Battle of the Alamo: Teacher’s Guide

Program Description
In 1836, two hundred Texans died defending the Alamo mission from 3,000 soldiers of the Mexican government. This video recreates the famous battle using the artwork of the American hero Davy Crockett, who fought and died at the Alamo, as well as recent footage shot at the fort. Discover how 12 days of anticipation and preparation led to a battle that lasted only an hour, yet changed the course of American history.

Onscreen Questions
Part One
- Why did Jim Bowie want to defend the Alamo?
- What caused the people of Texas to rebel from Mexico?
Part Two
- What important decision was made on March 2, 1836, at Washington-on-the-Brazos?
- What was the significance of the “line in the dust” drawn by Captain William Travis?

Lesson Plan
Student Objectives
- Describe the Battle of the Alamo.
- Explain the strategy and reasoning behind the defense of the Alamo.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the historical significance of the Battle of the Alamo.

Materials
- The Battle of the Alamo video and VCR
- Computer with Internet access
- Encyclopedias and history text books with information about the Alamo
Procedures

1. Review the Battle of the Alamo with the class. A good way to introduce this topic is to show The Battle of the Alamo video. Talk about the key people in the battle. Why did General Santa Anna attack the Alamo? Why did William Travis and his men insist on defending it? What strategies did both sides employ during the siege?

2. Explain to students that they will research a key person in the Alamo battle and write a letter describing that person’s experience. Give them the option of researching one of the following three people:
   - Jim Bowie
   - William Travis
   - General Antonio López de Santa Anna

   Or, allow students to choose a different person to research if they can prove that their choice of characters played a significant role in the Alamo siege.

3. Tell students they will research a historical figure and then write a firsthand-account letter to any person of their choice describing the Alamo from the historical figure’s perspective. Tell students to think about the following questions when composing their letters:
   - Why was this person fighting at the Alamo?
   - What role did this person play in the rebellion?
   - What were this person’s key moments or decisions during the siege?
   - What might the person have done differently in hindsight?

   Students may use The Battle of the Alamo program, history texts and encyclopedias, and the Internet to conduct their research. The following Web sites have information on the Alamo and its key players:

   Jim Bowie
   http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/BB/fbo45.html

   William Travis
   http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/TT/ftr3.html

   General Antonio López de Santa Anna
   http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/SS/fsa29.html

   General Alamo information:
   http://hotx.com/alamo/toc.HTML
   http://www.thealamo.org/
   http://www.lone-star.net/mall/texaninfo/alamo-battle.htm
   http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/AA/qea2.html
4. Once students have composed their letters, have them read them aloud to the class. Compare some of the information students used in their letters. Talk about the strategies that the Mexicans and Texans used during the battle. What were key events? What could the Texans have done differently? Why was General Santa Anna so intent on destroying this stronghold? Talk about this historical significance of the Alamo. Why is this siege so well remembered in history? Would you have stayed and fought at the Alamo?

**Assessment**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class discussions; used the research materials wisely; and produced a well-organized, well-researched firsthand-account letter that showed both thought and creativity and addressed the questions posed in the lesson directions.

- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; used the research materials with little assistance; and produced an adequate firsthand-account letter that showed some thought and creativity and addressed most of the questions posed in the lesson procedures.

- 1 point: Students minimally participated in class discussions; were unable to use research materials without assistance; and produced an incomplete firsthand-account letter that included little or none of the requested information.

**Vocabulary**

**frontier**
*Definition:* A region that forms the margin of settled or developed territory
*Context:* It is a brief and bloody battle fought on a remote frontier.

**garrison**
*Definition:* A military post; a permanent military installation
*Context:* For 13 days the doomed garrison stood its ground.

**keystone**
*Definition:* Something on which associated things depend for support
*Context:* He believes the fort is the keystone in a defense of the Texas frontier.

**siege**
*Definition:* A military blockade of a city or fortified place to compel it to surrender
*Context:* The second day of the siege of the Alamo dawned warm and cloudy.

**tactic**
*Definition:* A device for accomplishing an end; a method of employing forces in combat
*Context:* It is a tactic designed to wear down the strongest of soldiers.

**sentry**
*Definition:* Guard; a soldier standing guard at a point of passage
*Context:* The sentry stopped them at the door.
**Academic Standards**

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)
NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to [http://www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org)

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:
- Culture
- Civic Ideals and Practices
- Power, Authority, and Governance
- People, Places, and Environments

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)
McREL’s Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit [http://www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:
- United States History — Era Four, Expansion and Reform: Understands the extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800.
- Historical Understanding: Understands the historical perspective.
- World History — Era Seven, An Age of Revolutions: Understands the causes and consequences of political revolutions in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

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**Support Materials**

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- [http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html](http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html)