Episode 2: Voices in the Hall

Lesson Title: Voices in the Valley: How Communities Create Rules, Share Resources, and Shape Colorado's Future

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Episode Description:

Voices in the Hall explores how diverse Coloradans fought for representation, civic participation and expanded civil rights across multiple generations. Connecting early struggles for inclusion with modern movements that reshaped Colorado's political and social landscape through interviews with disability advocates, supported by accessibility subject matter experts, illuminating how Colorado became a focal point of disability justice.

Episode Inquiry Questions:

1. What strategies have people and communities used to influence change in Colorado? What were the outcomes of this civic engagement?
2. Why is it important that diverse voices are heard by communities, as well as local and state government officials?
3. Why is it important for those who are most impacted by an issue to be involved in creating solutions?

Lesson Description:

Communities are shaped by the decisions people make about land, resources, leadership, and shared responsibilities. In this lesson, students explore the San Luis Valley as a case study of how governance systems developed to meet the needs of the community.

Students investigate how Spanish and Mexican governments encouraged settlement through land grants, how local communities created systems for

managing resources, and how traditions such as acequia irrigation continue to influence Colorado today. Students then apply their understanding by designing a community government that addresses the challenges faced by early settlers, including land use, water access, decision-making, and conflict resolution.

Grade Level/Time Needed:

8th Grade/90-130 minutes

Lesson Inquiry Question:

1. How did geography influence the way communities in the San Luis Valley were organized?

Supporting Questions:

1. How did early governments shape settlement and land ownership?
2. How did communities create systems to share limited resources?
3. Why do communities need rules, leaders, and systems of decision-making?
4. How do historical governance systems continue to influence Colorado today?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Explain how Spanish and Mexican governments encouraged settlement in southern Colorado.
2. Analyze how geography influenced settlement patterns and community organization.
3. Describe how acequia systems demonstrate cooperation and shared responsibility.
4. Identify how historical governance systems continue to influence Colorado communities.
5. Compare historical systems of governance with modern local government.
6. Develop a community government plan that demonstrates understanding of civic participation and resource management.

Background Knowledge / Contextual Paragraph for Teachers:

Long before Colorado became a state, the San Luis Valley was home to Indigenous peoples who lived, traveled, traded, and cared for the land for thousands of years. The valley's rivers, grasslands, and mountain resources provided opportunities for farming, hunting, gathering, and trade. Indigenous communities developed deep knowledge of the environment and created ways to manage resources that supported their communities over generations.

Over time, the San Luis Valley became part of several different governments, each bringing new systems for organizing communities, managing land, and establishing rules. Before 1821, the region was influenced by Spanish government systems. During this time, Spain encouraged exploration and settlement and established ideas about land ownership and community organization. In 1821, Mexico gained independence from Spain, and the San Luis Valley became part of Mexico. Mexican governments continued to encourage settlement by providing land grants that allowed families and communities to establish farms, ranches, and towns.

After 1848, following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States gained control of the region. New laws and systems of government changed how land was managed and how communities interacted with local and national governments. Although governments changed, many traditions, place names, and community practices from the Spanish and Mexican periods continued to influence life in the San Luis Valley.

Each government shaped the valley in different ways by creating systems for land ownership, settlement, community organization, and resource management. These systems influenced where people lived, how communities developed, and how people worked together to solve problems.

Governance and Community Building:

Building a successful community required more than simply establishing homes and farms. Early settlers in the San Luis Valley depended on cooperation and

shared responsibility to survive in a challenging environment. Because the valley is a dry region surrounded by mountains, residents had to create systems for managing limited resources.
Communities developed ways to:

- Share water fairly among farms and families
- Maintain roads and community spaces
- Protect farmland and crops
- Resolve disagreements
- Support neighbors during difficult times

Governance was not only created by government officials or elected leaders. Community members also played an important role in creating agreements, traditions, and systems that helped their communities function. These local decisions reflected the idea that people who live in a community should have a voice in solving the problems that affect them.

The Acequia System-A Community Voice in Action:

One of the most important examples of community cooperation in the San Luis Valley is the acequia system. An acequia is a community-managed irrigation ditch that moves water from rivers and streams to farms and fields. Because the valley receives limited rainfall, access to water has always been essential for growing crops and supporting families.

Early communities understood that water had to be shared carefully. Families worked together to build and maintain irrigation systems, decide how water would be distributed, and create agreements about responsibilities. These decisions required cooperation, trust, and communication.

The acequia system shows that communities often create their own solutions when they face shared challenges. The people most affected by a problem—such as limited water availability—need opportunities to participate in decisions and help create fair solutions.

Today, many acequia traditions continue in parts of southern Colorado, reminding

us that the choices communities make can leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

Building Background Knowledge for the Student:

Quick Write: *Who makes decisions in your family? In your school? In your classroom? In your community*?

1. Display the following:
   "*Your town has one river, but ten families need water for farming*."
   Have students do a think-draw-share based on the following questions:
   - Draw a picture on how to divide the water:
   - Who should decide how water is shared? Circle that person.
   - What rules should exist? Create rules on the back of the paper.
   - Who should have a voice in the decision? Draw a square around those people.

Ask the students to save this work and revisit throughout the lesson.

Let students know that *"Communities throughout history have faced challenges like this. The San Luis Valley developed systems of governance to solve these problems."*

Lesson Sources:

1. 

Map of the San Luis Valley with Town names and major roads. Source: History Colorado
2. San Luis People's Ditch Record (1852): Colorado Water Conservation Board — Acequia History
   a. Historical documents detailing Colorado's oldest continuous water right and the legal recognition of community-managed acequias.
3. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). Source: National Archives.

a. Official primary text (specifically, Articles VIII & IX) regarding the property rights, citizenship, and land protection promised to Hispano residents.

Lesson Materials Needed:

- Timeline event cards
- San Luis Valley map
- Government Cards (Spain, Mexico, United States)
- Role Cards
- Teacher Discussion Guide
- Student Design worksheet
- Place Cards

Lesson Instruction:

Activity 1: Timeline Investigation — Three Governments, One Valley

Prepare ahead of time:

1. Create a classroom timeline stretching across the room or board in 10-year increments. Label three sections:
    a. Before 1821: Spain
    b. 1821–1848: Mexico
    c. After 1848: United States
2. Event cards with dates and descriptions:
    a. Activity 1 Timeline Cards

Lesson Launch (10 minutes)

1. Display the question:
   "*What happens when the government controlling a place changes?*"
   Students complete a quick turn-and-talk:
    - Who makes the rules?
    - Who controls land?
    - Who decides how resources are used?
    - How might people's lives change?
    - Do the rules change? (Think about different classes that you attend

every day-are the class rules the same for each class?)

Give them time to talk through these questions.

2. Have students share their thoughts and reactions as a whole class.
   Teacher Explanation: *"The San Luis Valley has been home to many communities for thousands of years. Over time, different governments controlled the region. Each government influenced how people settled, used land, and organized their communities."*
3. Student Activity: Build the Timeline (20 minutes)
   a. Tell students they are going to track the changes through the San Luis Valley to see when changes happened throughout history. Students work in groups to place event cards in chronological order. When they have them all placed correctly and have been checked by you, have them move to the questions.
   b. Analysis Questions: Have students turn their timeline cards over and answer the "think about" side of the timeline. (This is a great opportunity for civil discourse and the "there is no right answer" feeling.)
   c. Have the students flip the cards back over and talk about the following questions as teams. Ask for evidence to support their answers.
      i. Government Change
         1. Which events show a change in government control?
         2. How did those changes affect the people living in the valley?
      ii. Land and Resources
         1. Which events affected who could own or use land?
         2. Why was land ownership important for settlers?
      iii. Community Life
         1. Which events helped communities grow?
         2. What traditions or ideas continued even when governments changed?

4. Exit Ticket:
   Ask the students to answer the following on a piece of paper:
   "*Did the government create communities, or did communities create themselves*?"

Activity 2: Community Governance Simulation — Sharing the Valley's Water

1. Read the following to the students:
   "It is 1855. Your group has established a new settlement in the San Luis Valley. Your farmland is productive, but the valley is dry. One river provides water for all farms, homes, and animals. If your community cannot agree on a fair system, people may not survive."
2. Assign students to groups and give them each a role card.
3. Tell the students the problem:
   "There is enough water for some needs, but not unlimited water for everyone."
4. Using the teacher discussion guide and the student group decision worksheet, based on the student's role, students answer the following questions by discussing their options:
   a. Who receives water first?
   b. How will water be shared?
   c. What happens during drought?
   d. Who maintains the irrigation system?
   e. How will disagreements be solved?
5. Based on the student decisions, groups will create a *Community Water Agreement* (backside of student worksheet).
6. Have students answer the following reflection questions:
   a. Why did your group create these rules?
   b. Who had the strongest voice in your decision-making?
   c. Was it easy or difficult to reach agreement?
   d. Why is community participation important?
7. Have students share out in a gallery walk/presentations.
   a. After presentations/gallery walk, explain:

"The decisions your group made are similar to the choices early San Luis Valley communities faced. Acequia systems developed because people needed a fair way to share water and make decisions together."

Activity 3: Place Names Tell Stories — Reading History Through Geography

1. Display the following on the board:
   "A place name is more than a label. It can tell a story."
   a. Have students make a list of unique names of places they have lived/visited. Have them share out at their tables.
   b. Explain: *"The San Luis Valley contains many places with Spanish names. These names remind us of the people, languages, and cultures that influenced Colorado's history."*
2. Student Investigation
   a. Place students into groups of 6.
   b. Give each student a different place card and explain to them that they are going to research the answers to the questions on their card on a separate piece of paper.
   c. Students will share out what they have learned with their groups. Teacher Note: If students have a hard time finding information, have them connect with their partners in another group. It is a jigsaw activity to share information.
   d. When teams have had a chance to share out, ask:
      i. "*What stories can we learn from the names of places?*"
   e. Have students answer this question together as a team and submit.

Strategy Instruction Differentiation:

1. Scaffolded Materials: Provide graphic organizers, structured note-taking templates, word banks, and sentence frames. Use two-column notes with pre-selected key terms
2. Accessible Content: Use audio versions of text, pre-teach vocabulary, or use priority passages as needed to reduce the length of text to be analyzed.
3. Flexible Learning: Incorporate oral rehearsal before writing, allow extended processing time, and use small-group or partner work. Provide sentence

stems for summaries that keep components (origins, preservation, modern relevance) separated to scaffold the evaluation process.

4. Inclusive Environment: Pair students who share a home language, utilize bilingual word walls, and offer movement breaks or quiet workspaces.

Assessment:

1. Design a Community Government
    a. Scenario: It is 1855. You are founding a new settlement in the San Luis Valley. Your goal is to create a community where people can survive, participate, and have their voices heard.
2. Students create a government to include the following. Using the student design worksheet.
    a. Community Charter
    b. Settlement Map
    c. Community Laws
    d. Resource Management Plan
    e. Historical Legacy Statement
3. If time, ask student groups,
    a. "*What traditions, names, or systems from your community might still exist 150 years from now? Why?*"

2022 Colorado 8th Grade Social Studies Standards:

1. SS.8.1.1.EO.e: Synthesize information from multiple sources to connect sources to historical narratives.
2. SS.8.2.1.EO.b: Identify the spatial distribution of cultural groups and human migration patterns.
3. SS.8.4.1: Construct an understanding of citizenship and the expansion or restriction of rights in the United States.

Extension Activities:

1. Advanced Analysis: Introduce higher-level academic vocabulary and push students to analyze sources from conflicting perspectives. Have students use multiple source types (primary vs. secondary, articles vs. images vs. maps vs. graphs) and explore different perspectives on the same region.

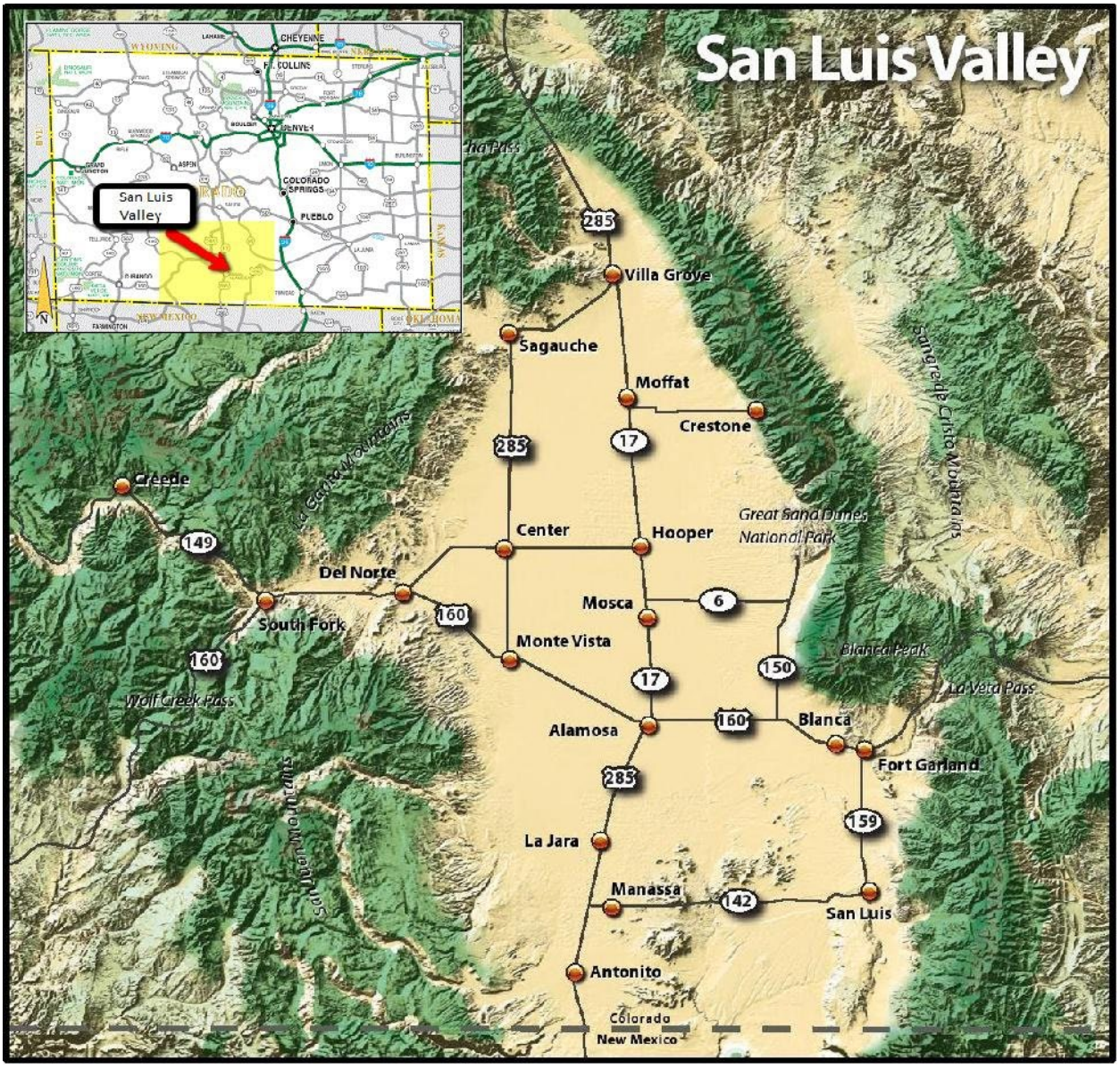
Additional Resources:

- The San Luis Valley article. Source: Colorado Encyclopedia.
- Mexican Land Grants in Colorado. Source: Colorado Encyclopedia.
- A Brief History of the San Luis Valley lesson plan. Source: History Colorado.
- A History of the San Luis Valley Primary Source Set. Source: Colorado Department of Education.
- Acequias of the San Luis Valley. Source: Colorado Open Lands.
- Sangre de Cristo Land Grant. Source: Colorado Encyclopedia.
- Conejos Land Grant Documents. Source: Colorado Encyclopedia.
- Mexican Land Grants and Disputed Territory–1830-1848. Source: Sangre Heritage Organization.

Timeline Cards-cut each card in the row and fold them in half (tape together)

Thousands of years ago — Indigenous Peoples Live in the San Luis Valley For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples lived throughout the valley. They hunted, gathered, traded, traveled, and developed relationships with the land and resources around them.	**Think About:** ● How did people depend on geography? ● What resources helped communities survive?
1700s — Spanish Exploration and Influence Spanish explorers entered the region during the 1700s. Spain created systems for exploration, settlement, and land ownership that influenced future communities.	**Think About:** ● Why would governments want people to settle new areas? ● How can a government encourage settlement?
1821 — Mexico Gains Independence from Spain Mexico became an independent country and gained control of the San Luis Valley. Mexican leaders encouraged settlement by providing land grants to families and communities.	**Think About:** ● Why would a government give land to settlers? ● How could land ownership encourage communities to grow?

1848 — United States Gains Control After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Following the Mexican-American War, the United States gained control of much of the Southwest, including the San Luis Valley.	**Think About:** ● How might a change in government affect people already living there? ● What questions might communities have about land ownership?
1851 — San Luis is Established San Luis was founded as a farming community and became Colorado's oldest continuously occupied town. Residents worked together to build homes, farms, and systems for sharing resources.	**Think About:** ● What does a community need to survive? ● Why is cooperation important?
1858 — Fort Garland is Built The United States established Fort Garland to provide military presence and support communities in the region.	**Think About:** ● Why do governments build forts? ● How might a fort affect nearby communities?
1876 — Colorado Becomes a State Colorado became the 38th state in the United States. Communities in the San Luis Valley became part of a new state government system.	**Think About:** ● How can joining a state change a community? ● What responsibilities come with statehood?



Map of the San Luis Valley with Town Names and Major Roads.

Source: [History Colorado]

Government Cards

United States	Mexico	Spain
		
Flag of the United States	Flag of Mexico	Flag of Spain

Group Roles

Farmers Primary Need: Reliable water access for field crops (corn, beans, squash). Priority Focus: Rules that guarantee downstream fields receive water before it runs dry.	**Ranchers** Primary Need: Water access for livestock and shared grazing lands (vegas). Priority Focus: Ensuring ditches do not block animal paths or privatize communal pastureland.	**Community Leaders** Primary Need: Peace, stability, and mutual cooperation across the settlement. Priority Focus: Creating fair voting systems and clear rules for resolving disputes.
New Families Primary Need: Access to water and land to establish a new home. Priority Focus: Fair rules that do not give all decision-making power only to founding families.	**Mayordomo (Water Manager)** Primary Need: A well-maintained irrigation ditch (acequia). Priority Focus: Rules requiring every family to participate in spring ditch cleaning.	

Teacher Discussion Guide

1. **Who receives water first?**

   Options:

   - Farmers growing food
   - Families needing drinking water
   - Animals
   - Businesses

   Students should explain their reasoning.

2. **How will water be shared?**

   Create rules:

   Examples:

   - Everyone receives an equal amount.
   - People receive water based on need.
   - Families take turns using water.

3. **What happens during drought?**

   Create a drought plan:

   - Who makes decisions?
   - What restrictions will exist?
   - How will people help each other?

4. **Who maintains the irrigation system?**

   Decide:

   - Who does the ditch cleaning?

- How often?
- What happens if someone refuses?

5. **How will disagreements be solved?**

   Create a system:

   - Community meeting?
   - Leaders?
   - Vote?
   - Council?

Group # _____

1. Who receives water first?

2. How will water be shared?

3. What happens during drought?

4. Who maintains the irrigation system?

5. How will disagreements be solved?

Community Water Agreement

Include:

Our Water Rules:

1.
2.
3.

Our Leaders:

Who makes decisions?

Our Conflict Solution:

How will disagreements be solved?

Place Cards

Place Card: San Luis Valley **Meaning:** Valley of Saint Louis Students investigate: ● Who named this area? ● Why might religious names have been used? ● What does this reveal about Spanish influence?	**Place Card: Alamosa** **Meaning:** "Cottonwood" in Spanish Students investigate: ● Why might trees have been important? ● What does this reveal about the environment?
Place Card: Monte Vista **Meaning:** "Mountain View" Students investigate: ● What geographic feature does this describe? ● How does geography influence settlement?	**Place Card: La Jara** **Meaning:** A Spanish word connected to a type of shrub/plant Students investigate: ● How do plants and resources influence names?
Place Card: Rio Grande **Meaning:** "Big River" Students investigate: ● Why would rivers be important to communities? ● What resources did rivers provide?	**Place Card: Sangre de Cristo Mountains** **Meaning:** "Blood of Christ Mountains" Students investigate: ● Why might people name mountains? ● How can names reflect beliefs and culture?

Design a Community Student Worksheet

Students create:

1. **Community Charter**

   Include:

   - Community name
   - Mission statement
   - Leadership structure
   - Rights and responsibilities of residents

2. **Settlement Map**

   Include:

   - Homes
   - Farms
   - Water sources
   - Roads
   - Community spaces

3. **Community Laws**

   Create three laws addressing:

   - Water use
   - Land use
   - Community responsibilities

4. **Resource Management Plan**

   Explain:

   - How water will be shared

- How conflicts will be solved
- How decisions will be made

5. **Historical Legacy Statement**

   Students answer:

   "What traditions, names, or systems from your community might still exist 150 years from now? Why?"

6. **Final Reflection**

   Students respond:

   1. Why do communities need systems of governance?
   2. Why is it important for people to have a voice in decisions?
   3. How did geography influence communities in the San Luis Valley?
   4. What can modern communities learn from historical communities?