

María Guadalupe Vallejo



Daughter of an East Bay Ranching Family
(historical)

1850s

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Storybook Summary

María Guadalupe Vallejo

Teacher Introduction

This story is based on a real person. María Guadalupe de Jesus Vallejo was born in 1844, during the last years of Mexican rule in what was then known as the territory of *Alta California*. She was the daughter of Don José de Jesus Vallejo and María Soledad Sanchez y Ortega. María's grandfather was Ignacio Vallejo, a sergeant in the Spanish army who helped defend the capital of Monterey against an attack by Captain Hippolito Bouchard, an infamous pirate who terrorized the California coast in 1818. María's mother, Doña María, was the granddaughter of José Ortega, a famous scout in the Spanish army.

In 1821 Mexico won its long war for independence against Spain. The Spanish colonists were no longer subjects of the king of Spain, but were now citizens of Mexico. These former colonists called themselves *Californios*, and like María's grandfather Ignacio, many of them received large grants of land from the Spanish King in gratitude for their service and to entice them to settle in *Alta California*. After the Revolution, Mexico continued the practice of encouraging the colonization of *Alta California* through the granting of land, and by the 1840s, perhaps as many as 7,000 *Californios* lived in the territory.

Because of his family connections, in 1836 Don José was appointed the *alcalde*, or civil administrator, of Mission San José. The government in far off Mexico City instructed Don José to close the mission, and sell the lands off to the highest bidder.

In recognition of his service at the mission, the Mexican governor granted Don José a large tract of land along Alameda Creek, which he named the *Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda*. A total of 17,000 acres, the Vallejo land today encompasses the western end of Alameda County, including southern Hayward and northern Union City.

María's story illustrates the life of a "typical" *Californio* rancho family living in the East Bay. It can be assumed that children living on other ranchos, such as those of the Castros, Sotos, and Estudillos, had similar lives.

In this story, María tells about the *Californios'* destructive relationship with the grizzly bear. While the story of the hunt and bear-bull fights may be upsetting to some students, it helps them to understand the impact that the colonists had on California. Sadly, the constant hunting of the grizzly bears, first by the Spaniards and *Californios*, and later by the Americans, all but wiped out the grizzly bear population of California. In 1922, the last wild California grizzly bear was killed in the Sequoia region.

María Guadalupe Vallejo

What happened to the Californios and to María?

Unlike the grizzly bear, many of the *Californio* families survived after the United States conquered California in 1846. However, the *Californio* families lost the majority of their huge ranchos to squatters, drought, and to their inability to pay taxes or prove to the United States government that their land in fact belonged to them. The Vallejos themselves lost their vast *Alameda Rancho*, as well as their home near Mission San José.

But in spite of their losses, many *Californios* adapted to life as Americans. María and her siblings were able to gain an education at Notre Dame Academy in the city of San José. She became fluent in five languages, and eventually became a music teacher. In her spare time she wrote articles for magazines as well as poetry recalling her life at Mission San José and the *Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda*. María died in 1904.

This story was researched and written by Professor Robert Phelps from the California State University East Bay's History Department. Professor Phelps is the Project Scholar for Crossroads.

María Guadalupe Vallejo

Introduction



Holá, mi nombre es María. As a girl, I lived with my family on our ranch in *Alta California*. I was born in 1844. My full name is María Guadalupe de Jesus Vallejo.

The part of Mexico where we lived was very far from big towns like Mexico City. Even with my big **familia**, sometimes it felt lonely there. But there was much to do on the ranch and excitement was never far away.

You can learn more about me and what it was like to live on *Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda*.

Mi familia

My father was Don José de Jesus Vallejo. His father was Ignacio Vallejo. Ignacio was a soldier in the Spanish army. In 1818, he helped fight off a pirate attack in Monterey, the capital of *Alta California*. To thank my grandfather for service in the army, the King of Spain gave him land. Many other men like my grandfather were also given land in *Alta California*.

My mother was María Soledad Sanchez y Ortega. Her father was José Ortega. He was a famous **scout** in the Spanish army.



Image from *Voyage of the Venus*, 1836-1839

I had five sisters and two brothers.

The names of my family were all Spanish. Years ago, Spain ruled *Alta California* and Mexico. But in 1821 Mexico won its long war for **independence** against Spain. Then, all the families like mine who lived in Spanish *Alta California* became **citizens** of Mexico. We called ourselves *Californios* because we lived in *Alta California*.

When *Alta California* became part of Mexico, more people were given land. They all became *Californios* too. By the 1840s, almost 7,000 *Californios* lived in the **territory**. The owners of the land grants were called **Dons**, or "lord." If the owner was a woman, she earned the title of **Doña**.

María Guadalupe Vallejo



Library of Congress

The Dons and Doñas made their living as ranchers. Along with many workers, they tended big herds of cattle. The hides, dried beef, and **tallow** were sold to traders from overseas.

Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda

Before I was born, my father Don José was appointed the **alcalde** of Mission San Jose. The government in far off Mexico City told my father to close the mission. He sold the lands off to the highest **bidder**. The Indians who lived and worked at the mission were forced to leave. Many of them found work on the ranchos. They became **vaqueros**, or cowboys, and tended to the cattle.



Sketch by José Cisneros

To thank my father for his work, the Mexican governor granted him a large **rancho**. The **rancho** was located along Alameda Creek. My father named it ***Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda***.

We had two homes. One home was on the **rancho** and the other was near Mission San José. I was born at the home near Mission San José. So were my sisters and brothers.

My home looked like the houses of the other **Californios**. They were built of **adobe** and had red tile roofs. They were very comfortable. They kept cool in summer and warm in winter. The furniture in our house came by sailing ship to the San Francisco Bay from places as far away as Boston, China, Persia, and Switzerland.



Spanish and Mexican land grants in Alameda County

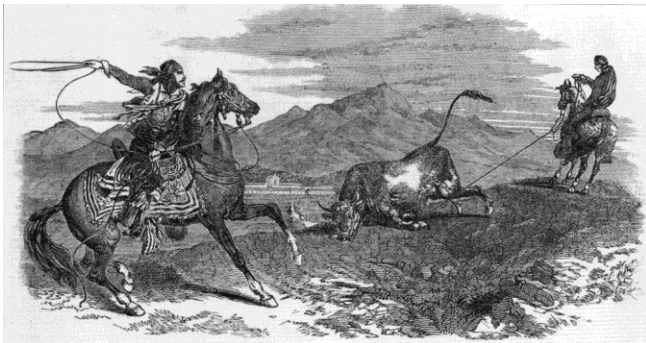
María Guadalupe Vallejo

My friends lived on the other *ranchos*. To the north was the family of Don Guillermo Castro at *Rancho San Lorenzo Alta*. To the northwest were *Ranchos San Lorenzo Baja*, belonging to the Soto family, and *San Leandro* belonging to the Estudillo family. Further north was *Rancho San Antonio* belonging to the Peralta family.

Working on the rancho

There was much work to be done on the rancho.

Each Spring Dons like my father held annual **rodeos**. During this time the cattle were rounded up from **grazing** on the land. There were thousands of cows from all the local *ranchos* grazing together. But each cow was marked with the **brand** of the Don owning them. The *vaqueros*



knew which **calves** belonged to their rancho, because the calves always followed their mothers, who had already been branded. The cows were separated and herded to the ranchos. Then the older animals were **slaughtered** for their hides, tallow, and meat. Later, the young cows and calves went back out to graze.

Harper's Monthly, 1894

My brothers went with our father to tend the family **herds**. But for my sisters and me, all of our work was for the household. We helped our mother with cooking, cleaning, and tending to younger members of the family.

One regular part of work was “wash day.” To do this, we went to the **spring** to wash the family’s clothes. To get ready for this hard day, my sisters and I had to wake up before sunrise to pack a lunch and prepare the **carreta**. A *carreta* is a two wheeled wagon pulled by two **oxen**. We rode to the spring in this wagon and horses carried the laundry on their backs. Once everything was ready, our Indian servants followed us to the spring.

The trip to the spring was slow. Sometimes we heard the howl of coyotes and the noise of other wild animals in the **dawn**. When we heard these sounds, none of us children were allowed to leave the *carreta*. Our mother was afraid that the wild animals would get us.

María Guadalupe Vallejo

At the spring, we rinsed the clothes in the water, soaped them, and then rubbed them against smooth rocks until all the dirt was gone. The clean clothing was hung on the branches of surrounding bushes to dry in the sun. Sometimes there was a great deal of **linen** to be washed.

We were proud of all our white linen. My mother, sisters, and I almost always wore white. We also had many expensive dresses, some of silk, velvet, and lace. We made most of these dresses ourselves. Some *Californios* had old and valuable lace that came from overseas. We also had dresses that were very colorful for **fiestas**.

Learning

My brothers and sisters and I learned everything we needed to know from our parents and older relatives. We did not go to school. We were taught to respect our **elders**. Our parents and older relatives taught us about our family histories and religion.

They also showed us how to ranch, farm, and **trade**. The boys were taught how to fish and hunt. And both boys and girls were taught how to ride horses. I loved to ride horses!

A few children, like me, were taught how to read. The only books we were allowed to read was the Bible and books about our family history. I had always looked forward to growing up and being able to read exciting **novels**.

Our religion was very important. We were Catholics. My sisters and I were expected to attend church at Mission San José every morning. When we went to church we dressed only in black. We were not allowed to wear brightly colored dresses to church. The padres taught us “that all ranks of men and women are equal in the presence of the Creator” so we should not wear our **finery**. We just wore plain dresses.

Time of enjoyment

While we did a lot of work on the *rancho*, there was also time for enjoyment

Even though our neighbors lived far away, we still found time to see each other. To visit each other, we rode horses. Young men would ride from one ranch to another for parties, and when someone’s horse got tired, he would let it go and catch another. There were so many horses in *Alta California*. Common horses were given to runaway sailors, and to trappers and hunters who came over the mountains. The fast and beautiful horses were highly **prized** in *Alta California*. All the young men had their favorites.

Maria Guadalupe Vallejo

At the *rodeos*, the men and boys showed off their horse riding and cattle roping skills. The *rodeo* was a happy celebration. People from all the local ranchos got together. We had big feasts and the adults drank plenty of wine. We danced to music that was in the traditions of both Mexico and Spain. The musicians played guitars and violins. Beautiful music filled the air.

1877



Image credit: "Roping a wild Grizzly" by James Walker,

Another time we all got together was for the bear and bull fights.

There were many bears in *Alta California*. Some said that as many as 30,000 grizzly bears once lived here. But men like my father didn't like the bears because they ate our cattle. Father said that a grizzly could weigh 900 pounds and they had huge claws! He warned all of us children to be watchful for hungry bears.

The young men in *Alta California* were responsible for hunting the bears. Sometimes, instead of killing the bear, they trapped it and brought it to the bull-fighting corral at Mission San José. There, the bears were forced to fight large **bulls**. Most of the bear and bull fights happened at Easter time or on the day of the patron saint of the Mission, which at Mission San José was March 19.

Young gentlemen trained for this contest. They entered the ring on foot and on horseback. Then they tied the front foot of the bull to the back foot of the bear with a rope. This was done to prevent the animals from running away from each other. But the large grizzly was more than a match for the fiercest bull in *Alta California*.

Not only did the boys hunt bears, but I learned that the **governor** of California once appointed expert bear hunters. Don Rafael Soto, was one of the most famous of these men. He had a special way of killing the bears. He would hide in a pit that was covered with heavy logs and leaves. Fresh beef was laid out on the logs. When the grizzly bear walked on the logs to get the meat, Don Soto shot the bear from beneath.

María Guadalupe Vallejo

The *rodeo* and bear and bull fights were special occasions. The rest of the year, my brothers and sisters and I found enjoyment at home. The boys practiced their riding skills and rope tricks for the coming rodeo. My sisters and I did **embroidery**.

We also spent a lot of time outside exploring the land. *Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda* was named after the big creek that flowed from the foothills to the bay. When our parents felt it was safe, we played along the creek.

I have happy memories of my childhood on the *rancho*.

Vocabulary

adobe – a type of brick made of mud and straw, also means “mud” in Spanish

alcalde – the Spanish word for “boss”

bidder – someone who offers to pay a price for something

brand – a mark burned on a farm animal with hot metal to show ownership

bull – a male cow

calf – a baby cow, “calves” means many baby cows

carreta – a two wheeled wagon pulled by oxen

citizen – member of a state or nation

dawn – the early morning as the sun rises

Don – the Spanish word for “lord” who is a man who owns land

Doña – the wife of a Don

elder – a person who is older than you

embroidery – to make designs in cloth using a needle and thread

familia – the Spanish word for “family”

fiesta – the Spanish word for “party”

finery – the best clothes you have

governor – the leader of a state

grazing – when cows or other animals eat grasses growing in fields or in nature

herd – a group of cows or other animals

independence – when a country becomes free and is not ruled by another country’s government

linen – a type of cloth

nombre – the Spanish word for “name”

novel – a book that tells a long story

oxen – a type of big cow

prized – the favorite

ranch – the Spanish word for “ranch”

rodeo – a time when people ride horses and show off their roping skills

scout – someone who goes out ahead to look for danger

slaughter – when cows or other animals are killed to be eaten

spring – a place where water comes up out of the ground

tallow – fat from cows or sheep used to make candles and soap

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Vocabulary

territory – part of land that a country claims

trade – when things are given to get other things in return

vaquero – the Spanish word for “cowboy

María Guadalupe Vallejo



Lesson Plan

People: María Guadalupe Vallejo
Timeline: Mexican Rancho Era
Pathways: El Camino Real
Classroom Kit: Alta California

1- Life on the Rancho

Activity Goals

- To introduce students to Mexican era culture.
- To understand differences between

Setting the Context

The life of children in the 1800s was very different from children’s lives today, especially on the remote frontier of *Alta California*. Children were expected to work and school was usually not part of their growing up. Although rancho children had more luxuries and free time than the children of rancho workers, they still had many chores to do.

María Guadalupe Vallejo did learn to read and write and went on to pen many essays about her life. For some of these texts, go to the Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco at www.sfmuseum.org/hist2/rancho.html. After reading Vallejo’s words, it is easy to see how the life of the *Californios* is often portrayed as idyllic.

Activity Instructions

After reading María’s story, students can complete a retrieval chart, comparing their life today with María’s life in the mid-1800s. Have them use this information:

- Jobs done by family members
- Homes made out of
- Food comes from
- Chores to do
- Clothing worn
- Ways of learning
- Ways of having fun

María Guadalupe Vallejo



Lesson Plan

People: María Guadalupe Vallejo

Timeline: Mexican Rancho Era

Pathways: El Camino Real

Classroom Kit: Alta California

2- Branding Iron

Activity Goals

- To understand the connection to the economy of the *Californios*
- To understand symbols used in the

Setting the Context

Like most families during the rancho era, María's owned livestock. In order to distinguish between each rancher's cattle, cows would be branded with a hot branding iron. A branding iron is a long metal rod with the brand (symbol or design) at the end. The iron is heated over a flame and then placed on the animal's skin to burn the brand mark. These brands, generally the initials of the head of the ranch, had to be registered with the government to prove ownership of the animals.

Materials Needed

- Brown paper bags
- Thick black marker

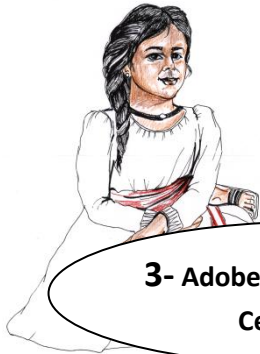
Activity Instructions

Read María's story to the class. Discuss the typical lifestyle of the *Californio* family. What chores did María and her sisters have on the ranch? What chores did her brothers do?

Talk about the economy and the importance of the cattle ranchers to *Alta California*. Have the students design their own cattle brand. Rip up large pieces of a brown paper bag to create the rough edges of a "rawhide." Ask your students to scrunch up the paper, unfold and scrunch – repeat until the paper becomes soft. Before they design their brand, show examples of brands that are entwined letters and numbers. Have the students draw the design in pencil on the rawhide, then color in with a thick black marker.

María Guadalupe Vallejo

Lesson Plan



People: María Guadalupe Vallejo
Timeline: Mexican Rancho Era
Pathways: El Camino Real
Classroom Kit: Alta California

3- Adobe Construction – 21st Century Style

Activity Goals

- To introduce students to Spanish colonial architecture, a legacy of *Alta California*
- To illustrate the concept that building style and construction reflect local resources and environment

Setting the Context

Often romanticized, the actual structures in *Alta California* were simple, one-story adobe buildings.

Adobe structures in *Alta California* were often one room and had no indoor fireplaces. The grand villa-style haciendas depicted by artists were later buildings influenced by American and European architecture. In fact, the first two-story building in California was built in 1835 by Thomas Larkin in Monterey.

To construct a building, the most economic avenue was to use the type of building materials available locally. Adobe was easily made from the nearby ground. The arches and doorways, supported by beams, had to be thick and wide to support their own weight. The wide eaves surrounding the buildings were to protect the adobe from the rain. Doors were covered with rawhide and floors were dirt. The first mission buildings had thatched roofs and later tile roofs.

To make a simple one-room adobe structure required 1,000 bricks. These bricks weighed between 20-40 pounds and could take a month to dry in the sun. Straw was used to bind the mud, but often brick makers had to use whatever they could find – sticks, shells, bird nests, tule, and other refuse. Weather and floods took their toll on these structures, requiring continual repair and reconstruction. (Source: *California's Architectural Heritage* by Harold Kirker).

The headquarters of the Vallejo Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda, likely one of the homes Maria refers to in her story, still stands today in Fremont in the Mission Park off Niles Boulevard. Documentation of the building, done in 1937 by the Historic American Buildings Survey, states that it was built in 1842 and later renovated. It has been restored multiple times, but it is unlikely to contain much of the original materials. Still it offers a good look at adobe construction in the past.

María Guadalupe Vallejo

Lesson Plan

People: María Guadalupe Vallejo
Timeline: Mexican Rancho Era
Pathways: El Camino Real
Classroom Kit: Alta California

**3- Adobe Construction – 21st
Century Style**



Activity Instructions

Construct a miniature adobe building using recycled and easily accessible materials.

Materials Needed

- 2 one gallon plastic milk containers (for the main structure of the building)
- 2 pieces of cardboard (for the roof and roof support)
- plastic netting (produce or poultry from supermarket to put around the milk containers so the adobe sticks to the containers)
- 2 ft of string and/or masking tape (to connect the roof support to the top of the building)
- plastic fork with the middle two tongs removed (to make roof sculpting tool)
- about a quart of adobe (see instructions below)



María Guadalupe Vallejo

Lesson Plan continued

People: María Guadalupe Vallejo
Timeline: Mexican Rancho Era
Pathways: El Camino Real
Classroom Kit: Alta California

**3- Adobe Construction – 21st
Century Style**



Making adobe – Materials

Option 1 – *this is the most primitive way*

- plain dirt/soil
- straw or dried weeds
- water

Option 2 – *requires a bit more material collection*

- sand
- clay
- straw or dried weeds
- water

Step 1: Mix

- 3 parts sand (You can use children’s sandbox sand.)
- 1 part clay (Clay can be found about 6” below the surface of the ground in many places.)
- 1/3 of volume straw/weeds (Cut up the weeds with a scissors into 1 inch length pieces.)
- 1 part water (or enough until reach desired consistency)
(Consistency should be between pancake batter and cookie dough!)

Note: At this stage, you can have students make a **simple adobe brick**. The bottom of a ½ gallon milk carton can be used as the mold.



María Guadalupe Vallejo

Lesson Plan continued

People: María Guadalupe Vallejo
Timeline: Mexican Rancho Era
Pathways: El Camino Real
Classroom Kit: Alta California

**3- Adobe Construction – 21st
Century Style**



Step 2: Assembling the Structure

1. Cut the top off one container and slide the other one in to it.
2. Place the netting around the plastic containers.
3. Begin to apply the adobe mixture – Let dry for approximately 1 day.



(Step 1)



(Step 2)



(Step 3)

4. Meanwhile, assemble the roof using cardboard.
5. Using the metal strap, bend the piece into a tool that can help shape the roof adobe. A simpler option here is to use a plastic fork with the middle two tines removed.
6. Brush the cardboard with water before applying the adobe to the roof. This will help bond the adobe to the cardboard
7. Apply adobe to roof, and use the shaping tool to give the roof the texture of adobe tile work.



María Guadalupe Vallejo

Lesson Plan continued

People: María Guadalupe Vallejo
Timeline: Mexican Rancho Era
Pathways: El Camino Real
Classroom Kit: Alta California

**3- Adobe Construction – 21st
Century Style**



8. Now you are ready to assemble the structure. For best results, attach the roof to the building with string. Masking tape may also be used under the eaves.



9. You can add details to the structure so that it is a house, church, or other building from Alta California.

This activity is courtesy of **Karl Schultz, Adobe Craft**. For more information, you may email him at schultzkv@comcast.net.

Storybook Summary - *María Guadalupe Vallejo*

When the Mission Padre Came to the Rancho

By Gare Thompson, *I Am American*

National Geographic, 2004

This is a unique look at both rancho and mission life. It is good as a read aloud book for students and is filled with many historic paintings as visuals. There is an introduction to early California life during the Mexican rancho era. A map shows each of the Bay Area ranchos.

The rest of the book is set on the rancho of the Delgado family of Monterey in 1838. Some of the story is told through the diary entries of Rosalinda, age 17, and her older brother Simón. In Chapter 1, *Life on the Rancho*, a former mission padre returns to the rancho for a visit. His letters and diaries are also used to tell the story. He shares his worries about the eminent take over of *Alta California* by the United States and what this will mean for the people of *Alta California*.

Chapter 2 describes the annual harvest festival and in Chapter 3 Russian traders arrive from Fort Ross. In Chapter 4, the padre tells a story of life at the missions and of an Indian uprising and escape. Rosalinda and Simón enjoy hearing about life in *Alta California*.

Discussion Topics

- *Rancho* life (of the workers, of the families, of the children)
- Secularization
- The coming of the Americans from the United States and what this meant for the *Californios*
- How must the *Crossroads* child María Guadalupe Vallejo's life have changed when squatters arrived and started living on rancho lands in the east bay