

George Washington Davis: Texas Pioneer and Patriot

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Grade Level: Students in grades 4-6 could use this lesson in their study of regional history and geography.

Context: George Washington Davis was a settler from Kentucky who created a series of landholdings in the DeWitt Colony, established his family there, and fought in the Battle of Gonzales as one of the “Old Gonzales Eighteen”. He entered Texas when it was part of Mexico, fought in the first battle of the Texas Revolution, went on to occupy positions of importance in the war and the new nation, and died as a citizen of the 28th state. Looking at the early half of his life might give students a personal perspective on the state’s history, particularly since Mr. and Mrs. Davis left two letters that are in language accessible to students and speak to particular aspects of their story.

Goal: The purpose of this lesson is to focus students’ attention on the lives of individuals as the actors in historical and geographical events.

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Use primary source material to draw conclusions about lives in the historical past.
- Explain how the lives of George and Rebecca Davis fit in the events of their times.

Standards: This lesson is designed to address these National Geography Standards:

4- Exploring Physical and Human Characteristics of Earth’s Spaces

9-Characteristics, Distribution and Migration of Human Population

12-Processed, Patterns and Functions of Human Settlement

Time Allotment: 2-3 forty minute periods.

Materials: computer connected to the internet, books about the Texas Revolution that include the Battle of Gonzales, maps that show the Anglo Texas colonies, rivers of Texas, blank maps of the USA and Texas, examples of timelines.

Procedure:

Part 1

Begin the lesson by presenting students with a copy of the daguerreotype of GWD available at www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/oldgonzales18.htm Allow students to brainstorm in small groups about what qualities they would expect him to have based on the photo. Groups may create a list of adjectives that they applied to the image. Next, pass out the “Letter of Recommendation” available at www.firstshopphoto.com/davis.htm , ask students to create a list of adjectives from the letter. Use both a printed copy of the original as well as the transcription.

Part 2

Create small groups of students for a “jigsaw” activity. The groups will work to understand one aspect of GWD’s life with the goal of sharing with the class for a more rounded view after reporting out. One group will work on the “Letter of Recommendation” and answering the questions from the attached sheet. Another group will use the “Dear Wife” letter and question sheet. A third group can research the Battle of Gonzales and the role that GWD’s peach orchard played in this skirmish. The fourth group will create a timeline and/or map showing important events and/or locations in the life of Mr. Davis.

Part 3

Groups report out on their work and conclusions.

Evaluation:

Students can explain in writing or orally what parts of GWD's life related to these different roles: Anglo settler and farmer in Mexican Texas, Rebel and Texas patriot, Supply organizer for the Republic of Texas army, Civil servant in the state of Texas.

Bibliography: There is an abundance of material on GWD on the web. Most essential are listed first.

www.firstshotphoto.com/davis.htm (contains photo and transcripts of original letters)

www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/oldgonzales18.htm (daguerreotype (sp) and biography of GWD)

www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/fda98_print.htm (biography of GWD)

www.stephenfaustindrt.org/george-washington-davis/ (Daughters of the Republic of Texas biography of GWD)

Books

Garland, Sherry, Voices of the Alamo, Scholastic Press, N.Y., N.Y., 2000

Wilson, Mike, The Battle of the Alamo, Mason Crest Publishers, Broomall, PA., 2003.

Silverstein, Herma, The Alamo, Dillon Press, N.Y., N.Y., 1992

Directed Questions for Letter of Recommendation

1. Is this letter formal or informal?
2. What is the date of this letter?
3. What do you think was the purpose (usefulness) of the letter? Why might George Washington Davis need or want it?
4. Look at the professions of the people who signed, why are they a good choice to tell about GDW's character?

Directed Questions for the "Dear Wife" Letter

1. Is this letter formal or informal?
2. What is the date of this letter?
3. List the words that GWD uses when telling Rebecca about the land.
4. When GWD writes about "the storm" and "clear sky and fair weather", he is not talking about the air and temperature. What is he telling her?

Directed Questions for the Battle of Gonzales Group

1. In what ways was the Battle of Gonzales important?
2. In what ways was the Battle not important?
3. Draw a picture of Texans burying the cannon in GW Davis's peach orchard. Include details.

Directed Questions for the Timeline/Map Group

1. How old were Mr. and Mrs. Davis at the time of their death?
2. List or locate the different places the Davis's lived before settling in Texas.
3. Mr. and Mrs. Davis owned land on the town of Gonzales and on the San Marcos and Guadalupe rivers. Find these places on a map of Texas.