

# Alamo Investigators

## The Battle of the Alamo

### Grade Level

7-12 grade

### Time Requirement

90 minutes

## Introduction

The Battle of the Alamo stands as one of the most iconic events in Texas history. However, most visitors know little about the actual events that unfolded on the morning of March 6, 1836. The commonly accepted narrative has been shaped more by ideologically influenced depictions in pop culture than reliable primary and secondary sources.

In this lesson, students take on the role of investigative historians. Working together, they assess the available evidence to reach meaningful conclusions concerning who was at the battle, how events unfolded, and the enduring significance of the battle in the context of the Texas Revolution. Once their investigations are complete, teams present their findings before seeing a visual representation of the battle over a large diorama.

## Materials

- Evidence Sets
- Graphic Organizers
- The Battle of the Alamo Diorama Video
- Instructional Slides

## Objectives

In this lesson, through collaborative activity and presentation, students explore a pivotal event in the Texas Revolution by putting themselves into the shoes of historians tasked with putting together a cohesive, accurate narrative with a limited set of evidence.

## Focus Question

How do historians create an accurate historical narrative?

## Social Studies Standards

7.1(B) explain the significance of the following dates: ... 1836, Texas independence; ...

7.3(B) explain the roles played by significant individuals during the Texas Revolution, including George Childress, Lorenzo de Zavala, James Fannin, Sam Houston, Antonio López de Santa Anna, Juan N. Seguín, and William B. Travis

7.3(C) explain the issues surrounding significant events of the Texas Revolution, including the Battle of Gonzales; the siege of the Alamo, William B. Travis's letter "To the People of Texas and All Americans in the World," and the heroism of the diverse defenders who gave their lives there; the Constitutional Convention of 1836; Fannin's surrender at Goliad; and the Battle of San Jacinto

7.20(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas

7.20(C) organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps

## Procedures

1. Explain context to students: The Battle of the Alamo was a pivotal moment in the war between Texas and Mexico. Historians are tasked with answering important questions about consequential events in history. Who was there, what happened, and what does it mean? These are important questions, and finding accurate answers is difficult and complicated with events like the battle. Only a few first-person accounts exist. There are no photographs from the battle. What was once a battlefield is now in the middle of downtown San Antonio, making the task even more complex.
2. Explain the task to students: Today, you will step into the role of historian investigators tasked with putting together an accurate narrative of what happened at the Battle of the Alamo. You will each be given a set of evidence that is different from the others in your group. Your evidence will be limited, but you will have to do your best to draw conclusions about who was there and what happened.
3. Divide the class into small groups of four or five.
4. Pass out the Evidence Documents to students.
  - a. *Ensure each group member has their own document, each from a different person.*
5. To help students with constructing a timeline, review the guiding questions on Part 1 of the graphic organizer.
  - a. *Remind students that the person who wrote their firsthand account may not have all the details. They should just fill in as much information as possible.*
6. Once students have their evidence, give them enough time to read through their evidence and complete their graphic organizers.
7. After they have completed Part 1 of their graphic organizers, each student shares their findings with their small group.
8. As they listen to the members of their group, students create a timeline that incorporates everyone's findings on Part 2 of the graphic organizer. Remind them their goal is to create a timeline that spans the whole battle with key events noted.
  - a. *Some firsthand accounts contradict each other. If students are debating, encourage conversation around how historians determine whose account may be more accurate. Encourage groups to come to a consensus.*
9. Groups write as much information as they have in their timelines on sticky notes, one sticky note per event. For example, one sticky note could say, "The Battle occurred on March 6th," and another could say, "William B. Travis fought on the North Wall."
10. Students post their event sticky notes on the wall or whiteboard, creating a large timeline.
11. Once everyone has posted theirs, allow students a few minutes to gallery walk through everyone's notes. Encourage students to discuss any contradictions or corroborations they notice.
12. In small groups or as a class, discuss the following reflection questions:
  - a. What questions did the evidence sets answer about the Battle of the Alamo? What questions were not answered?
  - b. How did the first-hand accounts corroborate or contradict each other?
  - c. Why is it difficult for historians to create accurate narratives for events that took place a long time ago?
13. Then, as a class, watch the Battle of the Alamo Diorama video that explains the details of the battle. Students use the information in the video to add to their graphic organizers and timeline.

## Assessment

Students can document their learning by taking the most important information from their graphic organizer and synthesizing it through one of the following:

- Writing a one to two-page narrative
- A letter written home by an eyewitness
- A newspaper article written after the fact
- A story board timeline
- A graphic novel