



## PROFILES IN COURAGE

Teacher's Guide

# SAM HOUSTON

### CREDITS:

Starring J.D. Cannon, Warren Stevens, Peggy McCay, and Slim Pickens. Written by A.J. Russell. Directed by Sherman Marks. Produced by Gordon Oliver and Robert Saudek Associates. Inspired by John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning book. **50 minutes.** Guide prepared for Social Studies School Service by Robert D. Barnes, 1983.

### OBJECTIVES:

- To explore the idea of violence as a solution to disagreements.
- To follow Sam Houston's fight to keep Texas in the Union when neighboring states seceded.
- To understand the meaning of moral courage.

### BACKGROUND:

In the early 1800s Spain encouraged the American settlers who trickled into Texas. When Mexico won her independence from Spain in 1821, the policy continued. However, a revolt of Texans in 1826 to establish the "Republic of Fredonia," while quickly crushed, convinced Mexico that Texas was becoming too American. When Mexico sought to limit and control what had become a steady stream of settlers and their slaves, Texans revolted in 1835.

While the confrontation at the Alamo left all American defenders dead, it was a costly Mexican victory. Less than two months later Texans screaming "Remember the Alamo!" decisively defeated the Mexican army at San Jacinto. The hero of that battle was Sam Houston.

In his original book, Kennedy describes Sam Houston: "He was fiercely ambitious, yet at the end he sacrificed for principle all he had ever won or wanted. He was a Southerner, and yet he steadfastly maintained his loyalty to the Union. He was a slaveholder who defended the right of Northern ministers

to petition Congress against slavery; he was a notorious drinker who took the vow of temperance; he was an adopted son of the Cherokee Indians who won his first military honors fighting the Creeks; he was a Governor of Tennessee but a Senator from Texas.

He was in turn magnanimous yet vindictive, affectionate yet cruel, eccentric yet self-conscious, faithful yet opportunistic. But Sam Houston's contradictions actually confirm his one basic, consistent quality: indomitable individualism, sometimes crude, sometimes mysterious, but always courageous."

This episode is not about Sam Houston's exploits at the battle of San Jacinto. It is about the sixth decade of Houston's life when he fights against the South and against secessionists in Texas to preserve the Union.

### SYNOPSIS:

In 1854 an angry debate between pro- and antislavery forces erupts with the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, proposing that "popular sovereignty" determine whether new territories adopt slavery. Sam Houston, arguing that the South must stand by the Missouri Compromise, warns "If the South accedes to the violation of a compact as sacred as this, they set an example that may be followed on occasions when they do not desire it... We are not acting alone for ourselves, but are trustees for the benefit of posterity..."

For his vote against the Kansas-Nebraska Act and his strong Union sentiments, we see Houston removed from his Senate seat by the Texas legislature. Taking his campaign directly to the citizens of Texas, Houston is elected Governor. But secessionist sentiments are strengthened with the election of Lincoln.

On March 16, 1861, Governor Houston is removed from office for refusing to support the Confederate government that Texas has joined.

**VOCABULARY:**

The following words and phrases appear in the program. Teachers may wish to check for student understanding:

nurturing	modify
riled	destiny
Kansas-Nebraska Act	sectional
transient	traitor
omen	subvert
calamity	befuddled
treachery	tottering
unceremoniously	reprehensible
enticement	proviso
entreaty	impotent
secession	restoration
San Jacinto	posterity
conviction	perseverance
liberator	inaugurate
maneuvering	diluted
actuate	strife
intercourse	pang
perpetuity	

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. Addressing a disinterested group of colleagues in the Senate chamber, Houston rails, "On this floor, on this floor, I am representative of all the people. I know neither North nor South. I know only Union!" What is Houston's subject and why does he address it? What is the reaction of the Texas legislature? Explain.
2. List some of the mannerisms and affectations that contribute to Houston's image as a "wild man."
3. "Trouble #7 is staring me right in the face." What is Houston talking about? What does it mean to run as an independent? Why does he do it?
4. "Lieutenant Governor" Clark advises Houston on the issue of secession. What does he urge? What reasons does he give? What is his own position?
5. Why does Margaret Houston feed Sam milk and soft cheese? Is she at all successful in her various attempts to temper Sam's behavior? Support your answer with examples.

6. South Carolina calls for a convention of slave states to "protect our property from the enemy," What is Houston's reaction to the invitation from Mr. Finchley?
7. The election of Abraham Lincoln enrages the citizens of Texas. Why? What is Sam's reaction?
8. What is the difference in Texas between a vote on Houston's popularity and a vote on secession? Explain fully.
9. Houston appears most effective when vilifying and ridiculing his opponents and cracking jokes. Can you give any examples? How do you feel about his techniques for dealing with people?
10. What proposal does Sam advance to "fire" the imagination of Texans and keep Texas out of the Confederacy? What is his aim? Is his reaction to Lincoln's offer consistent with his position? Explain.
11. Houston's son announces that he is not returning to school. He runs away to join the Confederacy. How do you feel about Sam's reaction? What does it tell us about the man?

**ACTIVITY:**

Hold a brainstorming session in class. Develop a list of controversial topics on the board. Find several volatile topics on the list where most or all of the class members are on one side of the issue. Ask several courageous class members to prepare arguments on the other side. Turn the class loose on them. Keep track of the techniques they use to defend their positions. Ask them to discuss their feelings about this experience.

**FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION:**

1. Find out how President Buchanan responded when South Carolina seceded from the Union. What were the consequences?
2. Examine the life of Sam Houston from the time he ran away as a small boy from his Tennessee, frontier home, until his death in 1863. Share your findings.