

Lesson Overview:

What did it take to build a productive colony in early Texas?

In this lesson, students explore how empresarios helped settle early Texas by comparing the contributions of Stephen F. Austin and Martín de León. Students then apply their understanding through a simplified colony planning simulation, using limited resources to make settlement decisions. The lesson emphasizes economic motivations, geography, and problem-solving.

Objectives

SWBAT (Students Will Be Able To):

- Explain the role of empresarios in the settlement of Texas.
- Identify and compare the contributions of Stephen F. Austin and Martín de León.
- Use economic reasoning to make settlement decisions.
- Describe how geography and resources affected colony success.

Social Studies TEKS

- **4.2(A)** Summarize motivations for European exploration and settlement of Texas, including economic opportunity, competition, and the desire for expansion.
- **4.2(B)** Identify the accomplishments and explain the impact of significant explorers, including Cabeza de Vaca; Francisco Coronado; and René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, on the settlement of Texas.
- **4.2(C)** Explain when, where, and why the Spanish established settlements and Catholic missions in Texas as well as important individuals.
- **4.2(D)** Identify Texas' role in the Mexican War of Independence and the war's impact on the development of Texas.
- **4.2(E)** Identify the accomplishments and explain the economic motivations and impact of significant empresarios, including Stephen F. Austin and Martín de León, on the settlement of Texas.
- **4.3(D)** Describe the successes, problems, and organizations of the Republic of Texas such as the establishment of a constitution, economic struggles, relations with American Indians, and the Texas Rangers.

Materials

- Tablets/laptops with internet access
- Short biography handouts for Stephen F. Austin and Martín de León
- Empresario Comparison Chart
- Printed map of early Texas settlements
- Settlement Planning Map
- Poster Board

Vocabulary

1. **Empresario** (*noun*): someone who, before Texas became part of the U.S., entered into a contract with the Spanish or Mexican government to settle a certain number of families in Texas in exchange for sizable grants of land.
 2. **Colony** (*noun*): a group of people who settle together in a new place; the place where the new settlement happens.
 3. **Resource** (*noun*): a natural source of wealth or revenue.
 4. **Incentive** (*noun*): a reward that encourages determination or action.
 5. **Settlement** (*noun*): a new community started in a new area.
-

Historical Context

Hook/Engage: "Would YOU Join a Colony?"

Time: 5 minutes

Instructions:

1. **The teacher asks:**

- "Why would people risk moving to an unfamiliar place?"
- "What would they need to survive?"

Briefly introduce the term **empresario** and explain that students will study two men who helped settle Texas.

Explore/Explain: "Empresarios in Action" Comparison Activity

Time: 20 minutes

Instructions:

1. **Teacher Role:**

- Distribute biographies, comparison charts, and maps.
- Model how to identify key information from the text.

2. **Student Instructions:**

1. Read short biographies of Stephen F. Austin and Martín de León.
2. Complete the Empresario Comparison Chart, identifying:
 - *Type of settlers*
 - *Colony location*

- *Motivation*
 - *One success*
 - *One challenge*
3. Locate each colony on the Texas map and note one geographic advantage or challenge.

Formative Check:

Teacher leads a brief discussion comparing the two empresarios.

Elaborate (Main Activity): Promotional “Empresarios Wanted!” Design

Instructions:

1. In groups, students will imagine they are a newly selected empresario.
2. Using poster board (or Google Slides), they will create a brochure to promote their own colony to new settlers.

Required Elements:

- Catchy title (e.g., “Come to León’s Land!” or “Austin’s Acres of Opportunity!”)
 - Map of colony location
 - List of resources and incentives (land, tools, protection)
 - Testimonials or slogans
 - Comparison: “How We’re Like/Unlike de León or Austin”
3. Answer planning questions as a group:
- a. *How will your colony survive?*
 - b. *What would attract settlers?*
 - c. *What challenge might your colony face?*
-

Exit Ticket Closure Option #1 (5 minutes)

Students answer the following question on an exit ticket:

- “How were your choices similar to those made by Austin or de León?”
-

Exit Ticket Closure Option #2 (10 minutes)

Students answer the following questions on an exit ticket:

1. Multiple Choice

Which statement best describes an empresario?

- A. A soldier who protected Texas settlements
- B. A person who brought settlers to Texas in exchange for land
- C. A farmer who owned land in Texas
- D. A leader of Native American tribes

2. Short Answer

Name one way Stephen F. Austin or Martín de León helped settle Texas.

3. Reasoning Question

If you were starting a colony, which resource would be most important and why?

Accommodations:

ESL/ELL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visual vocabulary cards and labeled maps• Sentence starters for written and oral responses
SPED	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-filled or partially completed comparison charts• Reduced number of resource tokens• Oral responses allowed instead of written
GT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Justification extension: Students must defend one decision using historical evidence• Optional comparison to a third empresario
Visual Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graphic organizers to visually organize key information.• Labeled maps of early Texas settlements to support understanding of geography and location.• Visual vocabulary cards with images and key terms (empresario, colony, and resource).
Kinesthetic Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical interaction with maps, including circling and marking settlement locations.• Small-group collaborative work that allows discussion, movement, and active participation.

Texas Historical Commission Activity

1. Historical Markers: “Mark the Colony!”: Students will choose one of the five historical markers shown below about Stephen F. Austin or Martín de León. After reading the marker, each student will write a short paragraph explaining why the colony was important and what challenges it faced. Then, students will create their own historical marker using construction paper or a digital format. The marker must include a title, the location, three important facts, and a drawing or symbol that represents the colony. Finally, students will share their work in a “walk-through history” gallery presentation.

- [Stephen F. Austin Marker in Nacogdoches](#)
- [Site of the Camp of Stephen F. Austin \(Bexar County\)](#)
- [Don Martin De Leon \(Calhoun County\)](#)
- [Don Martin De Leon \(Victoria County\)](#)
- [Home of Empresario Martin De Leon \(Victoria County\)](#)

2. Museums: “Museum-in-a-Box: Empresario Exhibit Case”: Students will explore digitized primary sources from the [Portal to Texas History](#) to examine maps, letters, documents, and images related to early Texas settlements. Then, students will design a focused shoebox exhibit (or a single-slide virtual exhibit case) that includes one featured image, two to four related objects (physical replicas, printed visuals, or digital images), and one exhibit label of 25-50 words explaining what the items represent, how they connect to empresario colonies, and why they were important to the colony’s success.

State Historic Site Connection

Imagine standing where Stephen F. Austin himself planned his colony more than 200 years ago. Well, that place is today’s [San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site](#), once the *capital* of his colony in Mexican Texas. At this site, early settlers lived, worked, and made important decisions that shaped Texas history, including publishing one of the first newspapers and hosting meetings that led toward independence from Mexico. Though the town was later burned by its own people during the Runaway Scrape, visitors today can walk the same ground, see artifacts, explore exhibits, and picture what life was like for families building a new home on the frontier.

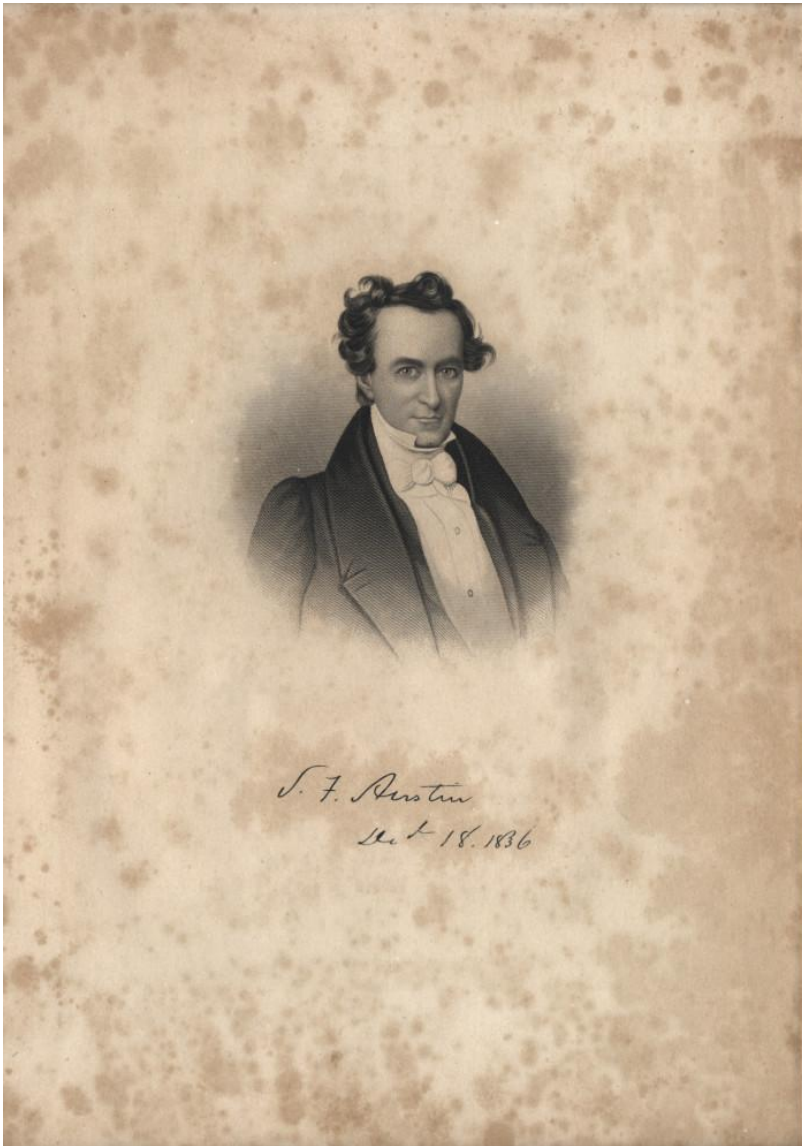
Resources



*“Report of Martín de León, November 27, 1826 | Bullock Texas State History Museum.”
Thestoryoftexas.com, 2025, www.thestoryoftexas.com/discover/artifacts/report-of-martin-de-leon-november-1826?*



“TSHA | de León’s Colony.” www.tshaonline.org, www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/de-leons-colony.



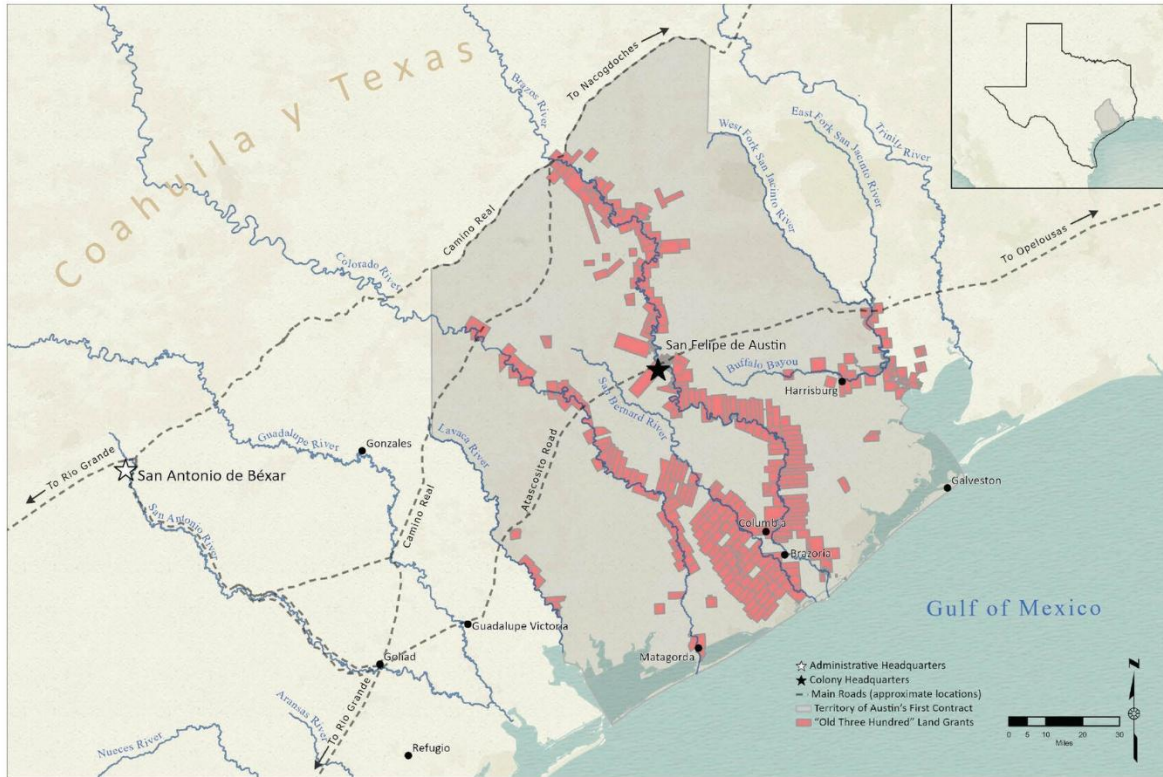
"Engraving of Stephen F. Austin." The Portal to Texas History, 16 Dec. 1836,
texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph11276/?q=stephen%20f.%20austin,
<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph11276/>.



George. "Texas." *The Portal to Texas History*, 19 Aug. 2025, texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph50215/m1/1/?q=empresario%20texas%20map, call-no: 125/2 00002.



"Old Three Hundred" Land Grants under Austin's First Contract
1824 - 1832



Compiled by Mark Conway and Brian Stauffer, 2023. Based on Texas General Land Office Map #94440 (<https://historictexasmaps.com/object/94440>), and Map #93754 (<https://historictexasmaps.com/object/93754>). Camino Real data from National Public Service, National Trails Intermountain Region, El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail, 2017. Basemap courtesy of Esri. The Texas General Land Office makes no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy or completeness of the information depicted on this map or the data from which it was produced. This map IS NOT suitable for navigational purposes and does not purport to depict or establish boundaries between private and public land.

Texas, Historic. *Historic Texas Maps, 2023*, historictexasmaps.com/collection/search-results/97185-old-three-hundred-land-grants-under-austins-first-contract-gis-educational-maps.



thc.texas.gov/learn