



## The Beginning of the War – Two Views on Texas

### Grade Level(s):

9 - 12

### Subject Area(s)

Language Arts, Geography, U.S. History, Civics

### Estimated Time

One to two 45-50 minute class period

### Summary

War is based on conflicts that nations can find no other way to resolve. One of the main conflicts between the U.S. and Mexico leading up to their war was the dispute over the territory of Texas. Students will research the two nations' very different viewpoints with regard to Texas and will form two teams, one representing the U.S. and one representing Mexico, to conduct a debate on the subject.

**Note:** Teachers may decide to spread this activity out over two classroom sessions to allow more time for research by the students.

### Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about the kinds of conflicts that cause wars.
- Explore the motivations of two nations on the brink of war.
- Perform substantial research in a multimedia environment.
- Work in a team to prepare their research to be used in a debate.
- Participate in a debate with their classmates.
- Consider how having a debate can impact people's opinions.
- Consider whether better communication between nations can help preclude war.

### Materials Needed

This activity can be completed using a computer lab where students can access the [video clips](#), [interactive timeline](#) and handout themselves via [The U.S.-Mexican War website](#). It can also be done by using one classroom computer with a projection device. In the second scenario, you will need to provide the students with the following handout:

- [Two Views on Texas](#)
- [Video Clips Library \(http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/resources/video\\_library.html\)](http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/resources/video_library.html)
- [Interactive Timeline Map \(http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/timeline.html\)](http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/timeline.html)



## LESSON PLANS

### Video clips used:

- "Mexico after independence: Much land, few settlers"
- "Mexico opens Texas to Americans who come to claim it as their own"
- "Sam Houston's Texans avenge the Alamo and defeat Santa Anna at San Jacinto"
- "Polk orders American troops into disputed territory"

### Procedure

**Pre-viewing Activity:** Explain to students that in the early 1840's the governments of the U.S. and Mexico had a very significant difference of opinion regarding Texas. The U.S. considered Texas to be a sovereign nation and with that nation's approval, annexed it. Mexico still considered Texas to be a part of its territories and regarded the U.S.'s annexation of it as an act of aggression. One way to highlight the two governments' conflict is to examine the names that the U.S. and Mexico use to describe the subsequent war. In the U.S., the war is usually called the "Mexican War" or the "Mexican-American War," while in Mexico, the war has names like the "U.S. Invasion of Mexico" and the "U.S. Intervention." Ask students to consider the implications of these names.

Explain to students that they will be divided into two groups to have a debate. One group will represent the U.S. perspective on the conflict over Texas and the other group will represent Mexico. Initially, the students will do some in-class research to collect data that will help them in the debate.

Go over the handout [Two Views on Texas](#) with the students. Explain that while students can do more research if they would like, they should at a minimum collect information on the following topics from the handout:

- The importance to Mexico of holding onto the land it had inherited from Spain after its war for independence.
- The United States' hope to expand across the North American continent.
- Mexico's decision to open Texas to foreign settlers.
- The changing face of the population of Texas.
- Mexico's decision to centralize its government, thereby restricting the autonomy of its territories like Texas.
- The Texans' rebellion led by Sam Houston and Texas' subsequent claim of independence from Mexico.
- The Battle of San Jacinto.
- Mexico's concern that if it loses Texas to the U.S., it will also lose New Mexico and California.
- The U.S.'s annexation of Texas and Mexico's subsequent decision to recall its Ambassador to the U.S.
- The two countries' land dispute regarding the area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande.

If you are allowing students substantial time to do research, direct them to the following extensive articles on The U.S.-Mexican War site:

- [The Borderlands on the Eve of War](http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/war/borderlands_on_the_eve.html)  
([http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/war/borderlands\\_on\\_the\\_eve.html](http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/war/borderlands_on_the_eve.html))
- [A Mexican Viewpoint on the War with the United States](http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/prelude/md_a_mexican_viewpoint.html)  
([http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/prelude/md\\_a\\_mexican\\_viewpoint.html](http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/prelude/md_a_mexican_viewpoint.html))



For more background, you can reference the following websites:

- [http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1830\\_1840.htm](http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1830_1840.htm)
- <http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org/>
- <http://www.lsjunction.com/events/events.htm>

**Viewing Activity:** Tell students to go to “The U.S.-Mexican War” website to access the short video clips “Mexico after independence: Much land, few settlers,” “Mexico opens Texas to Americans who come to claim it as their own,” “Sam Houston’s Texans avenge the Alamo and defeat Santa Anna at San Jacinto,” “Polk orders American troops into disputed territory” (or display the videos with a projection device in your classroom). Have students use their handouts to focus their research as they watch video clips depicting the military and political events that led to the conflict over Texas. Then have the students access the interactive timeline on the same site to further research the disagreement between the U.S. and Mexico over Texas.

**Post-viewing Activity:** After students have completed their research, have them meet in their groups to get ready for the debate. Ask each group to prepare a two-minute opening statement for their side of the debate. Also ask them to create a list of four points that it would like to address during the debate and to share that list with the other group. Once the groups have completed their preparations, have the students begin the debate by making their opening statements. Then have the groups go back and forth presenting each of their four main points, always allowing the opposition to respond to each point. Finally, have one person from each group summarize their side's position.

After the debate, ask the students to share their responses to the experience. Did they feel like they learned anything from the other side? Were they as sure of their own side's argument *after* the debate as they were *before* the debate? Did their research and the process of having the debate give them any ideas about how the war could have possibly been avoided?

### Classroom Assessment

To assess the students' work, consider the following:

- Did the students show that they had done thorough research and had a good grasp of the targeted topics?
- Did the students make their arguments clearly and persuasively?
- Did the students on each side work well together as a team?
- Did the students show an understanding of the material in the questions that they asked the other side?

### Extensions and Applications

Have the students write persuasive "op-ed" columns describing their side's perspective on the issue of Texas prior to the start of the war. If the students are not familiar with the conventions of op-ed columns, include a primer on the subject as part of the activity.

### National Standards

McRel K-12 Standards Addressed:

### Language Arts



## LESSON PLANS

- Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.
- Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

### Geography

- Standard 1: Understands the characteristics and uses of maps, globes, and other geographic tools and technologies.
- Standard 12: Understands the patterns of human settlement and their causes.
- Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.
- Standard 17: Understands how geography is used to interpret the past.

### U.S. History

- Standard 9: Understands the United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans.
- Standard 10: how the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed American lives and led to regional tensions.

### Civics

- Standard 22: Understands how the world is organized politically into nation-states, how nation-states interact with one another, and issues surrounding U.S. foreign policy.
- Standard 23: Understands the impact of significant political and nonpolitical developments on the United States and other nations.

### Online Resources

Below are the links for sites referenced in this activity and others:

- The U.S.-Mexican War (1846 - 1848)  
<http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/>
- Background on the U.S.-Mexico dispute around Texas  
[http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1830\\_1840.htm](http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1830_1840.htm)  
<http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org/>  
<http://www.lsjunction.com/events/events.html>
- Crucible of the Empire  
This PBS sites offers a variety of newspaper headlines from the late 1880s.  
<http://www.pbs.org/crucible/frames/journalism.html> (see Headline Gallery)



## LESSON PLANS

### Two Views on Texas worksheet

The following are some of the topics you should focus on during your research about the conflict between the U.S. and Mexico over Texas:

1. The importance to Mexico of holding onto the land it had inherited from Spain after its war for independence.
2. The United States' hope to expand across the North American continent.
3. Mexico's decision to open Texas to foreign settlers.
4. The changing face of the population of Texas.
5. Mexico's decision to centralize its government, thereby restricting the autonomy of its territories like Texas.
6. The Texans' rebellion led by Sam Houston and Texas' subsequent claim of independence from Mexico.
7. The Battle of San Jacinto.
8. Mexico's concern that if it loses Texas to the U.S., it will also lose New Mexico and California.
9. The U.S.'s annexation of Texas and Mexico's subsequent decision to recall its Ambassador to the U.S.
10. The two countries' land dispute regarding the area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande.