

Why we should remember the Alamo Activity

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Grade Level:

This is a lesson for 8th grade U.S. History,

Objective:

In this activity, students will learn to look at primary documents and write an editorial article describing the sacrifice, the emotions, and thoughts of those who died at the Alamo.

Tasks:

Ask students to write down questions they have about those who died at the Alamo and share to the whole class. (Examples: Why didn't they surrender? or Were they scared?)

Give students Source A (a copy of a letter from Travis that describes the dire situation). Students will look for reasons why they stayed even though they were outnumbered and gain perspective of what they were thinking or feeling during that time.

Give students Source B (a copy of the speech Travis gave to the soldiers). They are to identify inspirational aspects.

Students are to do additional research on their own to find any primary sources of those soldiers that will give another aspect of what they were thinking and feeling at that time.

Summary:

Each student will present to the class their article. They are to use the information given from the primary documents and answer the questions they had in the beginning of the activity.

The articles could be placed in a class newspaper or display on a bulletin board for others to view and read.

Additional Ideas:

A newspaper template could be used and have students write biographies, political cartoons, sketch what the fighting might have looked like, etc.

Required materials:

- copy of Travis letter (Source A)
- copy of Travis speech (Source B)
- computer with access to Internet

THE TRAVIS LETTER FROM THE ALAMO

Commandancy of the Alamo—
Bejar, Feby. 24th, 1836

To the people of Texas & All Americans in the world-

Fellow citizens & compatriots-

I am besieged, by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna—I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man— The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken — I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & our flag still waves proudly from the walls — I shall never surrender or retreat. Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch — The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country — VICTORY OR DEATH.

William Barret Travis,
Lt. Col. comdt.

P.S. The Lord is on our side — When the enemy appeared in sight we had not three bushels of corn — We have since found in deserted houses 80 or 90 bushels and got into the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves,

Travis

(This particular letter includes two notes by the men who carried the letter)*

(Note in pencil)

Since the above was written I heard a very heavy Cannonade during the whole day think there must have been an attack made upon the Alamo We were short of Amunition when I left Hurry on all the men you can in haste When I left there was but 150 & determined to do or die. Tomorrow I leave for Bejar with what men I can raise we will at all events Col Almonte is there the troops are under the Command of Gen Seisma

Albert Martin

(Note in ink)

NB I hope that Every one will Randeves at Gonzales as soon as poseble as the Brave Soldiers are suffering do not neglect the powder is very scarce and should not be delad one moment

L Smither

*(After Smither, the letter was carried still further by a 15 year old boy named Guy Brian.)

Received 4/3/1996

Historic sites

Alamo

Alamo Defenders

Travis, William Barret

The Times Herald

Travis' Classic Speech

Excerpt From "We Are Besieged"

Sam Acheson's "We Are Besieged" which resumes production at the Dallas Little Theater Wednesday evening for four extra performances, contains some fine writing. The speech printed below is an example of the literary craftsmanship in the play. It is made by Colonel Travis at the end of the third act and represents his historic challenge to the other defenders to cross a line drawn with his sword and pledge their martyrdom to principle. The excerpt is printed, as follows, by special permission of the copyright holder:

Men of the commandancy of the Alamo: In less time than we can know, we will be called upon to meet a grand assault by the enemy. Certain events of the last hour or so have made that plain. I call you together, therefore, that I may speak plain and bitter truths about our position. As you well know we fell back into this fortified position twelve days ago this morning. We did so only in the face of overwhelming force under the tyrant Santa Anna. We might then have withdrawn all forces from Bexar. But acting on my own responsibility, I chose to make a stand instead. I was ready then, as now, to say there should be no retreat, no surrender.

It was my hope that when our appeal for reinforcements reached the settlements more than one small army would be raised to march to our relief. The boys nearest us—those at Gonzales—responded gloriously. But day after day has passed and no more help has reached us. It is my duty to inform you that we may no longer even hope for aid from Goliad, where the largest body of our troops is stationed. We are now completely on our own—and must remain so until the issue of this siege is settled.

A great and final decision confronts us. Our homes, our families and all that freemen hold dear are somehow bound up with what we decide here.

To the colonists within our ranks, I remind you that if this invading horde is not thrown back, all the fruits of our years of toil and endless discouragement will be wiped out in a single instant. We came to this fair land under terms of honorable contract. We were guaranteed those human rights which alone make life worth living. Those rights the arrogant and unconscionable dictator of Mexico has sworn

—I ask you: Why did you come to cast your fortune with us? There may be those hold that you are mere heedless youths, adventurers, filibusterers. In the eyes of this butcher of Zacatecas you are so many pirates, deserving only the gangplank or the garrote. I know you better. My father knew your fathers; my forefathers, your forefathers—men of one land, of many lands, but all of the same strain that can live only skies of freedom.

Shall we now give up this fight?

From all parts of the United States you have come and from beyond the seas—from the Isles of Britain and France and from all the races and states that will themselves one day be free. No nation today lives to itself alone. If liberty dies in Texas, the promise for mankind everywhere passes into jeopardy.

The elders of Texas are meeting at this moment, we confidently believe, to proclaim ours a free and independent Republic. If we but provide it here by resistance to the death, there is yet time for them to finish their labors, yet time for Texans to arm and as one great company to hurl back these foul invaders.

Beyond and behind these freemen are the whole American people, 26,000,000 strong. Our brothers there will not stand idly forever. In hundreds and mounting thousands they will come to avenge those who make the last sacrifice for liberty.

The choice is ours. Shall we fight on till the end, making the enemy pay dearly inch by inch—or shall we turn craven and try, each man for himself, to escape from this final encounter?

Here I draw a line. It is as good a way as any to cast our ballot. Here and now I free each of you from your oath of allegiance. Let every man understand that he may