**Golden Age Spain (late 15th Century-1681)**

When King Ferdinand of Castile and Queen Isabel of Leon married, they united Spain. Though their reign is marked by religious intolerance, it was also a time of rising to World Power. They conquered other European lands and controlled the seas. By 1550, Spain was a leading power in Europe and poised for their “Golden Age” in conquest, commerce and the arts.

**Social hierarchy**: At the top was the nobility, followed by the rest of the Spanish populations with the poor and homeless at the bottom. The minorities: Jews, Arabs and *gitanos* (gypsies), were often regarded with mistrust and discriminated against. People took great pride in having “sangre pura” (pure blood), that is, a purely Spanish ancestry.

**Rules of behavior:** there were very strict rules of behavior, especially when dealing with nobility. There were specific verbal expressions to be used according to a person’s social status as well as physical actions such as to kiss a lady’s hand and to offer to kiss the feet of a lord. Honor was a very important value in Golden Age Spain. If a man or woman felt disrespected (for example, somebody did not treat them according to their social status), this could lead to duels and other things.

**Professions:** Besides nobility, there were soldiers, students, scribes, priests, doctors, merchants, craftsmen, farmers, servants, etc. Each would dress according to their profession, so that it was easy to recognize a person’s social status and treat them accordingly.

**Education:** very few people could read in the Golden Age: clergy, nobility, intellectuals (professors, lawyers, scribes, doctors, painters), some merchants, government employees and servants of very important houses. Books were very expensive. A person that had 20 to 30 books would have been considered a scholar. Some of the most important Golden Age playwrights (Lope de Vega, Quevedo, etc) had up to 300. Besides religious books, the most popular literature of the time were the novels of knight errantry. A public reader would read books for people who could not read.

**Religion:** Spaniards were very devout Catholics and the church was the social center of the society.

**Love:** The strength with which the Golden Age man falls in love is often portrayed in literature and theater. It was hard for a man to have close contact to his beloved, since she was constantly and zealously guarded by parents, siblings, and servants. Often a lover would send a group of musicians to sing a *serenata* (serenade) for his beloved, send her gifts and poetry.

**Entertainment:** The theatre was the most popular entertainment, but people would also go to the running of the bulls and dances. Religious drama was part of Spanish culture since medieval times and were mounted on wagons called *carros* and then in public theatres called *corrales*. Secular drama included *comedias*. Lope de Vega, Pedro Calderon, and Miguel Cervantes were popular writers during this period. Play subjects included: Conflicts of love and honor, daring adventures, melodramatic confrontations and rescues and the essence of Spanish plays.

*Some of this information was taken from a lesson plan created originally by Raquel Klammer, BYU student*