

Lesson Overview:

What drove European explorers across oceans, and what did they leave behind?

In this interactive, inquiry-based lesson, students will investigate the motivations and consequences of European exploration in Texas. Through hands-on mapping, digital simulations, and reflective writing, students will trace key routes, analyze primary and secondary sources, and examine the impact of early contact on Native peoples and settlements. Students will use string and pin maps to recreate explorer routes and roleplay decisions through digital simulations like Mission US or Age of Exploration to explore differing perspectives on exploration and colonization.

Objectives

SWBAT (Students Will Be Able To):

- Summarize the motivations behind European exploration (gold, glory, and God).
- Identify and describe the accomplishments of major explorers who impacted Texas: Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, and René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle.
- Explain the Spanish strategy for settlement and mission-building in Texas.
- Use maps and digital tools to document exploration routes and contact with Native peoples.
- Analyze the consequences of European contact on Indigenous populations.

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.

Materials

- Exploration images & explorer portraits (print or digital)
- Chart paper or whiteboard + markers
- Explorer readings/profile cards (print or digital)
- Large wall or floor map
- String or yarn + pins/tape
- Student devices or paper/pencils (either works)
- Writing paper or digital document for reflection/journals
- Explorer Motivation & Impact Chart
- Sticky notes

Vocabulary

1. **Explore** (*verb*): to travel over new territory for adventure or discovery.
2. **Conquistador** (*noun*): a leader in the Spanish conquest of the Americas, especially of Mexico and Peru.
3. **Colony** (*noun*): a group of people who settle together in a new place.
4. **Empire** (*noun*): a very large group of lands or countries that are all ruled by one leader or government.
5. **Impact** (*noun*): something that causes a major change.
6. **Indigenous** (*adjective*): the earliest known inhabitants of a place.

Pacing Guide

Activity	Time	Purpose
1. Hook: Would YOU Set Sail?	15 minutes	Engage students in thinking about the risks and motivations of exploration. Introduce the concepts of Gold, Glory, and God through discussion and visuals.
2. Explore: Build Background (Gold, Glory, God Chart)	5 minutes	Help students categorize and organize reasons for exploration into the three main motivations using a class anchor chart.
3. Main Activity: Explorer Mapping & Analysis	25 minutes	Students work in groups to learn about one explorer (Cabeza de Vaca, Coronado, or La Salle), trace their route on a map, and analyze motivations and impacts on Texas and Indigenous peoples.
4. Wrap-Up: Share & Reflect	5 minutes	Students reflect on how exploration affected people in Texas.

Hook/Engage: "Would YOU Set Sail?"

Time: 15–20 minutes

Instructions:

1. Display scenario prompt for Think-Pair-Share:

"You're offered a chance to sail into the unknown in 1500. You might find gold... or danger. Would you go?"

- Share a few responses with the class

2. Gallery Walk or Simply Explore Images:

- Ships (Caravel), maps, gold coins, Indigenous peoples, Catholic missions
- Explorer portraits: Cabeza de Vaca, Coronado, La Salle
- Ask: *"What do you notice?"* or *"What might explorers want from these journeys?"*

3. Group Discussion Prompts:

- *Why might someone want to take a risky voyage?*
- *What would you hope to find?*
- *What would you fear discovering?*
- *How would this impact people already living in these lands?*

4. Class Brainstorm: "Motivations for Exploration" Chart

- Label and define the following three columns: Gold, Glory, God
 1. Gold: to find treasure and become rich
 2. Glory: to be famous and important
 3. God: to share their religion and beliefs
- Students suggest possible motivations; teacher or scribe records ideas

ESL/ELL: Sentence stems: *"I would go because..."*, *"I would not go because..."*

SPED: Allow verbal responses instead of written, and pair with supportive partner

GT: Ask: *"Which motivation do you think was strongest? Why?"*

Explore: Explorer Mapping & Analysis

Time: 30 minutes

Instructions:

1. Set Up Groups:

- Divide students into small groups (4-5 students).

2. Assign Explorers:

- Each group gets one explorer:
 - Cabeza de Vaca
 - Coronado
 - La Salle
- Provide each group with:
 - Short reading/profile card
 - Explorer Motivation & Impact Chart

3. Read and Discuss:

- Students read (or listen) and discuss the following:
 - Where did the explorer go?
 - Why did they explore?
 - What happened as a result?

4. Map the Route:

- Each group will use string/yarn to trace their explorer's route on the class map.

5. Share Out:

- Each group will share with their class the explorer's:
 - Name
 - Country
 - Route Taken
 - Motivation(s)
 - Impact on Texas/Indigenous People

ESL/ELL: Sentence stems: *“The explorer went to...”* or *“They wanted...”*

SPED: Provide partially completed charts

GT: Ask extension question: *“What might have happened if this explorer succeeded or failed differently?”*

Conclusion: “Native American Journal” Exit Ticket

Time: 10 minutes

Instructions:

1. Write:

- Each student will write a journal entry from the perspective of an Indigenous person encountering their explorer for the first time.

ESL/ELL: Provide reflection sentence frame *“When I first saw the explorer, I felt ___ because ___.”*

SPED: Offer oral reflection instead of written.

GT: Ask students *“How might the perspective of the Indigenous person challenge or change the way history usually describes this encounter?”*

- **State Historic Site Connection: Presidio La Bahía**

[Presidio La Bahía](#) is a very old fort in Texas that was built by Spanish soldiers in 1749. A fort is like a strong, protected place where soldiers lived and worked. This fort is special because it was one of the most fought-over places in Texas history. Different groups (Spanish, Mexican, and Texan soldiers) all used it at different times. Inside the fort is a chapel (a small church) called Our Lady of Loreto, which is one of the oldest churches in the United States and is still used today. A very sad event happened here in 1836 during the Texas Revolution. After a battle, a group of Texan soldiers led by Colonel James Fannin were captured and held at the fort. Later, many of them were killed in what is called the Goliad Massacre. Because of this, people in Texas began saying, “Remember Goliad!” to remind others of what happened and to keep fighting for independence. Over time, the fort fell apart, but in the 1960s people worked hard to restore and rebuild it so visitors today can see what it looked like long ago.

- **State Historic Site Connection: Mission Dolores**

[Mission Dolores](#) was a Spanish mission built in Texas in 1721. A mission was a place where Spanish priests lived and tried to teach Native Americans about their religion. At the mission, a few priests, soldiers, and their families lived together. The priests worked with a group of Native Americans called the Ais, but most of the Ais did not stay there for long. Still, they often traded, helped each other, and lived peacefully. The mission was located along an important road called El Camino Real, where people from different places (Spanish, French, and Native Americans) met and shared goods and ideas. After a big war called the French and Indian War, Spain no longer needed the mission in that area. So, in 1773, Mission Dolores was closed and abandoned. Over time, the buildings disappeared, and people forgot exactly where the mission had been. Many years later, archeologists (scientists who study the past) found the location by digging and discovering old objects like tools and pieces of buildings. Today, there are no old buildings left, but there is a museum and historic site where visitors can learn what life was like there long ago.

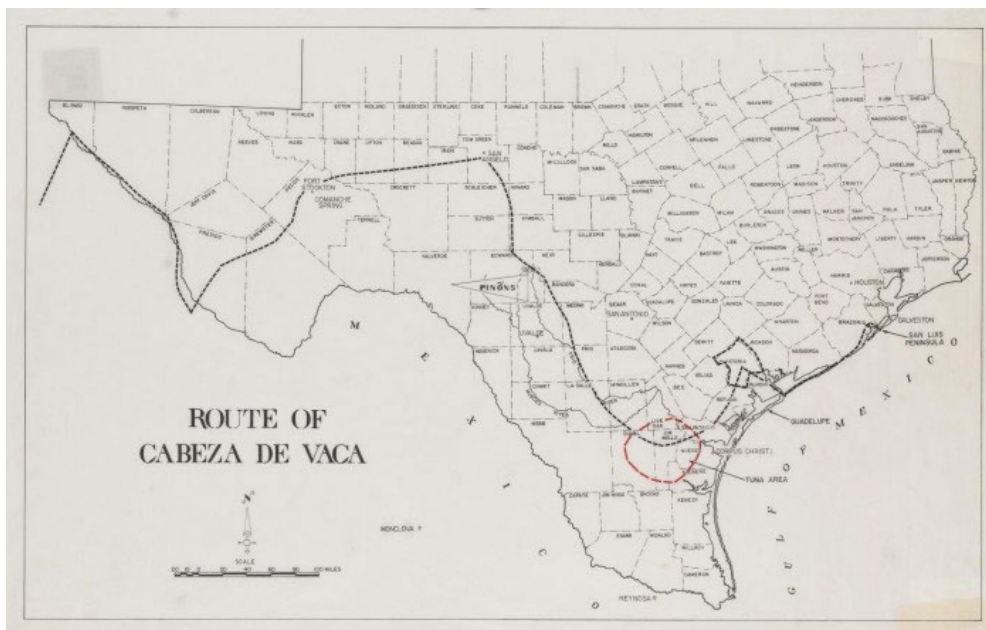
Resources



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INSTRUCTOR GUIDE
EXPLORERS, GOLD, & GLORY!

Grade 4

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