.

**Materials Needed:** Harcourt *Reflections: California: A Changing State*, pages 162-163 and/or *Diseno* of Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana, Handout # 5.1  
Paper (a brown bag works well), pencils or crayons for sketching, tea bag (optional)

### 1. What is a *diseno*?

Both Spanish and Mexican governments used a *diseno*, or map, to identify a rancho's specific parcel of land and to show its distinctive landmarks and natural boundaries. A ranchero needed a *diseno* in order to apply for a land grant. The hand-drawn map showed the boundaries of the land grant.

Indicated on a typical *diseno* were natural landmarks, including many of the following: a hilltop; a creek bed or arroyo; isolated trees; clumps of cacti; and, even skulls of cattle set on the top of piles of stones or a tree stump. Ask students what the advantages and disadvantages might be for using natural landmarks.

### 2. *Diseno* Activities

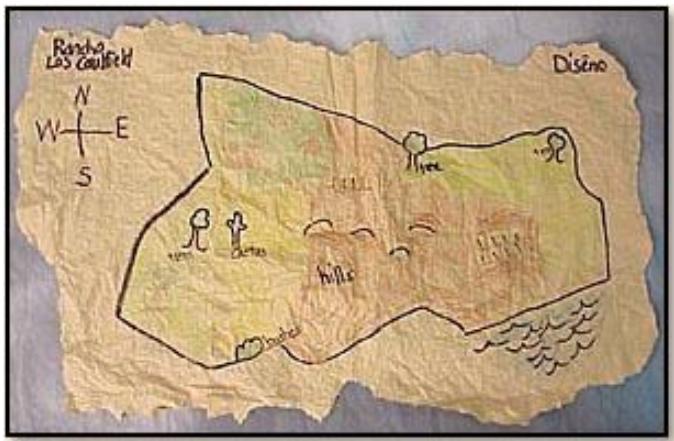
Examine the *diseno* found on pages 162-163 in California: A Changing State and /or use *Diseno* of Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana, Handout # 5.1 If using the textbook, share information from the *Teacher Edition* section at the bottom of the page about San Miguelito de Trinidad located on the Nacimiento River in Monterey County.

***Diseno* Activity #1:** Ask students to identify all physical and human features visible on the *diseno*. Advise students that a *diseno* is often difficult to read.

***Diseno* Activity #2:** Have each student draw a *diseno* of the area around the school. Select a vantage point at the center of the school playground or at a high spot near your school. Include natural boundaries such as trees, mountains, the local hills, rivers, large rocks, etc... Refer to Handout #5.2 for additional directions for "Doing a *Diseno*."

***Diseno* Activity #3:** Inform students that a "fictional" Mexican governor is planning to grant each of them his or her rancho. First, students have to

create an appropriate Spanish name for their rancho. Then, they need to draw a *diseno* showing the physical landmarks on their property. If desired, students may also show the location of their adobe home on their *diseno*. To make the *diseno* look more realistic, draw the *diseno* on a brown paper bag and then crumple the bag to give it an "old" look. Students can dip their bags into weak tea to make the bags look more like parchment paper. If crayons are used, the drawing will not fade when it is dipped in the tea.



## Activity # 2 Measurement with a Reata

**Materials needed to make a reata include:** three colors of yarn/roving and enough yarn for every pair of student to have three lengths of 40" each.

Precise measurements of land grants were unavailable, because measurement tools were fairly crude. Measurements were made with a **reata**, or 50 to 60-foot rope typically made from leather or braided horsehair. Two vaqueros would go out to measure the land using the reata. A pole would be tied to each end of the reata. One of the vaqueros would hold one of the poles while the other would walk or ride his horse until the reata was stretched out. They would repeat the same procedure taking turns until the area was measured.

Have students play the role of a vaquero and measure the land of the school playground using a reata. Thick yarn or roving can be used to make a reata. Cut 3 colors of roving about 40" long. Distribute a set of yarn to each pair of students. Each pair needs 3 lengths of yarn, one of each color. Knot the 3 lengths of yarn together at one end. Have one student hold the knotted end so both their partners' hands are free to braid the lengths. Tell the students to separate the colors – yellow to the left, orange in the middle, and brown to the right (or whatever colors you use.) Use the color names to help the students know which length to braid as you demonstrate. The reata should be braided tightly. (Note: A single color may be used, but multiple colors make the reata easier to braid.)

Once the reata is finished and tied off at the bottom, take your students out to the playground to measure its length and width using their reata. It is helpful to provide students an outline of the playground that can be used to record the measurements.

(Activity developed by Cathy Spiess and Mark Bourgeois.)

## Activity # 3 The Economy of the Ranchos.

**Materials needed:** Harcourt *Reflections* textbook pages 156-161 and 164-168; Copy for each student of the **Rancho Retrieval Chart Handout #5.3**.

### 1. Picture Walk

Ask students, "How do you think the families of the ranchos used the land to supply food, clothing, shelter and money?" Guide students through a picture walk of their textbook to view the visuals related to ranchos. Harcourt *Reflections* pages 156-161 and 164-168.

### 2. Rancho Retrieval Chart

Distribute to each student a copy of *Rancho Graphic Overview Handout #5.3*. To complete the graphic overview, have students read information about ranchos in their textbook. *California: A Changing State* (Harcourt) pages 156-161 and 164-168.

**Rancho Retrieval Chart (Handout #5.3)**

Category	Life on a Rancho
Food	
Clothing	
Types of Shelter	

Types of Tools Used	
Types of Transportation	
Jobs (Roles)	
Elements of the Economy	
Religion	
Entertainment/Customs	

As you share the information below about life on a rancho, help students identify appropriate notes and record these notes on their **Rancho Graphic Overview (Handout #3.5)**

**Rancho Economy:** Cattle were the mainstay of the rancho economy. Unlike the missionaries whose land was used to cultivate grapes, figs, citrus fruit and olives, the rancheros used the land for only one product: cattle. More specifically, there was money to be made from cattle hides because these were in great demand back on the east coast. Tallow (hard fat obtained from parts of the bodies of cattle) was melted down for the type of fat appropriate to make candles and soap. The cattle were an important source of meat for food. In addition, ranchers tanned the cattle hides which were then made into saddles, shoes, harnesses and reatas. The hides were used as “money,” permitting a barter system for supplies from the American east coast. Each dried steer hide, referred to as a “California bank note,” was worth approximately one dollar. The rancheros traded the hides for goods that they could not make themselves, including silk, shoes and china.

The hides were part of an economic cycle. At the beginning of the cycle, the cattle were allowed to mature. Then the cattle hide was cured and tanned. Tanned hides were sold and taken to factories on the east coast. Factory workers turned the tanned hides into specific leather goods. These leather goods were sold often to the rancheros as finished products. Now the cycle was complete as it began with rancheros and their cattle and ended when cattle products were used and often bought by the same rancheros.

**Clothing:** Supplies of clothing were always in short supply on the rancho. Unavailable items tended to be shoes, silk stockings and other articles of clothing such as a rebozo or mantilla (a lightweight lace or scarf worn over the head and shoulders, often over a high tortoise shell comb worn in the hair). Men wore full length trousers with the exterior seams decorated and open to show a different colored fabric beneath.

**Education:** Most of the children did not learn to read and write because there were almost no schools in California. Some ranchos were lucky when a discharged soldier moved in with them. The former soldier, in most cases, could read, write, and perform basic arithmetic.

**Entertainment/Customs:** Picnics, or meriendas, were popular. The ranchero rode his horse and the women or children arrived in a two-wheeled carts (carretas) pulled by oxen. The typically featured foods at the meriendas were carne asada (roasted beef), roasted chicken, enchiladas, tamales and tortillas. There were celebrations with fiestas, barbecues and dances (dances included the jarabe or fandango). There were rodeos (see the jobs section below). The Spanish, Californian traditions survived until 1860, including a carefree lifestyle; fiestas with music and dancing; rodeos; and, gracious hospitality.

**Jobs on the Rancho:** Many ranchos were 100s of acres in size as they needed a lot of land to provide enough grass for the cattle to eat. The ranchero might hire as many as 100 workers to do the work of

the rancho. Ranchos were nearly self-sufficient. They made almost everything needed by the people living on them. With the nearest pueblo often more than a day's ride away, people had to grow or make most of what they needed. The rancheros grew their own food, raised their own cattle and sheep, and wove their own wool into cloth.

In spring, soon after the calves were born, all the adult cattle were rounded up and sorted according to their brands. Because the young calves followed their mothers, even the unbranded calves could be kept with the proper herd. Once the vaqueros separated the cattle, each ranchero had to decide which animals to keep for breeding and which to kill for their meat, hides and tallow. Those to be killed were separated from the rest of the herd.

A special type of rodeo, called a mantanza, was held each year to kill the cattle for their hides and tallow. On the large ranchos, sometimes a thousand head of cattle were killed at a single mantanza. Often only the hide and tallow were taken while the rest of the carcass and some of the meat were left to decay on the range. The mantanza's demands caused men from many ranchos to work together at round-up time. It was a time for long hours and hard work; but, afterward, there was time to celebrate with fiestas, barbecues, and dances.

By 1836 all of the mission property in California except the church buildings had been taken from the Fathers. The rancheros found workers more easily after the missions were secularized, because mission Indians needed new workplaces. Both the Californios and the Indians worked as vaqueros (cowboys), usually with a foreman called a mayordomo. They would rope cattle and tame horses. Many Indians worked as house servants, harness makers, tanners and carpenters. Some workers would stake out cowhides to dry in the sun while other workers made tallow in large iron pots. Indian women would grind corn for tortillas and bake bread in an outdoor oven. Others cooked, sewed or cleaned.

## Activity # 4 Cattle Brands.

**Materials needed:** Copies of transparency of **Cattle Brand Samples (Handout # 5.4)**; tempera paint, paper, pen, cord or thick string, cardboard, glue and wide-diameter containers for dipping:

**Cattle Brands.** Under Mexican law all rancheros needed a brand, or identifying mark, for their cattle and horses. Because the cattle roamed freely across the land, the brand helped everyone know which animals belonged to which ranch. The brand, an iron rod with a design at one end, was recorded and registered with the government. The branding irons were made by a blacksmith (herrero) who heated the iron in a forge until it became red hot and pliable. The blacksmith would then bend the iron into the shape of the brand. Branding irons usually had very long handles so that the vaqueros would not burn their hands when they heated the irons in the fire and so they could keep their distance from the flaying legs of a captured calf. The brand was burned into the hair located on the animal's hip. Brands were uniquely designed by each ranchero for his herd and this brand design was recorded and registered with the government.

### 1. Cattle Brand Art Activity

Each student can design and then create a cattle brand for his or her imaginary rancho. Brands consist usually of letters, numbers and characters (symbols) or a combination of these three. If a letter is "too tired" to stand and "lies" on its side, it is called "lazy." A letter that is slanted or in an angular position is known as "tumbling." A letter that is curved at the end is spoken of as "running." Once a brand is pictured/created/drawn, it can be formed by using cord or some thick string glued onto a piece of

cardboard. After the glue dries, the brands can be dipped in tempera paint and pressed onto paper. It works exactly like a hand-stamp.

## **2. Cattle Brand/Rancho Writing Activity**

Have students write a descriptive paragraph that includes the name of their imaginary rancho, the rancho's natural features and what their cattle brand symbolizes. Combine all required elements to form a scoring guide. Include items such as: shows an understanding of the historical time period, has no historical errors; writes in a well organized style; uses descriptive words; and, has all required elements of the prompt.

## **Activity # 5 Early California Time Line**

Choose appropriate dates that relate to the ranchos era and post these on the large classroom version of the "Early California Time Line" (an in-progress activity begun in earlier lessons).

## **Activity # 6 Rancho Days Celebration**

Culminate the lesson with a Rancho Days Celebration. Depending on the activities selected, supplies include: typical Spanish and Mexican heritage outfits for cowboys and Rancho period families; a variety of foods, e.g. tortillas, chips, salsa and beef jerky; Spanish music tapes and instruments; and, prizes.

Have adult volunteers, and if possible, older brothers and sisters help with the celebration. The volunteers can be assigned to each activity as participants, organizers and facilitators. Divide students into small groups and have groups rotate from one activity to the next. Sample activities can include:

- Lasso practice with a rope thrown around a desk chair disguised as a cow.
- Play horseshoes for prizes.
- Dance hall featuring students fandango or jarabe dances and singing songs of the period.
- Mock Spanish/Mexican government official registry office where brands made earlier in the lesson can be registered. Dip branding irons into tempera paint and then stamp them onto chart paper for display on the classroom wall.

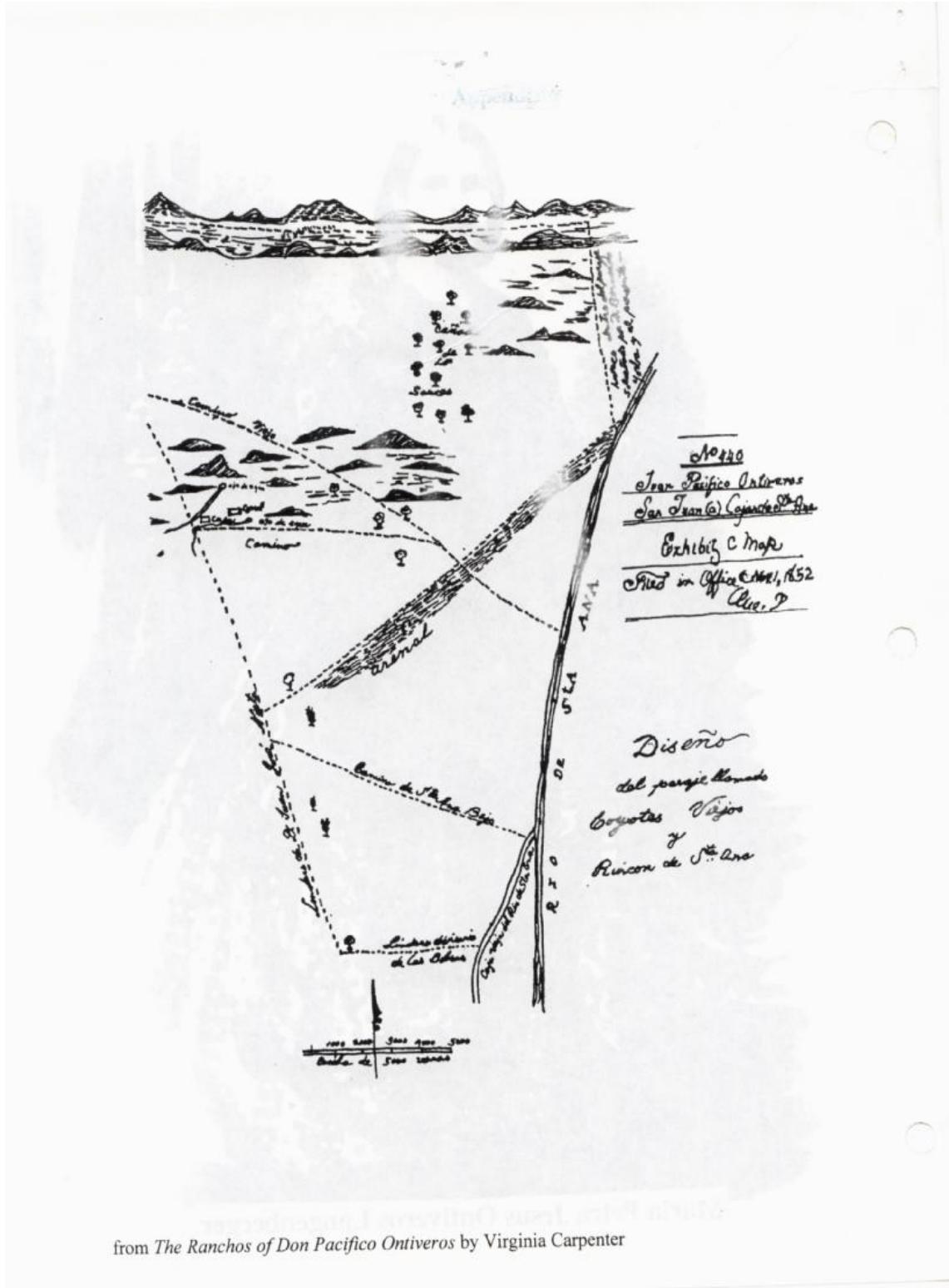
## **Assessment**

The assessment of this lesson is integrated with the instruction and occurs throughout the unit. The focus questions provide a framework for the evaluation of the lesson. draw a *diseno* of the area around the school

- Create an appropriate Spanish name for their rancho and draw a *diseno* showing the physical landmarks on their property. If desired, students may also show the location of their adobe home on their *diseno*
- Measure the length and width of the school playground using their hand-made reata
- Take notes on *Rancho Retrieval Chart (Handout #5.3)* from information provided orally by the teacher and information read in the textbook.
- Design and then create a cattle brand for his or her imaginary rancho
- Write a descriptive paragraph that includes the name of their imaginary rancho, the rancho's natural features, and what their cattle brand symbolizes
- Participate in a Rancho Days Celebration

# *Diseno of Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana*

This *diseno* was submitted in 1852 to the United States Government after California became a state in 1850.



from *The Ranchos of Don Pacifico Ontiveros* by Virginia Carpenter

## Doing a *Diseno*

**You have decided to petition the governor of California under Mexico for a grant of land. Along with the petition, you must submit a *diseno* (drawing of a piece of land.) How do you do it?**

- Make a “vista de ojos” (survey-by-eye) as you, the mapmaker, walk over the area.
- Take a pad of paper, a pencil and a compass to the school playground or an area of high ground near the school.
- Locate some obvious physical landmarks, such as creeks, hills, canyons, large trees and boulders.
- Standing at the high ground near the school or a specific vantage point, and only using your eyes, draw the topography of the surrounding 10 to 15 miles. Try to draw individual landmarks as much to scale as possible, so decide ahead of time how big the whole map will be. For example, if you choose 11”x14” paper, then place the school at the center within a one inch area. Make all future items on the map in measurements that would be in scale with the size of the school.
- On your *diseno*, label the physical landmarks you have identified.

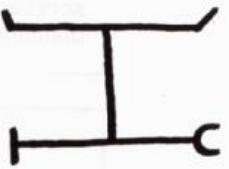
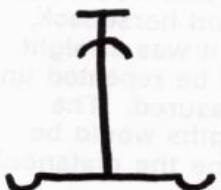
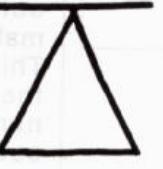
**The governor will respond by granting you a “concedo,” or provisional ownership. Now, within a year, you must build and occupy a house and a corral, stock the land with cattle and plant something. No fence may interrupt traffic on a public road.**

Based on the work of Cathy Spiess

## **Rancho Retrieval Chart**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Life on a Rancho</b>
<b>Food</b>	
<b>Clothing</b>	
<b>Types of Shelter</b>	
<b>Types of Tools Used</b>	
<b>Types of Transportation</b>	
<b>Jobs (roles)</b>	
<b>Elements of the Economy</b>	
<b>Religion</b>	
<b>Entertainment/Customs</b>	

Handout # 5.4

	Historic Brands of Orange County	
Mission Viejo		Boca de la Playa
		
Rancho Serrano	Santiago de Santa Ana	Rancho San Joaquin
		
Rancho Trabuco	Rancho Alamitos	Rancho Niguel
		
Mission San Juan Capistrano		Estancia de Costa Mesa

## Extended Activities – Ranchos

### Frida Maria, a Story of the Old Southwest

#### 1. *Freida Maria*

Show the cover of the book, *Frida Maria*, by Deborah Nourse Lattimore. **Ask students:**

- What do you see on the cover? What is the title? Who is the author?
- Who do you think is the owner of the fan? What is a fan used for?
- What is meant by the phrase, “a story of the old Southwest?”
- When do you think this story, *Frida Maria*, takes place? How do you know?

#### 2. Guided Reading Activity

First, read page 1 of *Frida Maria*. Then, ask students, “What is a fiesta? Why do you think Frida Maria can hardly wait to attend the fiesta?” Direct attention to the first 4 pages of the story and ask questions about the details of the clothing and the architecture in the illustrations. Discuss Frida’s full name.

As you read the rest of the book to the students, have them help you identify what happens at a fiesta, and then develop a summary list (i.e., invitations, food, decorations, colorful dresses, dancing – including the jarabe dance, singing, playing guitars and horseracing.) Carefully study the illustrations for additional clues about the clothing worn, the architecture, the art and the types of artifacts. Also, develop a list of the Spanish words and their meanings, as identified in *Frida Maria*.

#### 3. Recognizing Historical Fact as distinct from Fiction

Read the note by the author of *Frida Maria* found at the end of the book. Review the difference(s) between fact and fiction, between fiction and historical fiction. Identify the clues which indicate that “Frida Maria” is a fictional person. The story did not actually happen, but the book does contain some factual information about life on a rancho. Return to the text and ask the students which parts of the story are historically accurate (can be proven) and which sections are fictional. Create a chart that may include some of the following:

Historical Fact	Historical Fiction
Fiestas were held on ranchos.	Parts of the plot in the story are accurate for the specific era. Fictitious characters are included.
Fiestas included food, dances and songs. New clothing is often sewn and worn at a fiesta.	Frida sewed her dress and made it into pants.
A horse race might be held at a fiesta.	An imaginary person named Frida rides an imaginary horse named Diablo and wins an imaginary race.
A hot, dry, Santa Ana wind might blow.	

#### 4. Dialogue and Quotations

The story *Frida Maria* is filled with dialogue and quotations. Return to the story and look for dialogue written within quotations. Study the four sample quotations listed below and analyze the different formats. Note the punctuation marks used for quotations. Ask students, “How can you identify the person who is doing the speaking?”

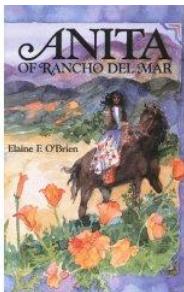
- “Do you think I could ride Diablo at Fiesta?” Frida asked her uncle.
- “We will have to ask your mama, my little fox,” Tio Narizo replied.
- Mama walked past fanning herself. “Come,” she said to Frida. “I hate to see you unhappy. Come out with me to meet Don Ramon and his wife in the garden.”
- “I look forward to the great race,” said Don Ramon. “No one has ever beaten my horse, Furioso.”

Make a list of all the characters with dialogue in the story (Frida Maria, Tio Narizo, Mama, Cook, Marta, Mercedes, and Don Ramon.) Ask students if they think the characters actually said these words or if the dialogue was created by the author. Why do they think so?

#### 5. (Optional) Reader’s Theater

Work together with the students to turn the story, *Frida Maria* into a Reader’s Theater. Materials include enough copies of the story for each reader. The simplest way to adapt a short story for a Reader’s Theater leaves the original text intact but divides the text so that one reader is the narrator while the other readers perform the dialogue for each character. Nametags for each character are helpful. Movement, gestures, staging, costumes and simple props can enhance the production, although in a traditional Reader’s Theater, the characters usually do not “act” out their parts nor do they look at each other. Body stance is straight forward to face the audience and to project the reading “into” or beyond the audience (known as “off stage focus”). When readers/characters are “on stage,” they face the audience; and, when the readers/characters await their turn, it is considered “off-stage” but characters simply turn their backs instead of leaving the stage.

### Another Fiction Book to Read:



**Anita of Rancho Del Mar** by Elaine F O'Brien, Santa Barbara: Fithian Press. 1991. This book is a fictionalized account of a young girl’s life on a Santa Barbara Rancho. The portrayal of life on a rancho is historically accurate.