

The Fall of the Alamo

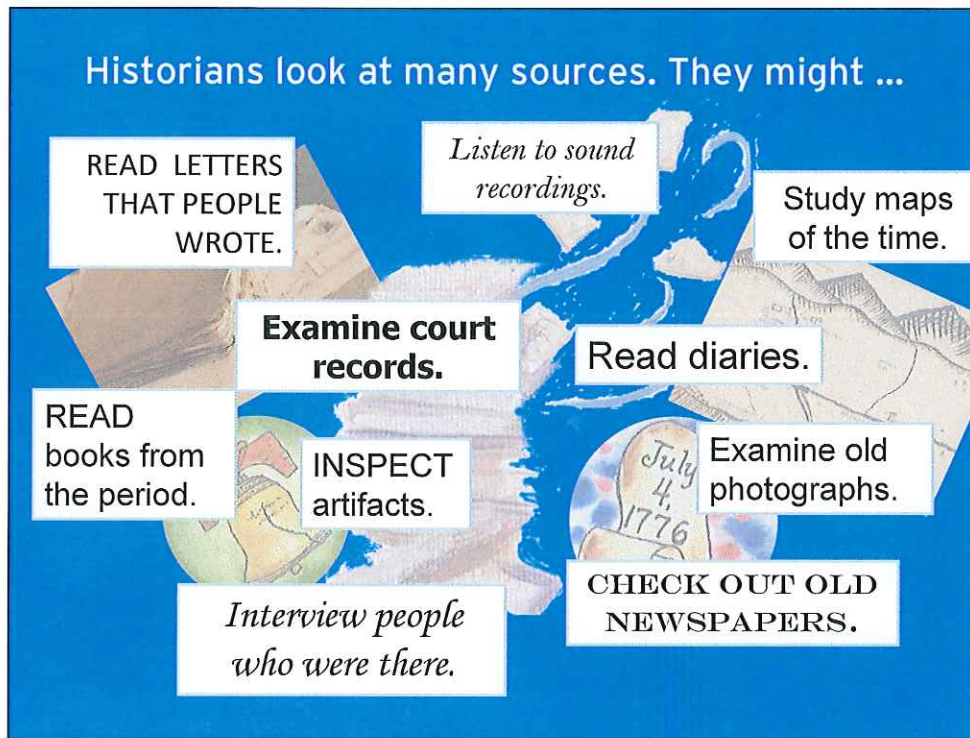


Begin the PowerPoint presentation with this, the first slide, displaying as students enter. Do not draw attention to the slide, but give them ample opportunity to view it.

Reliability of Sources

HE Lesson 5

Tell students that this lesson will focus on checking the reliability of sources. Explain that historians rely on sources to find out about the past.



Click the slide to reveal some of the many things historians do. Explain that historians look at both primary and secondary sources. Ask students: What is the difference between a primary and secondary source? (Primary sources come from the historical period being studied. Secondary sources are created long after the period.)

Not every source is reliable. It can be difficult to remember things.

For example, do you remember the first slide in this PowerPoint? Each one of you was a witness to the slide. You are a source.

What was its title?

What was happening in the image?

What is happening in the center of this picture?

What were they doing?

Did anything stand out to you?

How many buildings were shown?

**Let's take
another look
at it.**



Call on students to answer the questions on the slide, but do not confirm correct answers or deny wrong answers. Accept even “I don’t know” as an answer.

- What was its title? *The Fall of the Alamo*
- Was it day or night? *Day.*
- What was happening in the image? *A battle.*
- About how many people were in the picture? *Too many to count; about 20 in the foreground.*
- What were they doing? *Some were firing rifles, others were lying on the ground or falling.*
- Did anything stand out to you? *One man near the center of the image raised his rifle over his head like a club.*
- How many buildings were shown? *There were two buildings in the background.*

Finally, click to the next slide, which is a repeat of the first slide.

The Fall of the Alamo



Ask students: How is it possible that not everyone remembered exactly the same thing?

Look for: Some of us may have had our attention on something else, like getting our books out of our backpacks or talking to someone next to us. Not everyone was focused on the slide. Maybe no one paid close attention to it because it did not seem important.

Tell students that historians must deal with witnesses to history having different memories and points of view. Explain that today students will learn how to check the reliability of historical sources.

Point of view

Every source has an author or creator.

Everyone who creates a source has a **point of view**.
People see and remember events differently.



Explain that historians try to answer these questions:

Who created the source?

Why did they create it?

Ask students: Why do you think these questions are important?

Look for: They are important because they help you determine point of view. If someone has one point of view, it might help to try to find a different point of view to get more complete knowledge of an event.

A person's point of view can be affected by bias.

People come to situations and events with different backgrounds and beliefs. These can affect how people see and judge situations.



Explain that historians must look to see whether the person who created the source was biased.

Explain that we all have biases:

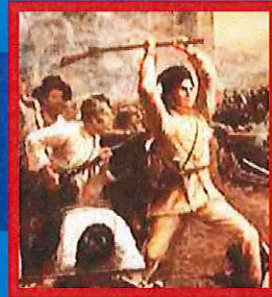
For example, you might favor one football team over another. It does not mean your favorite is the best team, but it does mean you favor that team. That is a simple bias. Whenever you have bias, it can affect how you explain events to others. You might, for example, explain that your favorite team lost only because of a referee's bad calls. This may or may not be true, but your bias could affect how other people judge what you say.

Ask students to think of other kinds of bias that might exist. (Some might be innocuous — like preferences for certain flavors in food. Others might be serious —like racial or religious bigotry.)

Historians identify point of view, bias, and other factors in sources.

You are going to get a tool for examining sources. You will use it to check the reliability of sources in a controversy over a real historical event.

The controversy is over the death of Davy Crockett...



Explain that historians look at many factors in evaluating sources. Tell them that they are going to look at a historical debate going on today and evaluate a few sources in the debate.

Ask students: Has anyone heard of Davy Crockett before?

Crockett was a famous frontiersman from Tennessee.

He served three terms in the U.S. Congress, too.



In 1834, he lost an election in Tennessee and decided to leave the state.

Ask students: What is a frontiersman? (An explorer of the wilderness)

Review the other content on the slide.

Add that there is some folklore surrounding Crockett's life even to the present day. He himself was a storyteller and may have embellished events he became famous for. For example, he claims he killed a bear with his own two hands.

He moved to *Tejas* (Texas) in January 1836. Texas was part of Mexico. It was a Mexican state.

About 30,000 English-speaking Americans and European immigrants had moved to Texas. They were known as Texians.

Texas residents of Mexican origin were called *Tejanos*.



Review the content of the slide, answering questions students may have.

Many Texians and Tejanos resisted the government of President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna of Mexico.

He was known for his harsh rule. As president in 1835, he dissolved the Mexican Congress and made himself dictator.

The military ran the government with Santa Anna in charge.



President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna

Review the content of the slide, answering questions students may have.

Add that several Mexican states, including Texas, rebelled against Santa Anna's rule at various times. Santa Anna was harsh in punishing defeated rebels, sometimes executing them in mass killings.

By 1835, many residents of Texas wanted independence from Mexico.

They disliked Santa Anna's laws, which ...

- Ended state legislatures (elected government).
- Required all citizens to join the Catholic Church.
- Restricted immigration into Texas.

His laws also outlawed slavery. Many Texians had brought slaves with them from the southern U.S.

The Texians and Tejanos formed an army to fight the Mexican army.

Review the content of the slide, answering questions students may have.

Source: Fowler, Will. *Santa Anna of Mexico*. Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press (2009).

The Alamo

The Alamo, once a Spanish mission, was turned into a sturdy fort. Its walls were made of stone two-feet thick.

In 1836, Texian and Tejano soldiers held the Alamo, including Davy Crockett.

Santa Anna's army of around 4,600 soldiers attacked the Alamo.



Note that the estimated numbers at the Alamo reflect about 150 or so soldiers, and the rest were women and children.

The defenders held onto the Alamo for two weeks. But on the morning of March 6, however, Mexican forces broke through the Alamo's defenses.

Most of the defenders died in battle. Witnesses said that Davy Crockett was one of those killed.

A Mexican officer took the few living defenders prisoner. He presented them to General Santa Anna. Santa Anna ordered the prisoners executed.



Go over the content. Then ask students:

How did the defenders of the Alamo die? (Most died in the battle. A few were executed afterward.)

How did Davy Crockett die? (In battle at the Alamo.)

How do we know this? (Witnesses said so.)

A different story ...

In 1955, a bookseller in Mexico City published the diary of Jose Enrique de la Peña, an officer in Santa Anna's army. In that diary, de la Peña claimed that Davy Crockett was one of the executed prisoners – not one of the soldiers who died fighting.

Which story is true?

Did Crockett fight to the end?

Or did Santa Anna have Crockett executed?

To find the answers, historians need to do research. They have to examine the de la Peña diary. And they have to look at other sources that describe Crockett's death.

You are now going to help determine if the diary source is reliable.

**Did Davy
Crockett die
fighting or
was he
executed?**



Review the controversy with students. Tell them they are now going to examine sources.

You are going to get a tool: It's called **INSPECT**. It lists questions that historians ask about sources.

You are also going to get a part of the de la Peña diary.

INSPECT - Analyzing Sources	
I dentify. What is it? (Book, photo, song, etc.) When was it created? What was happening at the time? Where was it created? Is it a primary or secondary source?	
N ame. Who created the source?	
S lant. Is there any evidence of bias? Do others disagree with this person?	
P urpose. Why was the source created? Who was the intended audience?	
E vidence. What does the source show or prove?	
C redibility. Is the source authentic? Where was the source discovered? Who discovered it? Do experts question if this source is real? Is it accurate?	
T hink. Evaluate the source. Do other sources back it up? Try to find other sources.	

Distribute **Handout 5A: INSPECT** and **Handout 5B: De La Peña** to each student.

Ask the students to read the De la Peña paragraph. Then tell them that together the class is going to use INSPECT to examine the paragraph. Click to next slide to view INSPECT questions.

INSPECT

Identify. What is it? (book, photo, song, etc.) When was it created? What was happening at the time? Where was it created? Is it a primary or secondary source?

Name. Who created the source?

Slant. Is there evidence of bias? Do others disagree with this person?

Purpose. Why was the source created? Who was its intended audience?

Evidence. What does the source show or prove?

Credibility. Is the source authentic? Where was the source discovered? Who discovered it? Do experts question if this source is real? Is it accurate?

Think. Evaluate the source. Do other sources back it up? Try to find other sources.

As a class, work through the steps of INSPECT to answer the question – What does the source tell you about the death of Davy Crockett? Call on students to provide the answers for the different steps. Below are some suggested answer for each.

I - A page from de la Peña's diary. It was written sometime after the Alamo.

N - José Enrique de la Peña wrote it. He was an officer in the Mexican army.

S - He might be biased toward Santa Anna, because he was in Santa Anna's army. But he also described Davy Crockett as "one of great stature" and what Santa Anna did as "barbarous," so he probably did not favor Santa Anna.

P - His purpose is unclear. It is a diary, so he may have just wanted future generations to read it.

E - The document shows that Crockett was captured and executed. It also shows that Santa Anna was brutal.

C - De la Peña was an eyewitness, so that makes it reliable. But it was not known until 1955, over 100 years after the Alamo. Some historians question whether it is authentic (written by de la Peña) and, if so, whether de la Peña was accurate in his account of what happened.

T - Walter Lord relied on it to write about the Alamo. That makes it seem reliable. Another source to look up might be Walter Lord's history of the Alamo. Other sources might be other eyewitness accounts.

You are now going to be divided into small groups. Each group will get a document to **INSPECT**.

In your group, do the following:

1. Read the document together.
2. Go through each step of **INSPECT** and write down your answers.
3. Be prepared to report your answers.



Divide the class into groups of four or five. Each group should have a different source from **Handout 5C**. It is all right if multiple groups have the same source (e.g., two groups have Susanna Dickson), as long as each group works independently.

Review the instructions with students. Each group should repeat the steps of **INSPECT** for their assigned document. First, students read their selection. Second, as a group, they should discuss and answer each of the steps.

Share Back: Jigsaw

1. After each group has been able to complete **INSPECT** for their assigned source, count off the members of each group 1–8. Each numbered group should then meet separately, so that each group has a representative for each of the four sources. (If you have a large class, you may have two separate groups for each of the four handouts.)
2. One member in each group presents the results of their **INSPECT** discussion to the others in the group. They continue until all four sources have been presented.
3. Below are notes to help you as you listen to students' answers.

Answer Key to Handout 5C

Source 1: Susanna Dickinson						
I – An interview, almost 40 years after the Alamo	N – Susanna Dickinson, the wife of a Texian lieutenant.	S – She is aympathetic to the Texians and Crockett.	P – Unknown. It is probably for historians of the time.	E – She saw Crockett dead by the church door within the Alamo. She remembered Crockett’s “peculiar cap.”	C – It is authentic. Not much else is known.	T – She saw Crockett “mutilated” and among “heaps of dead,” so it is possible that it was someone else.
Source 2: Sergeant Felix Nuñez						
I – An interview published in a newspaper, 245 years after the battle.	N – Sergeant Felix Nuñez, who fought with General Santa Anna.	S – Unknown. He might be more sympathetic to Santa Anna.	P – George Noel, a historian, wanted to research the Alamo and asked Sergeant Nuñez. The newspaper editor wrote this for his readers.	E – Nuñez says that Crockett’s dead body was just inside the Alamo walls.	C – The newspaper editor said that Nuñez gave this information to Noel, but not much id known about Noel. Noel never published his research, either.	T – Look up more information about George Noel. Also, are there any other sources that back up what Nuñez said?
Source 3: George M. Dolson						
I – A letter that was published in a newspaper, a couple of months after the Alamo.	N – George M. Dolson was a Texian officer	S – As a Texian, he probably has bias against Santa Anna. He calls Santa Anna “the monster.”	P – He wrote this letter to his brother. It seems he just wanted to share what happened to Crockett, who was famous.	E – The source shows that Crockett was executed.	C – It does not appear that anyone thinks this letter is not authentic. Need more information about what experts think.	T – It would be helpful to look up what historians say about Dolson’s letter’s reliability.
Source 4: Ramon Martinez Caro						
I – Caro’s written record, published by historian Carlos E. Castañeda in 1928, almost 100 years after the Alamo.	N – Ramon Martinez Caro was General Santa Anna’s secretary.	S – Unknown. He might be more sympathetic to Santa Anna.	P – His job was to keep records of Santa Anna’s activities and decisions.	E – The source helps prove that men were executed after the battle. But he does not say that Crockett was one of them.	C – It does not appear that anyone thinks this letter is not authentic. Carlos E. Castañeda relied on it.	T – The other sources here do not contradict this source. Need more research into how well known Crockett was to the Mexicans. It would be odd if Caro knew of Crockett but did not mention his name.

Were you able to answer all the **INSPECT** questions for your document?

Do you think there is enough evidence in the sources to reach a conclusion about Crockett's death?

What examples of bias did we see in the sources today? Do you think those examples affect our knowledge of how and when Davy Crockett died?

Why is it important to find more than one source about a historical event?

Why is it valuable to see more than one point of view of an event in history?

E. Debrief - Questions to ask:

Were you able to answer all the INSPECT questions for your document?

Answers will vary. It is likely that no group could answer all the questions with the information provided. Remind students that that is all right. INSPECT is a tool to help identify sources and to help students think about gathering more sources.

After hearing about all the sources, do you think there is enough evidence to reach a conclusion about Crockett's death?

Answers will vary. It seems that the sources conflict with each other. Tell students that there is still debate among historians about whether Crockett died in battle or was captured before being executed. No one is 100 percent certain.

What examples of bias did we see in the sources today? Do you think those examples affect our knowledge of how and when Davy Crockett died?

Accept reasoned responses. Examples might be de la Peña's description of Crockett ("great stature, well-formed") or Nuñez's description of the "valor" of the Texans ("would fill a volume as large as the History of Texas"). Whether or not students think these examples affect our knowledge is a matter of reasoned opinion.

Why is it important to find more than one source about a historical event?

Look for: More than one source might provide more than one point of view.

Why is it valuable to see more than one point of view of an event in history?

Look for: By comparing points of view, you might find out what is true and what

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- Portrait of Davy Crockett
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Davy_Crockett1834.jpg
- Map of Texas 1835
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ea/Mapa_de_Mexico_1835_1.PNG
- *President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna*
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_L%C3%B3pez_de_Santa_Anna
- *Battle of the Alamo* (1912) by Percy Moran
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- The Alamo
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