

ALAMO

An Interactive Unit on the Texas Revolution's Pivotal Event and Its Personalities, 1835–1836

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The nationwide movement for high standards has not only determined what students should learn, but also has mandated that students demonstrate what they know. ALAMO is a standards-based unit addressing numerous History Thinking, U.S. History, and English Language Arts Standards. The content is the target of most state frameworks for American History. ALAMO provides many opportunities for both informal and formal assessment as students explore the events leading up to the siege and storming of the Alamo, and study the motivations and personalities of both attackers and defenders. The cooperative problem-solving and decision-making required in ALAMO also address Applied Learning standards.

National Standards for History Standards in Historical Thinking

Standard 1: *Chronological Thinking*

The student is able to:

- B. **Identify the temporal structure of a historical narrative or story.**
- E. **Interpret data presented in time lines and create time lines** by designating appropriate equidistant intervals of time and recording events according to the temporal order in which they occurred.

Standard 2: *Historical comprehension*

The student is able to:

- B. **Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage** by identifying who was involved, what happened, where it happened, what events led to these developments, and what consequences or outcomes followed.
- D. **Differential between historical facts and historical interpretations** but acknowledge that the two are related; that the facts the historian reports are selected and reflect therefore the historian’s judgment of what is most significant about the past.
- E. **Read historical narratives imaginatively**, taking into account what the narrative reveals of the humanity of the individuals and groups involved—their probable values, outlook, motives, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.
- F. **Appreciate historical perspectives** (a) describing the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there, as revealed through their literature, diaries, letters, debates, arts, artifacts, and the like; (b) considering the historical context in which the event unfolded—the values, outlook, options, and contingencies of that time and place; and (c) avoiding “present-mindedness,” judging the past solely in terms of present-day norms and values.

STANDARDS

Standard 3: *Historical Analysis and Interpretation*

The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation. The student is able to:

- B. **Consider multiple perspectives** of various people in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears.
- C. **Analyze cause-and-effect relationships** bearing in mind multiple causation, including (a) the importance of the individual in history; (b) the influence of ideas, human interests, and beliefs; and (c) the role of chance, the accidental and the irrational.
- J. **Hypothesize the influence of the past**, including both the limitations and the opportunities made possible by past decisions.

Standard 4: *Historical Research Capabilities*

The student conducts historical research. The student is able to:

- B. **Obtain historical data from a variety of sources** including library and museum collections, historic sites, historical photos, journals, diaries...oral testimony from living witnesses...censuses, tax records, etc.

National Standards for U. S. History

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801–1861)

Standard 1

United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans.

- 1C. The student understands the ideology of Manifest Destiny, the nation's expansion to the Northwest, and the Mexican-American War.

NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts

Standard 4: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 5: Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 6: Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

Standard 7: Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print text, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience

Standard 8: Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

California Applied Learning Standards

Standard 6. Students will understand how to apply communication skills and techniques. Students will demonstrate ability to communicate orally and in writing.

Standard 8. Students will understand the importance of teamwork. Students will work on teams to achieve project objectives

STANDARDS



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In ALAMO students learn first hand the causes, course, and results of the Texas Revolution of the 1830s. Of course, the siege and battle of the Alamo is the keystone to all of the revolution's events and is the heart of this unit. While participating in ALAMO, students gain valuable insights into Texas history and sharpen critical thinking skills. Specifically, your students experience the following:

Knowledge

- Learn the essential history of the Texas Revolution
- Place the events in Texas in the context of America's western expansion in the nineteenth century
- Learn common myths about the Alamo and discard or accept each in light of historical analysis and fact
- Become familiar with several history-makers who played key roles in the Texas Revolution
- Learn important geography of the region and how each site shaped events relating to the Texas Revolution
- Learn and make use of key historical terms and names relating to the Texas Revolution

Skills

- Practice effective group discussion and decision-making skills
- Utilize oral participation skills in front of small and large groups
- Prepare and orally present information in role-playing situations
- Take and organize notes during oral presentations
- Analyze and evaluate information presented by peers
- Read for understanding, research, and write to reflect knowledge

Attitudes

- Realize that warfare, especially a war for independence, is often brutal, inglorious, and uncompromising
- Honor the brave men on both sides at the Alamo, but especially the Texian garrison
- Understand that the martyrdom of the Alamo defenders had a huge impact on subsequent events, including the pivotal Battle of San Jacinto and, a decade later, the war with Mexico
- Understand that taking a defiant stand, especially a military one, involves accepting responsibility for one's actions and beliefs, and can lead to capture, imprisonment, or death
- Appreciate the dynamics of group interaction and cooperation
- Understand that hard work usually produces better results
- Learn that teamwork most often produces a better product and does so more easily than individual efforts

PURPOSE



OVERVIEW

When visitors come to San Antonio to view the church and grounds, it is akin to a pilgrimage, an acknowledgement that the Alamo is indeed an awesome shrine for the men who defended its walls for 13 days in 1836, against a vastly superior Mexican army. Entering the cool, quiet interior of the mission itself, visiting pilgrims remove their hats and caps and read a sign on the door:

**Be silent, friend
Here heroes died
To blaze a trail
For other men**

Several have written that there are two Alamos: one is the Alamo in historical fact and the other the myriad myths we have created about it. While we like to think the Alamo of history is the version we Americans embrace, the Alamo of myth is more embedded into our collective imaginations and culture. Both levels have captured Americans—and especially Texans—for over 160 years.

Students begin their study of the Alamo by reading a comprehensive essay of events prior to, during, and after the destruction of the Alamo garrison. They then break into contingents to become experts on one of seven Texas Stars. Armed with their newly gained knowledge, they jigsaw into different groups and role-play their Texas Star to teach others about this individual. Students take notes on each presentation. They then return to their original contingents to discuss lesser-known individuals significant in the history of the Alamo. They create a butcher paper tapestry to present to the rest of the class.

The next major activity again involves role-playing. Within their contingents, students portray real characters from the Alamo story in episodes depicted in tableaux called *Frozen Moments*. The teacher stops and starts action by touching, and thus “unfreezing” the characters in a scene. These characters then respond to questions as the episode is played out.

The unit also includes map work, a comparison of the two sides, an explanatory Alamo dialogue, a poetry assignment, a research project, and an exciting competitive review simulating an exchange of artillery fire by both sides.

Differentiation

Like all INTERACT units, ALAMO provides differentiated instruction through its various learning opportunities. Students learn and experience the knowledge, skills, and attitudes through all domains of language (reading, writing, speaking, listening). The academic and kinesthetic activities appeal to a variety of learning aptitudes. Adjust the choice of activities to best fit your students and encourage their strengths.



Day 1

Objectives

- Introduce unit
- Establish contingents/make folders

Materials

- Student Guide — *class set*
- WHAT IS THE ALAMO? — *display copy*
- COOPERATIVE GROUP WORK RUBRIC — *one per contingent + one to post (optional)*
- EXTENSIONS — *class set (optional)*
- CONTENT RUBRIC — *class set + one to post (optional)*
- 1836: A PERSPECTIVE — *display copy*
- ALAMO “SHAPE” BOOKLET — *class set (optional)*
- Lined paper (8.5" x 11") — *class set*
- Pocket folders — *one per contingent*

Teacher Reference

- **Alamo Roster** — *one*

Preparation

1. Decide student contingent assignments and complete an **Alamo Roster**.
2. Decide whether your students will complete an EXTENSION and/or ALAMO “SHAPE” BOOKLET research activity.

Procedure

1. Have students take out lined paper. As a motivator ask them to number 1 through 7 on the paper. Then ask them to answer these questions:
 1. What is the Alamo?
 2. Where is the Alamo?
 3. What two forces fought at the Alamo?
 4. Who won the battle?
 5. What famous persons died at the Alamo?
 6. Approximately when did the battle occur? (month/year)
 7. Why should we spend the next ___ days involved in the story of the Alamo?
2. When students have finished, display the WHAT IS THE ALAMO? display copy and discuss their responses to the seven questions. Add detail and color as appropriate.



This is an important day because students will get the “feel” and overview of the unit, if not necessarily the historical content.

Option: Show the last five minutes of the Walt Disney film, *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier* (see **Resources/Bibliography** on page 15). Have a lively discussion about the controversy surrounding Crockett’s death and some Alamo “myths” that are perpetuated in our popular culture.

DAILY DIRECTIONS

DAY 1



3. Distribute the Student Guides and read the page 1. Tell students the scope and approximate sequence of the unit, what they will be doing and for how long. Turn to page 2. Read and explain how students will work in contingents. Distribute and review the **COOPERATIVE GROUP WORK RUBRIC**. (If you will use the **Alamo Mission Points (AMPs)** competition, introduce how this will work in your classroom.)
4. **Option:** Distribute the **EXTENSIONS** information and review. Answer any questions. Distribute the **CONTENT RUBRIC** and go over your expectations. If you are using competition and points, explain how Extension projects enable students to earn extra AMPs.
5. Display a copy of **1836: A PERSPECTIVE** and go over its interesting contents. Note that it reflects on the year 1836, as well as past and future events.
6. Move students into their contingents. Have them select a “colonel” to lead them for today. The title is mostly honorary and ceremonial, yet, expect leadership from the colonels. Explain if, how, and how often students will change role responsibilities.
7. If time, distribute contingent folders and have students decorate with a flag and contingent motto. Instruct students to keep all handouts and other materials in these folders throughout the unit.
8. Distribute the **ALAMO “SHAPE” BOOKLET** information. Introduce it and go over the requirements and establish a due date. If not already done, distribute the **CONTENT RUBRIC** and go over your expectations.