Lesson Plan:
Gone to Texas: The Story of the Texas Empresarios
(Social Studies, Grade 7)

Objective

Using educational films from the 1960s and 1980s, students will examine the varied experiences of the nineteenth century Texas Empresarios, and identify the important contributions of significant individuals, including Moses Austin, Stephen F. Austin, Baron de Bastrop, Martín de León, and Green DeWitt. This film is a valuable resource that was saved through the Texas Archive of the Moving Image’s digital preservation program. The film educates and entertains, containing extraordinary reenactments of specific events that occurred in early Texas. This lesson highlights the Mexican settlement and colonization of Texas and traces the events that led up to the Texas Revolution, such as the 1825 Colonization Law of Coahuila y Tejas and its reversal in 1830, the Fredonian Rebellion, and the politically divisive land dispute between Texas Empresarios Martín de León and Green DeWitt. Most of the lesson focuses on Moses Austin and his son, Stephen F. Austin, as they worked to bring the first colonists or “The Old Three Hundred” to Texas. This lesson, utilizing a unique and engaging educational film created by the Texas Education Agency in 1978, serves as a great introduction to the Texas Empresarios and nicely segues into the Texas Revolutionary period.

Process

Prior Knowledge

Students should have prior knowledge of the following areas to successfully take part in this activity:

1. The following activity assumes that students know Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, and, as a result, Texas became a part of the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas.
2. Students should know that Mexico formally invited Americans to colonize Texas in 1825, which inspired hundreds and eventually thousands of Americans to settle in Texas between 1825 and 1830.
3. Students should be aware of Mexico’s empresario program and the requirements of settlers living in Texas’ colonies.
4. Students should have some familiarity with a few significant individuals, including Moses Austin, Baron de Bastrop, Stephen F. Austin, Martín de León and Green DeWitt.
5. Students should have some background knowledge of different groups living in Texas, including native and immigrant groups.
6. Students should be aware of some of the causes and results of the Texas Revolution.

Hook A:

- Give each student a sticky note. Instruct them to write down three facts and two possible test questions based upon watching the following Texas history introductory video. (A test question highlights the important subject matter and can only be answered by someone who paid attention to the video).

- Watch a four minute segment of the 1963 educational film “Our Texas Heritage” as an introduction. Play from 0:40 – 4:00. [Link](http://texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=2013_01906&p=video1&b=40&e=240)

- After watching the video segment, give students time to write down their three facts and two questions. Then, have students come up to the front board and put their sticky notes on it.

- Collect sticky notes and read students’ questions aloud. Call on different students in class to answer the various questions. This will serve as an informal assessment of your students’ prior knowledge of the Texas Empresarios in Mexican Texas.

Hook B:

- Ask students to quickly (and perhaps silently) line up along the wall according to height (shortest to tallest), then have student number off from one to six, starting with the shortest and moving down the line until everyone has a number. Adjust numbers based on class size; make sure every group has 3 to 4 students.

- Designate specific space in the room for each numeric group to meet. Have students gather and answer a few assigned questions that are posted below (e.g. have all the ones in one corner, twos in the other, threes in the middle, etc.)

- Give each numeric group a piece of paper. Have students write their names and collective answer(s) to the different assigned questions on this paper. You can write students’ question(s) down on a note card or walk around to each group and assign them questions. Make sure students write their question(s) down before deliberation. Give groups about 5 – 10 minutes to respond to the assigned question(s) selected from the list below. Monitor group discussion and help clarify as needed.

- After about 10 minutes, ask each group to “report out” their answers. Go around the room until each group’s spokesperson has shared their answers. This is another chance to gauge students’ prior knowledge and prep them for the lesson.
Possible Group Questions:

- Why did the Spanish build missions and presidios in Texas?
- What happened to Texas when Spanish rule ended in 1821?
  - Why did Mexico ask Americans to colonize Texas?
  - Why didn’t Mexico settle Texas with its own citizens?
- What was the Texas Empresario program?
  - What was an empresario?
- What did Mexico require of a person before they became an empresario or settler?
- What were some of the benefits of moving to Texas?
- What were some of the costs of moving to Texas?
  - Who were the “Old Three Hundred?”
- What was life like in the colonies of Mexican Texas?
- Who was Stephen F. Austin, and why is he important?
  - What caused the Texas Revolution?

Lesson


2. Have students individually answer the questions on the provided worksheet (PDF). Pause occasionally to clarify and provide time for students’ reflective writing.

Independent Practice

- After students have completed their worksheets, put them in groups and tell them they will be assessing the pros and cons of moving to Texas during the empresario years, 1825 to 1830.
- Give students a piece of paper and tell them to create a pros and cons “T Chart,” and ask them “what were the benefits and costs of moving to Texas?”
- Make sure students address the following pros: settlers had a chance to own fertile, abundant land for little money; low taxes; for those who lost everything after the Panic of 1819 (economic recession), this was a chance to start over; new adventures; a chance to be self-sufficient; provide a better life for your family, etc.
- Make sure students address the following cons: settlers had to renounce their American citizenship; convert to Catholicism; had to provide letters of recommendation proving their good character; had to swear loyalty to Mexico; high risk of native attacks; lack of protection; few luxuries, stores, access to goods, etc.
- After students complete their group “T-Charts,” have them create an advertisement poster to attract settlers to Texas. Show them an example of an advertisement in a magazine. Show one that promotes a product, but also contains warnings or a list of side effects for potential consumers. Using key vocabulary words and symbols have students create a group advertisement that highlight many of the attractive features of
moving to a Texas colony under the empresario program. Also, make sure students address some of the caveats (warnings), too. Make sure students’ advertisement posters provide clear historical information addressing both the pros and cons of moving to Texas.

Extended Learning (Reflective Take-Home Essay Assignment)

In 1825, when Mexico invited American settlers to colonize Texas, they did not want just anyone moving there. In fact, the Mexican government created an empresario program to encourage and manage the colonial settlement of Texas and attract the right people to their state. The 1825 Colonization Law of Coahuila y Tejas stated “the new settlers (who present themselves for admission) shall prove their Christianity, morality, and good habits....”

Potential colonists had to prove their work ethic and character by providing letters of recommendation. They had to ask influential citizens, politicians, or community and business leaders for these recommendations. Then, they had to carry their letters to offer to empresarios like Stephen F. Austin for consideration and possible acceptance into a Texas colony.

Write a short essay describing the characteristics and traits of the ideal (perfect) Texas empresario and/or settler. Make sure to explain how these qualities would help this person survive and thrive in a Mexican Texas colony in the 1820s to 1830s.

Now, think about your personal character. Are you a reliable person? Are you honest, dependable, and a hard worker? Do you never make excuses or blame others for your mistakes? Are you a good student, friend, or child, and do you try to help others and improve your community?

In another short essay, assess your personal character and describe what makes you a good student, friend, and/or son or daughter. Be sure to include three names of people you would ask to write a recommendation for if you had to today. Explain why you selected these people and how they might describe you. Do you need to work harder on improving your work ethic or character? Explain.
Films

- Our Texas Heritage (1963)  
- Gone to Texas Film (1978)  

Resources

- The Texas State Historical Commission’s Timeline of Texas History  
  http://www.texasalmanac.com/topics/history/revolution-and-republic-texas

TEKS

History

1A Identify the major eras in Texas history, describe their defining characteristics, and explain why historians divide the past into eras, including Natural Texas and its People; Age of Contact; Spanish Colonial; Mexican National; Revolution and Republic; Early Statehood; Texas in the Civil War and Reconstruction; Cotton, Cattle, and Railroads; Age of Oil; Texas in the Great Depression and World War II; Civil Rights and Conservatism; and Contemporary Texas

1B Apply absolute and relative chronology through the sequencing of significant individuals, events, and time periods

1C Explain the significance of the following dates: 1519, mapping of the Texas coast and first mainland Spanish settlement; 1718, founding of San Antonio; 1821, independence from Spain; 1836, Texas independence; 1845, annexation; 1861, Civil War begins; 1876, adoption of current state constitution; and 1901, discovery of oil at Spindletop

2D Identify the individuals, issues, and events related to Mexico becoming an independent nation and its impact on Texas, including Texas involvement in the fight for independence, José Gutiérrez de Lara, the Battle of Medina, the Mexican federal
Constitution of 1824, the merger of Texas and Coahuila as a state, the State Colonization Law of 1825, and slavery

2E Identify the contributions of significant individuals, including Moses Austin, Stephen F. Austin, and Juan Erasmo Seguín, José Gutiérrez de Lara, Martín De Leon, and Green DeWitt, during the Mexican settlement colonization of Texas

2F Contrast Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo purposes for and methods of settlement in Texas

3A Trace the of events that led to the Texas Revolution, including the Fredonian Rebellion, the Mier y Terán Report, the Law of April 6, 1830, the Turtle Bayou Resolutions, and the arrest of Stephen F. Austin

3D Explain how the establishment of the Republic of Texas brought civil, political, and religious freedom to Texas

Geography

8B Analyze and interpret geographic distributions and patterns in Texas during the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries

8C Analyze the effects of physical and human factors such as climate, weather, landforms, irrigation, transportation, and communication on major events in Texas

9A Locate the Mountains and Basins, Great Plains, North Central Plains, and Coastal Plains places and regions and places of importance in Texas during the 19th, and 20th, and 21st centuries such as major cities, rivers, natural and historic landmarks, political and cultural regions, and local points of interest

9B Compare places and regions of Texas in terms of physical and human characteristics

9C Analyze the effects of physical and human factors such as climate, weather, landforms, irrigation, transportation, and communication on major events in Texas

10A Identify ways in which Texans have adapted to and modified the environment and analyze the positive and negative consequences of the modifications

11A Analyze why immigrant groups came to Texas and where they settled
11B Analyze how immigration and migration to Texas in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries have influenced Texas

Citizenship

17A Identify different points of view of political parties and interest groups on important Texas issues, past and present

17C Express and defend a point of view on an issue of historical or contemporary interest in Texas

18A Identify the leadership qualities of elected and appointed leaders of Texas, past and present, including Texans who have been president of the United States

Culture

19A Explain how the diversity of Texas is reflected in a variety of cultural activities, celebrations, and performances

19B Describe how people from various racial, ethnic, and religious groups attempt to maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to the larger Texas culture

19C Identify examples of Spanish influence and the influence of other cultures on Texas such as place names, vocabulary, religion, architecture, food, and the arts

Social Studies Skills

21A Differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas

21B Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions

21E Support a point of view on a social studies issue or event

21F Identify bias in written, oral, and visual material

22A Use social studies terminology correctly
22B  Use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, and proper citation of sources

22C  Transfer information from one medium to another, including written to visual and statistical to written or visual, using computer software as appropriate

22D  Create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information