

# DISCOVER AMERICA

## Teacher Guide



## Defenders of the Alamo: Courage, Sacrifice, and Heritage

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## Key Themes

- Courage and Sacrifice
- Leadership and Heroes
- Community and Unity
- Geography and Strategy
- Cultural Exchange and Influence

## Core Values

- Community
- Liberty
- Life



## Learning Objectives

### Students will be able to

- Identify the key events leading up to and during the Battle of the Alamo.
- Recognize the significance of the Alamo in the broader context of the Texas Revolution and American history.
- Discuss the roles and contributions of important figures in the battle and the Texas Revolution.
- Explain causes of the Texas Revolution, including political, economic, and social factors.
- Analyze the impact of the Battle of the Alamo on the Texas Revolution and its outcome.
- Discuss and reflect on the concepts of bravery, sacrifice, and perseverance demonstrated by the defenders of the Alamo.
- Conduct research on specific aspects of the Battle of the Alamo and the Texas Revolution using various sources.

# Key Terms

- 0 1 **artillery:** large, heavy weapons used in land battles, like cannons, which are too big to carry by hand and are often mounted on wheels for easier movement.
- 0 2 **declare:** to say something in an official or public way.
- 0 3 **province:** an area of land that is part of a country, similar to a state.
- 0 4 **revolution:** a very great change in something that causes many other things to change.
- 0 5 **revolutionary:** someone who takes part in a revolution against the government.
- 0 6 **siege:** a military act of surrounding a city or base, attacking it, and cutting off supplies.
- 0 7 **surrender:** to give up control of something to someone else.



# Introduction

**TELL Students**

Have you ever faced a situation where it felt like everything was stacked against you? Picture this: your sports team is up against opponents who are older, stronger, and faster. Or imagine you're handed a school project that seems incredibly tough and complex. Maybe your music teacher assigns you a new piece that's more challenging than any you've attempted before.

**ASK Students**

How would you handle these situations? Would you step onto the field, grab your pencil, or sit down at your instrument ready to face the challenge head-on?

**TELL Students**

Choosing to confront these challenges takes a great deal of courage and determination. However, embracing such difficulties is more than just about getting through them. When you play in a tough game, you grow as an athlete; when you tackle a demanding project, you develop as a student; and when you master a complicated piece of music, you advance as a musician. Each of these scenarios teaches us an important lesson about perseverance. Facing challenges head-on not only tests our resolve but also enhances our skills and builds our character. This is why it's crucial to not shy away from difficult situations. By choosing to engage rather than retreat, you learn to adapt, overcome, and eventually succeed, which is a valuable life skill that will serve you well beyond these immediate challenges. Just like the defenders of the Alamo back in 1836, who knew they were outnumbered and outmatched by the advancing army of General Santa Anna. Despite the daunting odds, they chose to stand their ground, fight for what they believed in, and defend their fort. Their incredible bravery and refusal to surrender in the face of overwhelming odds have been remembered throughout history as a powerful example of courage and resilience. Just as you can draw strength from overcoming your personal challenges, remembering the Alamo can inspire us to face our difficulties with bravery and perseverance, no matter how insurmountable they may seem.

**ASK Students**

What do you know about the Alamo?

# Introduction

## TELL Students 📷

The word “Alamo” comes from the Spanish word for “cottonwood tree.” The Alamo was a military fort and the site of a great battle, but it was originally a mission for the Catholic Church. Imagine a fort standing tall in the hot Texas sun, surrounded by brave men fighting for their beliefs and their future. The Alamo is a story of courage, determination, and sacrifice. Picture yourself in 1836, where every decision and every act of bravery played a part in shaping the history of our nation.

**[Reference Alamo Image]**

## ASK Students

How did the bravery and sacrifices of the defenders at the Alamo in 1836 influence the outcomes and spirit of the Texas Revolution?

## TELL Students 🔑

Many Texan revolutionaries bravely fought at the Alamo. They raised their flag as a symbol of their fight for independence from Mexico. A **revolutionary** is someone who takes part in a revolution against the government. A **revolution** is when a people overthrow their government and replace it with a new one. There were about 200 men who stood their ground against a much larger Mexican army. These soldiers showed incredible courage in the face of overwhelming odds.

## ASK Students

Why do you think it was important for the soldiers to be courageous?

## TELL Students 🔑

Yes! Soldiers must be courageous because battles are hard and dangerous. Many soldiers are in charge of artillery. **Artillery** is large, heavy weapons used in land battles, like cannons, which are too big to carry by hand and are often mounted on wheels for easier movement. Both the defenders and the Mexican army used cannons during the siege, and the roar of cannon fire was a common sound during those days. A **siege** is a military act of surrounding a city or base, attacking it, and cutting off supplies.

# Introduction

## **ASK** Students

What is a siege?

## **TELL** Students

That is right! A siege is what happened at the Alamo. Let's watch another episode of Star Spangled Adventures to learn more about the brave men who fought at the Alamo.

## **WATCH**

Star Spangled Adventures Cartoon Ep. 32: The Alamo



# Lesson

## TELL Students 📷

Deep in the heart of Texas in 1836, about 200 brave Texans, including Tejanos and volunteers, fought hard to protect the Alamo from thousands of soldiers led by the Mexican president, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. **[Reference Santa Anna Image]** Before we talk about the Battle of the Alamo, let's understand what the Alamo was and how Texas became part of the United States. [Show Texas on U.S. Map.] The Alamo was originally a mission built by Spanish settlers around 1718, called Mission San Antonio de Valero. Missionaries and Native American converts lived and worked there for nearly 70 years. Later, it became a military fort and was renamed "El Alamo" after the Spanish word for cottonwood trees that grew around it and to honor the soldiers' hometown, Alamo de Parras.

## ASK Students

What was the original purpose of the building known as the Alamo before it became a military fort?

## TELL Students 🔑

After an 11-year revolution, Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821. Coahuila and Texas, formerly Spanish provinces, joined as one Mexican state. A **province** is an area of land that is part of a country, similar to a state. To encourage people to move to Texas and make it a busier place, the Mexican government came up with a plan to attract settlers from the United States and other countries. They offered big pieces of land at very low prices and said that the new settlers wouldn't have to pay taxes for a while. This made many families and adventurers excited to start a new life in Texas. People who moved there were called "Texians" at first. They came from many different places, like Ireland, Germany, and England, adding to the mix of people already there. Over time, as they all lived and worked together fighting for their land, they began to call themselves "Texans," showing they were united and proud of their new home. This mix of people and the land they settled on helped shape what Texas is today.

## ASK Students

What did the Mexican government do to encourage people to settle in Texas?

# Lesson

**TELL** Students

Please read the following passage to learn more. [Please print and disseminate fourth grade student text.]

*As more and more settlers moved to Texas, the area started to change a lot. Most of these new settlers came from the United States, and they had different ways of living and different ideas from the Mexican people who were already there. As the number of settlers increased, they started to fill up the land, and this made some of the original residents and the Mexican government worried and unhappy. In 1830, to control this rapid change, the Mexican government created a new rule to stop more American settlers from moving to Texas. But many Americans kept coming anyway, even though it was not allowed. This made the situation more tense, as more people were living in Texas without permission.*

**ASK** Students

Why did the Mexican government create a new rule in 1830, and what was its effect on the settlers coming to Texas?

**TELL** Students

Then, in 1833, a new leader named Santa Anna became the president of Mexico. Many people hoped he would be fair and give them more freedom, but he did the opposite. Santa Anna made himself very powerful and did not listen to what the settlers wanted. He believed in strong control and put more power in the hands of the government. This upset the settlers, known as Texians, because they felt they had no say in the decisions that affected their lives. They wanted to be part of the discussions and decisions about Texas's rules and future. Because of these issues, the Texians became more and more frustrated. They felt they were not being treated fairly. They did not just want small changes anymore. They started thinking about becoming independent and making Texas a place where they could create their own rules. This was the beginning of serious disagreements that would later lead to big fights for independence.

**ASK** Students

How did Santa Anna's leadership style affect the Texians, and what did it lead them to consider for Texas's future?

# Lesson

**TELL Students**

The Texas Revolution began in 1835 after Texians and their allies fought to control San Antonio de Béxar, an important town where the Alamo is located. Today, this town is known as San Antonio. The fight for San Antonio de Béxar was a crucial early victory for the Texians, who were determined to break away from Mexican rule. This conflict was not just about a single battle; it was part of a larger struggle for independence fueled by multiple causes. One major cause of the Texas Revolution was the growing tension between the Texian settlers and the Mexican government. Many settlers, who had come from the United States, felt that their needs and rights were not being addressed. They were frustrated with the Mexican government's attempts to enforce strict control over Texas, including the prohibition of further American immigration and the imposition of heavy taxes.

**ASK Students**

What were some of the reasons behind the growing tension between the Texian settlers and the Mexican government that led to the Texas Revolution?

**TELL Students**

Additionally, the leadership style of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who became the president of Mexico in 1833, played a significant role in sparking the revolution. Santa Anna's move towards centralizing power and reducing the autonomy of the Mexican states, including Texas, angered many. His authoritarian rule and disregard for local governance made the Texians feel that their voices were being ignored and their freedoms suppressed. Economic factors also contributed to the unrest. Many Texian settlers had moved to Texas for economic opportunities, enticed by land grants and the promise of a fresh start. However, as the Mexican government attempted to exert more control, these opportunities seemed threatened. The settlers wanted to protect their land, investments, and livelihoods from what they perceived as unfair policies.

**ASK Students**

How did General Santa Anna's leadership style and economic factors contribute to the unrest among Texian settlers and spark the Texas Revolution?



# Lesson

## TELL Students

As the Texians and their allies fought to control San Antonio de Béxar, they were not only fighting for a strategic location but also for their right to self-governance and their vision of a free and prosperous Texas. The capture of San Antonio de Béxar marked a significant moment in the Texas Revolution, symbolizing the determination and resilience of the Texian forces. It set the stage for subsequent battles, including the famous Battle of the Alamo, where the defenders' bravery and ultimate sacrifice further galvanized the Texian cause. The Texas Revolution was a complex conflict driven by a desire for independence, economic security, and the protection of civil liberties. The early victories, like the battle for San Antonio de Béxar, highlighted the Texians' commitment to these ideals and their willingness to fight for a future free from oppressive rule.

## ASK Students

What caused the Texas Revolution?

## TELL Students 📷

The Alamo was crucial because it helped warn other Texian settlements of attacks. Even though the Alamo wasn't very strong, it was important. Eventually, rumors spread that Santa Anna was coming with around 6,000 soldiers. After the battle in San Antonio, many volunteers went home, but some leaders, including General Sam Houston and Governor Henry Smith, thought the Alamo was important and needed to be defended. **[Reference Houston and Smith Images]** Alamo Commander Lt. Colonel James Clinton Neill worked hard to make the fort stronger, and soon more reinforcements arrived. Among them were James Bowie, Lt. Col. William B. Travis, and Davy Crockett. **[Reference Bowie, Travis, Crockett Images]** They all agreed that the Alamo was the "key to Texas." Let's watch two exciting Patriot of the Week videos to learn more!

## WATCH ▶

Patriot of the Week: [William B. Travis](#)

Patriot of the Week: [Davy Crockett](#)



# Lesson

## **ASK** Students

After the battle in San Antonio, why did some men stay to defend the Alamo while others left?

## **TELL** Students 🔑

In February 1836, when Neill had to leave the Alamo for a short time, Travis and Bowie took charge of the fort. Soon after, Santa Anna and his large army arrived and told the fewer than 200 Texans and their allies to surrender. To **surrender** is to give up control of something to someone else. Travis fired a cannonball back at them to show they would not give up. Knowing they needed more help, Travis sent a message saying that the enemy was close and they needed more soldiers and supplies. In this letter, he also said they would defend the fort until the end.

## **ASK** Students

What did Travis do to show that the defenders of the Alamo would not give up when Santa Anna and his army arrived?

## **TELL** Students

After Santa Anna's army attacked the fort for a whole day, Travis wrote another letter on February 24, 1836, to ask for help. In this letter he explained that they were surrounded by Santa Anna's army. He said they had been under attack for 24 hours but hadn't lost any men yet. He explained that they needed swift help and that the enemy's army was getting bigger every day. He also said that even if no help came, they would fight as long as they could and would never give up.

## **ASK** Students

What did Travis say in his letter on February 24, 1836, about the situation at the Alamo and what he needed?

## **TELL** Students

A few more soldiers arrived, but it wasn't enough. On March 6, 1836, at about 5:00am, more than 1,000 of Santa Anna's soldiers attacked the Alamo. In less than 90 minutes, the defenders were defeated, and at least 189 of them were killed. (Women and children who weren't fighting were allowed to leave safely.) Even though they lost the battle, the phrase "Remember the Alamo!" became a powerful call for others to continue fighting.

# Lesson

## ASK Students

What happened at the Alamo on March 6, 1836, and what was the impact of the phrase "Remember the Alamo!"?

## TELL Students 🔑

While the Alamo was under siege, Texians declared their independence from Mexico on March 2, 1836. To **declare** means to say something in an official or public way. The bravery of those who defended the Alamo is an inspiring part of American history, showing us the fight for Texas independence. In 1836, a small group of brave people stood their ground at the Alamo against a much larger army. Their courage during this tough battle made many people across America admire and remember them. Even though they did not win, their spirit helped others keep fighting for freedom. This led to a big victory at the Battle of San Jacinto, which helped Texas become independent from Mexico.

## ASK Students

How did the bravery of the Alamo defenders impact the fight for Texas independence?

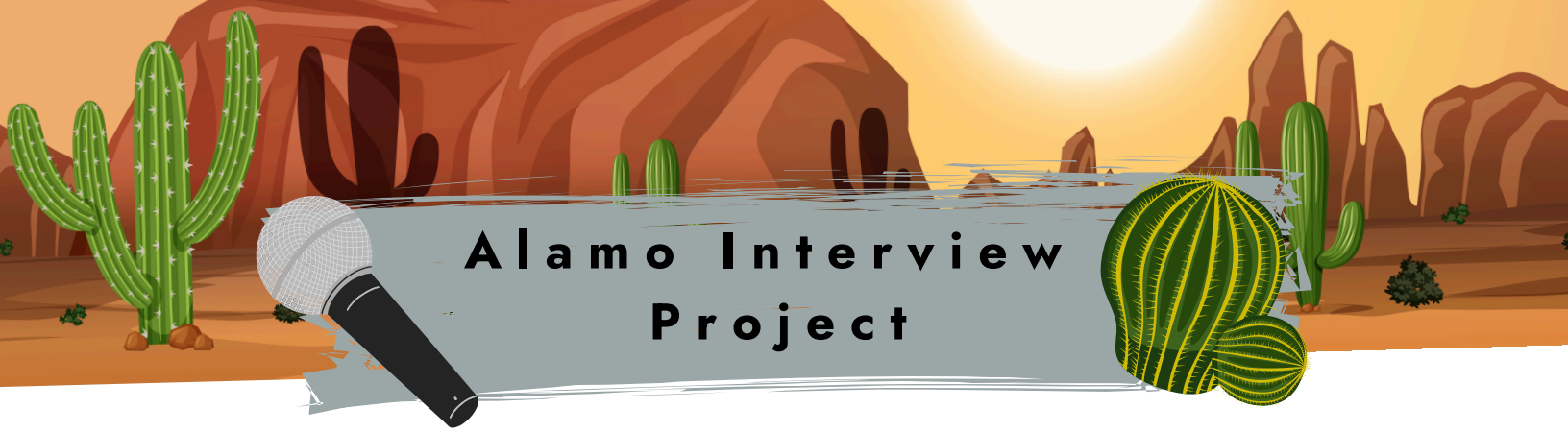
## TELL Students

This story helps us see how important it is to be brave and stand up for what we believe in, even when it's hard. It teaches us that, just like the Alamo defenders, we can all show courage in our own lives. Whether it's helping a friend, trying something new, or standing up for what's right, acts of courage can inspire others and make a big difference. By learning about the Alamo, you can think about how you too can be brave every day. Let's watch two episodes of Learn More with Liberty to learn more!

## WATCH ▶

Learn More with Liberty: Songs and Stories





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## Objective

This activity allows fourth graders to explore the Battle of the Alamo by stepping into the shoes of reporters. They will conduct mock interviews with classmates role-playing as defenders of the Alamo, then report their findings to the class, enhancing their understanding of the event and developing their communication skills.

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## Materials

- Character Cards: Pre-written cards containing information about different defenders at the Alamo such as William B. Travis, Davy Crockett, James Bowie, and other notable figures.
- Interview Question Sheets: Prepared sheets with a list of questions that students can ask their character.
- Reporter Notebooks: Small notebooks or sheets of paper for students to take notes during the interviews.
- Costumes or Props (optional): Items like hats, jackets, or fake mustaches to help the characters feel more real.
- Presentation Tools: Access to tools like a microphone or a stand where students can present their reports.

## Preparation

- Introduce the activity by explaining the significance of personal testimonies in understanding historical events.
- Distribute character cards and interview question sheets to half the class, who will act as Alamo defenders. The other half will be reporters.
- Give reporters their notebooks for taking notes.

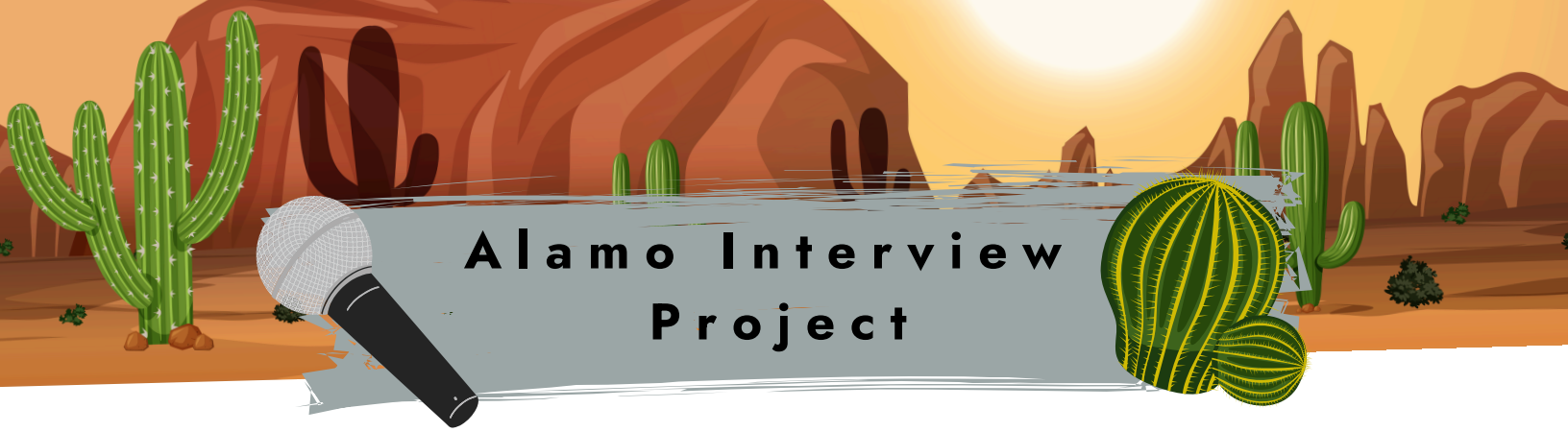
## Role-play Setup

- Allow some time for the defenders to familiarize themselves with their characters using the information on their character cards.
- Reporters prepare by reviewing their interview questions, which should cover topics like the defender's background, role in the battle, personal feelings about the conflict, and hopes for the outcome.

## Conducting Interviews

- Set up a classroom layout that resembles a newsroom where reporters can move from one defender to another, conducting interviews.
- Encourage reporters to take detailed notes and ask follow-up questions to gain deeper insights.





# Alamo Interview Project

## Writing the Report

- After the interviews, give reporters time to compile their notes into a news report format. They should summarize the defender's experiences and perspectives on the battle.

## Presentation

- Have each reporter present their findings to the class. This can be done as a news broadcast with each student coming up to the front to share their report.
- Optionally, use presentation tools to enhance their reporting, such as a microphone or a projector for displaying images related to their character.

## Reflection and Discussion

- After all presentations, hold a class discussion about what was learned from the interviews. Discuss the different perspectives and experiences shared by the defenders.
- Reflect on how these personal stories help us understand the complexities of historical events like the Alamo.

This interactive activity not only teaches students about the Alamo but also helps them develop valuable language arts skills and a better appreciation for historical study and reporting.

# Character Cards

These character cards provide a mix of factual and personal information to help students step into their roles effectively, portraying these historical figures with depth during their mock interviews. The inclusion of personality traits aids in developing a more nuanced and engaging interaction during the activity.

## William B. Travis

**Role:** Co-commander of the Alamo defenders

**Background:** A lawyer by trade who moved to Texas to start anew. Known for his leadership and commitment to the cause of Texan independence.

**Key Fact:** Wrote the famous "Victory or Death" letter calling for reinforcements while under siege.

**Personality Traits:** Determined, eloquent, brave.

## Davy Crockett

**Role:** Frontiersman and defender at the Alamo

**Background:** Famous American folk hero, former congressman, and bear hunter who came to Texas as part of the American volunteer fighters.

**Key Fact:** Known for his charismatic personality and strong sense of justice.

**Personality Traits:** Charismatic, bold, humorous.

## James Bowie

**Role:** Co-commander of the Alamo before falling ill during the siege

**Background:** Renowned for his fighting skills and the creation of the Bowie knife. A wealthy land speculator who became a central figure in the Texas Revolution.

**Key Fact:** Led the defense of the Alamo until he became too sick to fight.

**Personality Traits:** Tough, resilient, strategic thinker.



# Character Cards

## Juan Seguín

**Role:** Tejano leader and supporter of Texan independence

**Background:** A native Texan who served as a senator in the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas, Seguín was instrumental in rallying Tejano support for the Texan cause.

**Key Fact:** Managed to escape the Alamo to bring reinforcements, although he arrived too late to make a difference in the battle.

**Personality Traits:** Loyal, courageous, influential.

## Susanna Dickinson

**Role:** Survivor of the Alamo siege

**Background:** Wife of a Texian artillery officer, Susanna and her infant daughter survived the battle and were released by Santa Anna to spread the news of the Texian defeat.

**Key Fact:** Her accounts provided valuable eyewitness testimony of the siege.

**Personality Traits:** Resilient, observant, articulate.

# Exploring the Battle of the Alamo

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## Instructions:

This worksheet will help you understand more about the Battle of the Alamo and the important figures involved. Read the questions carefully and answer them based on what you've learned about the Alamo.

## Fill in the blanks

1. The Alamo was originally a \_\_\_\_\_ built by Spanish settlers around the year \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The battle took place in the year \_\_\_\_\_, in what is now the city of \_\_\_\_\_, Texas.
3. William B. Travis, \_\_\_\_\_ Crockett, and James \_\_\_\_\_ were among the key defenders of the Alamo.

## True or False

1. The Alamo was originally called Mission San Antonio de Valero. (True / False)
2. Davy Crockett was a former president who fought at the Alamo. (True / False)
3. Juan Seguín was a Tejano leader who fought inside the Alamo until the end. (True / False)

## Multiple Choice

What did William B. Travis do during the siege of the Alamo?

- A) He wrote letters asking for help.
- B) He escaped before the battle began.
- C) He negotiated peace with Santa Anna.
- D) None of the above.

Why is the Battle of the Alamo significant in American history?

- A) It was a decisive victory for Texas.
- B) It marked the end of the Texas Revolution.
- C) It rallied support for Texan independence.
- D) It was the first battle of the American Civil War.



# Exploring the Battle of the Alamo

## Short Answer

Describe one reason why the Mexican government was concerned about the influx of American settlers into Texas.

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What was the "Victory or Death" letter, and who wrote it?

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## Reflection

Why do you think it's important to remember events like the Battle of the Alamo today? Write a few sentences explaining your thoughts.

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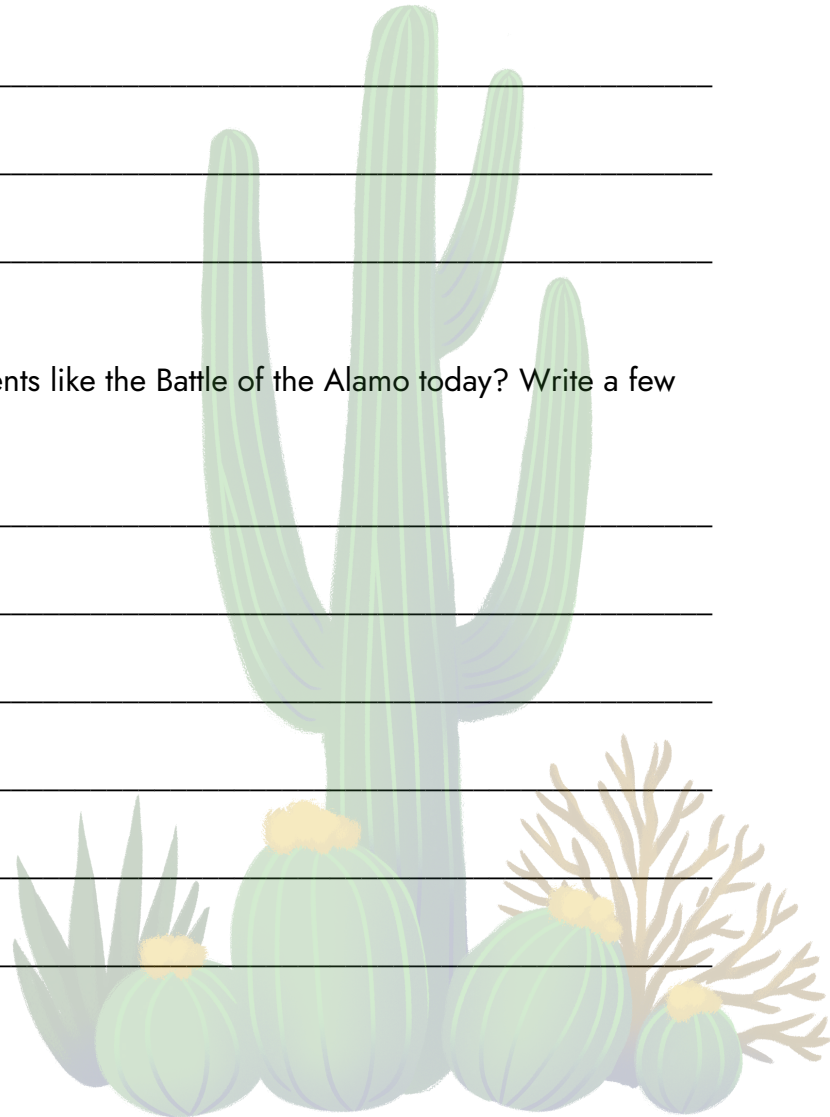
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# Exploring the Battle of the Alamo Answer Key

## Fill in the blanks

- The Alamo was originally a mission built by Spanish settlers around the year 1718.
- The battle took place in the year 1836, in what is now the city of San Antonio, Texas.
- William B. Travis, Davy Crockett, and James Bowie were among the key defenders of the Alamo.

## True or False

- The Alamo was originally called Mission San Antonio de Valero. (True)
- Davy Crockett was a former president who fought at the Alamo. (False)
- Juan Seguín was a Tejano leader who fought inside the Alamo until the end. (False)

## Multiple Choice

- What did William B. Travis do during the siege of the Alamo?  
A) He wrote letters asking for help.
- Why is the Battle of the Alamo significant in American history?  
C) It rallied support for Texan independence.

## Short Answer

- Describe one reason why the Mexican government was concerned about the influx of American settlers into Texas.
  - One reason was that the large number of American settlers threatened to overwhelm the local Mexican culture and governance, leading to tensions over land and political control.
- What was the "Victory or Death" letter, and who wrote it?
  - The "Victory or Death" letter was written by William B. Travis during the siege at the Alamo. In it, he vowed to hold the fort despite overwhelming odds and pleaded for reinforcements.

## Reflection

- Why do you think it's important to remember events like the Battle of the Alamo today? Write a few sentences explaining your thoughts.
  - Student responses will vary. A possible answer could be: Remembering events like the Battle of the Alamo helps us appreciate the sacrifices made for freedom and learn from the past to understand the value of bravery, resilience, and standing up for what one believes in.

# Student Text

***Please read the following paragraph to learn more.***

As more and more settlers moved to Texas, the area started to change a lot. Most of these new settlers came from the United States, and they had different ways of living and different ideas from the Mexican people who were already there. As the number of settlers increased, they started to fill up the land, and this made some of the original residents and the Mexican government worried and unhappy. In 1830, to control this rapid change, the Mexican government created a new rule to stop more American settlers from moving to Texas. But many Americans kept coming anyway, even though it was not allowed. This made the situation more tense, as more people were living in Texas without permission.



# Resources

- <https://www.thealamo.org/remember/battle-and-revolution/defenders#sortByName>
- <https://www.history.com/topics/latin-america/alamo>
- <https://www.thealamo.org/remember/battle-and-revolution/revolution-timeline>
- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/remembering-the-alamo-101880149/>
- <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/texian>
- <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/alamo-battle-of-the>
- <https://www.thealamo.org/remember/battle-and-revolution/travis-letter>



# Images

## Alamo



Credit: Canva Pro.

## William B. Travis



Credit: Texas State Historical Association

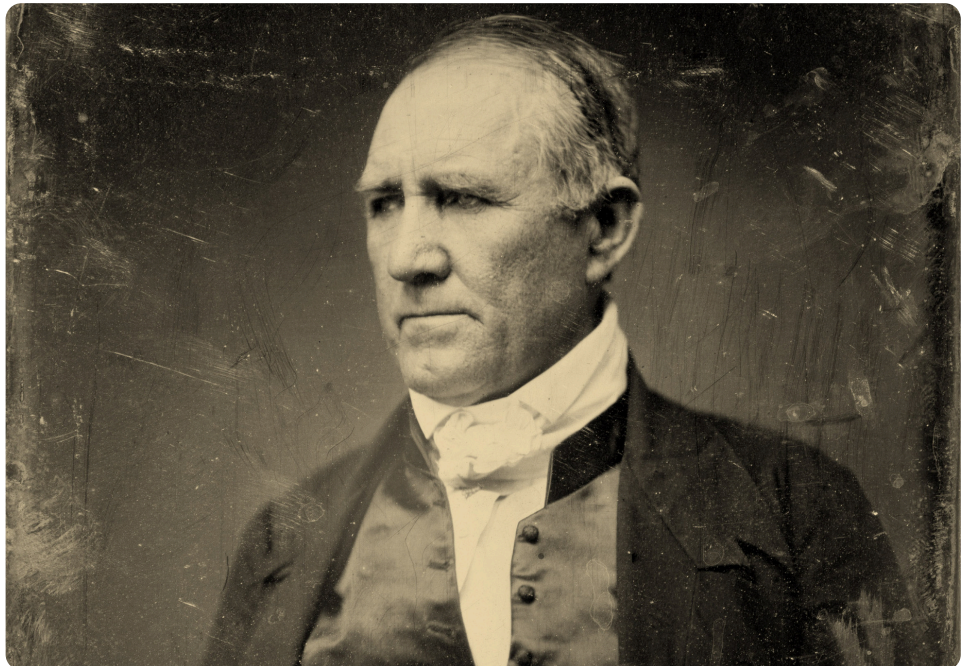
# Images

**Santa Anna**



Credit: Wikipedia.

**Sam Houston**



Credit: Canva Pro.



# Images

**Henry Smith**



Credit: Wikipedia.

**James Bowie**



Credit: Texas State Historical Association

# Images

**Davy Crockett**



Credit: Wikipedia

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