

History of the American Southwest

Essay Prompts by Unit

Unit 1: Indigenous Peoples of the Southwest

1. Compare and contrast the cultural practices and environmental adaptations of two ancient Southwest cultures (e.g., Ancestral Puebloans and Hohokam). How did geography shape their societies?
 2. How did the oral traditions and cosmologies of the Indigenous peoples of the Southwest influence their understanding of community and nature?
 3. Analyze the role of trade networks among Indigenous groups in the Southwest. How did these networks affect cultural exchange and economic stability?
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Unit 2: Spanish Colonization and Mission System

1. Assess the impact of the mission system and encomienda on Indigenous societies in the Southwest. Were there elements of both cooperation and resistance?
 2. Evaluate the significance of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 as a form of Indigenous resistance to colonization. How did it shape the future of Spanish-Indigenous relations?
 3. How did cultural syncretism manifest in the blending of Indigenous and Spanish traditions in the Southwest? Provide specific examples.
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Unit 3: Mexican Independence and the Northern Frontier (1821–1846)

1. Explain how the transition from Spanish to Mexican rule affected Indigenous communities and land use in the Southwest.
 2. Discuss the development of Californio and Hispano cultures during the Mexican period. How did land grants and ranchos shape their society?
 3. Analyze the importance of the Santa Fe Trail to trade and cultural exchange between Mexico and the United States.
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Unit 4: U.S. Expansion and the Mexican-American War

1. How did the ideology of Manifest Destiny drive the U.S. toward war with Mexico, and what were the consequences for the Southwest?
2. In what ways did the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Gadsden Purchase alter the social, political, and economic landscape of the Southwest?

3. Compare and contrast the causes and effects of the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War on the Indigenous and Mexican populations of the region.
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Unit 5: Territorial Period and the American Southwest (1850s–1912)

1. How did the mining booms and the expansion of railroads transform the economy and environment of the Southwest during the territorial period?
 2. Analyze the impact of U.S. westward expansion on Indigenous peoples during this period, focusing on events like the Navajo Long Walk and the Apache Wars.
 3. What factors contributed to the push for statehood in Arizona and New Mexico, and how did statehood reshape the region?
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Unit 6: The Southwest During the 20th Century

1. How did World War II reshape the Southwest economically and demographically? Consider the roles of military bases, the bracero program, and Native American code talkers.
 2. To what extent did New Deal programs, such as the CCC and WPA, address the economic challenges faced by people in the Southwest during the Great Depression?
 3. Examine the impact of post-war urbanization on cities like Phoenix, Albuquerque, and El Paso. How did these cities change culturally and economically?
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Unit 7: Cultural Identity and Civil Rights Movements

1. How did the Chicano Movement and Native American activism of the 1960s and 1970s challenge social and political inequalities in the Southwest?
 2. Analyze how land rights and water disputes shaped activism and legal battles among Indigenous peoples in the Southwest during the 20th century.
 3. How has the concept of borderlands identity contributed to the cultural hybridity of the modern Southwest?
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Unit 8: Contemporary Issues in the Southwest

1. How are environmental challenges, such as water scarcity and climate change, affecting Indigenous and urban communities in the Southwest today?
2. Analyze the relationship between Native American sovereignty and modern tribal economies. How are tribes balancing tradition with contemporary economic development?

3. In what ways has immigration and border security shaped the social and political discourse in the Southwest in the 21st century?
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Unit 9: The Southwest in Art, Literature, and Popular Culture

1. How have Southwestern landscapes and cultural themes been represented in visual art and literature? Use specific examples from artists or authors like Georgia O’Keeffe and Leslie Marmon Silko.
2. To what extent has the Western genre shaped national and international perceptions of the Southwest? How have modern reinterpretations challenged those depictions?
3. Discuss the significance of festivals, foodways, and place-based traditions in preserving the cultural identity of the Southwest.