

LESSON 10



A Big Rig Tour of the Southwest

How have geography and history shaped life in the Southwest?

Introduction

Welcome to the Southwest. My name is Mr. Nakai, and I will be your guide for this region.

Let me tell you a little about myself. I am an American Indian, from the Navajo tribe. Until I retired last year, I was a truck driver. I drove my big rig—that’s what truckers call their trucks—all over the Southwest. I know this region like the back of my hand.

When I was asked to lead this tour, I thought about how I could make it really special. Then, it hit me! I’m a trucker. Why not take you on a truck tour? My big rig holds only three people, but some of my trucking buddies have been nice enough to offer to help out. Together, we rounded up enough trucks to take your whole class.

During the tour, you’ll see where I grew up as part of the Navajo. You’ll visit big cities and small towns. This region has some incredible sights, both natural and manufactured. And, the region is full of history. You’ll visit some places that are important to our past.

The view from high up in a big rig can’t be beat. So pick a truck, buckle your seat belt, and let’s go. We’ll begin our trip in Arizona.

Social Studies Vocabulary

adapt
aqueduct
border
canyon
capital
cavern
dam
desert
mesa
mission
rebellion

◀ A truck travels through the hot, dry U.S. Southwest.



Civics



Economics



Geography

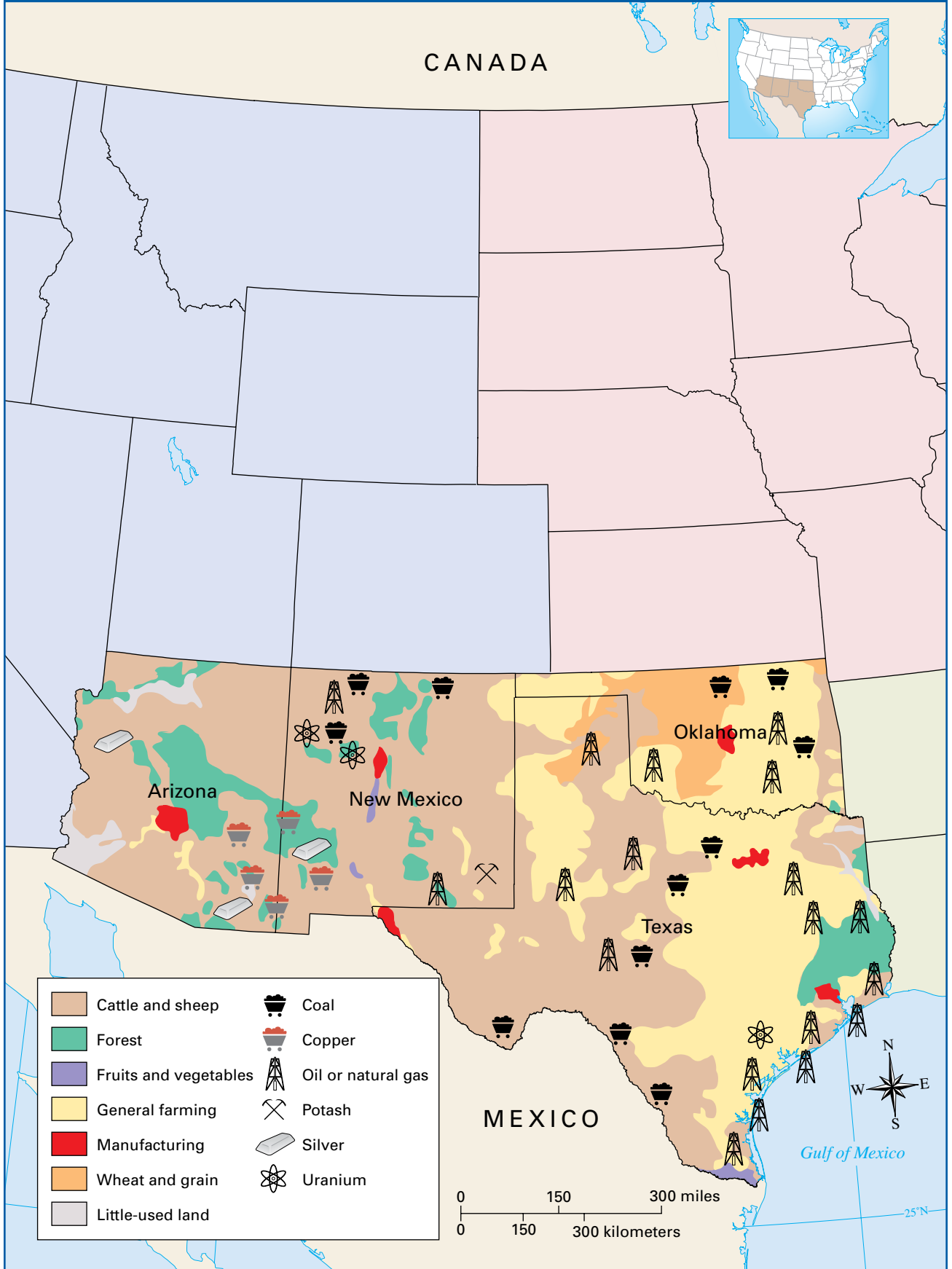


History

The Southwest Region



Land Use and Resources in the Southwest





People, plants, and animals have adapted to living in the dry land of Monument Valley. Flat-topped mesas dot the landscape.

mesa a flat-topped hill

desert an area of land that receives very little rain

adapt to change in order to survive

1. Monument Valley: Home of the Navajos

Let's begin our tour where I live. This is Monument Valley. It is part of the Navajo Indian Reservation. This is the largest reservation in the United States.

The Southwest is home to a large number of American Indians, more than most of the other regions of the country. Many American Indians live and work on reservations. Others live in towns and cities.

I was born and raised in Monument Valley. To me, this is the most beautiful place on Earth. Moviemakers also love this valley for its setting. Many western movies and television commercials are filmed here.

Look closely at this landscape. Do you see those flat-topped hills? They are called **mesas**. Notice how bare the mesas are. Not enough rain falls in Monument Valley for forests to grow. Much of the Southwest is **desert**. A desert gets less than 10 inches of rain a year.

Over time, plants, animals, and people have all **adapted** to living in this dry land. To adapt means to change to survive. The Navajos, for example, learned how to grow corn and raise sheep, even with little rainfall.

As we move on, look for other ways that people have adapted to living in the desert.

2. Phoenix, Arizona: America's Hottest City

This is Phoenix, Arizona, America's hottest large city. During July, temperatures here can soar to over 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

A hundred years ago, Phoenix was a small town. Not many people wanted to move to Arizona in those days. Some folks said that it was too hot, dry, and lonely here. What I call the three "A's" changed their minds.

The first "A" was air conditioners, which use electricity to cool the air in a room. Air-conditioning allows people to live in comfort no matter how hot the day is outside.

The second "A" was **aqueducts**. An aqueduct is a large pipe or canal that moves water over a long distance. Aqueducts are used in the Southwest to move water from lakes and rivers to farms and cities. Aqueducts make it possible for people to have regular showers and green lawns in Phoenix.

The third "A" was automobiles. Travel in the Southwest used to be hard, and even dangerous. A traveler stuck in the desert could die of thirst.

Cars, along with good roads, made travel safer and easier. People began to come to the Phoenix area as tourists. Some liked the hot, dry weather so much that they came back here to live. Since 1940, Phoenix has grown at an amazing rate.

aqueduct a pipe or canal for carrying water over a long distance



Air conditioners, a water supply, and automobiles helped make Phoenix a place where people want to live. Phoenix is now the sixth largest city in the United States with an ever-growing population.

dam a wall built across a river to stop the flow of water

3. Hoover Dam: A Concrete Marvel

You are looking at one of America's greatest manufactured structures, Hoover Dam. A **dam** is a wall built across a river to stop the water from flowing.

Hoover Dam was built for two main reasons. The first reason was to control flooding on the Colorado River. The dam slows the rush of water down the river during flood times. The second reason was to store water. Water stored behind Hoover Dam flows through aqueducts to farms and cities.

Hoover Dam was built more than 70 years ago. At that time, nobody had ever built such a huge dam. Many people said it couldn't be done. Some said the Colorado River could never be stopped long enough to build a dam. Other people did not think a dam could be made strong enough to hold back so much water. My dad helped prove these people wrong by helping to build Hoover Dam.

My dad knew a great many facts about Hoover Dam. He told me that there is enough concrete in the dam to pave a road from California to New York. He said that the lake behind the dam holds enough water to flood the entire state of Pennsylvania with one foot of water. That's a lot of concrete holding back a lot of water!

Hoover Dam helps control flooding of the Colorado River. The dam also stores water and creates electricity for use by cities and farms.



4. The Grand Canyon: Arizona's World-Famous Wonder

Wow—what a view! You are looking into the Grand Canyon, the most famous natural feature in the United States.

A **canyon** is a deep, narrow valley with steep sides. There are many canyons in the Southwest, but this one is the grandest of them all.

The Grand Canyon is about 277 miles long and one mile deep. It is so deep that the canyon's top and bottom have different weather. It can be cold here on top and hot down below. It is so deep that when I stand here on the rim, I sometimes see eagles flying below me.

The American Indian tribe known as the Havasupais lives at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. According to Havasupai legend, the canyon was formed when a flood covered the world. To end the flood, a god dug a hole in the Earth. The floodwater rushed down the hole, carving out the Grand Canyon as it went.

Scientists tell a different story. They say the Grand Canyon began to form anywhere from 6 to 17 million years ago. It has been carved slowly out of the Earth by water and wind. The Grand Canyon is still growing today, even while we are here looking at it.

Water and wind formed the Grand Canyon. Its walls are so high that the weather is different at the top and bottom.

canyon a deep, narrow valley with steep sides





Visitors look small in the Big Room of Carlsbad Caverns. This national park is entirely underground.

cavern a large cave

5. Carlsbad Caverns: Big Rooms and Bats in New Mexico

At most national parks, the big attractions are found above the ground. Not here! At Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico, the show takes place underground. About 100 caves and **caverns** lie beneath this park. A cave is a natural hole found in the Earth, and a cavern is a large cave.

According to local legend, some cowboys, including one named Jim White, found Carlsbad Caverns. One evening, they saw what looked like a plume of smoke rising into the sky. That plume of smoke turned out to be a big cloud of bats flying out of a cave entrance.

A bat looks like a mouse with wings. Hundreds of thousands of bats sleep in the caverns during the day. At night, the bats leave in a great, whirring cloud to hunt for food. If you come to the entrance at sunset, you may see them take flight. It's a very pretty sight.

More than a half million visitors tour Carlsbad Caverns each year. One of the most popular stops is a huge chamber known as the Big Room. The Big Room is about 25 stories high and a third of a mile wide. It could hold six football fields and still have space left over. Can you see the tourist in this Big Room photo?

6. El Paso and Ciudad Juárez: Two Cities, Two Countries, One Border

We are at the **border** between the United States and Mexico. A border is a line that people agree on as a boundary to separate two places. The border between the United States and Mexico is a river called the Rio Grande.

The Rio Grande separates two countries and divides two busy cities. El Paso, Texas, an American city, lies north of the border. Ciudad Juárez, a Mexican city, lies south of the border.

Forty years ago, El Paso and Juárez were sleepy little border towns with few people or trucks. Today, a total of about 2 million people live in the two cities. And the area is crawling with trucks.

The reason for this change is simple. American businesses have built hundreds of factories in Juárez. Americans build factories across the border because Mexican workers will work for much lower pay than American workers. This reduces the cost of doing business. These factories, called *maquiladoras* (mah-kee-luh-DOHR-uhs), assemble all kinds of goods. The goods are then trucked across the border for sale in the United States.

Many Mexicans move close to the border to take *maquiladora* jobs.

border a boundary line that separates two places



The Rio Grande forms part of the border between the United States (left) and Mexico (right). The river begins in Colorado.

mission a Spanish settlement built to teach Christianity in North America

rebellion an armed fight against a government

7. San Antonio, Texas: Home of the Alamo

Welcome to San Antonio, Texas. San Antonio is a city famous for its Spanish **missions**. A mission is a Spanish settlement where priests once taught American Indians the Christian religion.

San Antonio's missions were built in the early 1700s. At that time, Texas was a colony of Spain. Later on, Texas became part of Mexico.

The Alamo is San Antonio's most famous mission. More than 2.5 million people visit the Alamo every year. They come to see where a small band of men fought and died so that Texas might be free.

In 1836, Americans living in Texas declared their independence from Mexican rule. A Mexican general named Antonio López de Santa Anna led 2,000 troops to Texas to crush this **rebellion**. A rebellion is an armed fight against one's government.

A band of 183 Texas freedom fighters gathered at the Alamo. Their goal was to stop the Mexican army there. Instead, the Mexican forces captured the mission and killed every one of its defenders.

News of the killings at the Alamo outraged Americans. Hundreds picked up their guns and headed to Texas to join the rebellion. Their battle cry was "Remember the Alamo!"

Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836. For nine years, Texas was a free nation. Then, in 1845, Texas joined the United States as the 28th state.

The Alamo is one of many missions built in San Antonio. It is a symbol of Texas independence.





8. Austin: The Capital of Texas

The government of Texas is in Austin, the **capital** of the state. A capital is a city where the government of a country or state is located.

Like our national government, state governments have three branches—legislative, executive, and judicial. The legislative branch is the state legislature. The Texas legislature meets in the building you see here with the large dome on top.

State legislatures make laws for all the people in a state. Most of the traffic laws in each state are passed by the state legislature. As a truck driver, I have to know and obey all these laws.

State legislatures decide how much people must pay in taxes to the state. They also decide how that money will be spent. Truckers always want state legislatures to spend more money on improving the roads.

The executive branch is headed by the state governor. It's the governor's job to make sure that all the laws passed by the state legislature are carried out.

State courts make up the judicial branch. State courts judge people who are accused of breaking state laws. If a person is found guilty of breaking a law, the courts decide how that person should be punished.

Austin is the seat of the Texas government. The capitol building is where the state legislature meets to make laws for the people.

capital a city where the government of a country or state is located

9. Guthrie, Oklahoma: Center of the Land Rush

Most of the Southwest was settled slowly, over time. Guthrie, Oklahoma, was settled in one day.

For many years, the U.S. government kept Oklahoma closed to everyone but American Indians. Then, in 1889, the government decided to open 2 million acres of land to new settlement. This area was to be given away in a one-day land rush. The first person to reach and claim a piece of land on that day could keep it.

On April 22, 1889, between 50,000 and 100,000 people gathered at the starting line for the land rush. Most were European Americans. Some were African Americans. Black or white, everyone wanted the same thing—free land.

At noon, a bugler blew some notes on his horn. The rush was on! People raced off in wagons, on horses, and on foot. In a few hours, every inch of land was taken.

Not everyone waited for the land rush to begin. Some settlers cheated and entered the area sooner than the government allowed. One of these “sooners” was found tending a garden full of vegetables. Oklahoma’s soil was so rich, he claimed, that the plants had all sprouted up that day.

Guthrie, Oklahoma, was born during the land rush. At noon, Guthrie wasn’t much more than a patch of grass. Six hours later, the town had a population of 10,000 people.

Most of the Southwest was settled slowly. However, settlers raced to grab land in Oklahoma during a one-day land rush in 1889.





Today, the town of Guthrie still has about 10,000 people living there. Most of the downtown buildings in Guthrie still look like they did in the late 1800s.

Like Guthrie, Oklahoma City got its start during the land rush of 1889. But today, it is the largest city in the state. Oklahoma City and nearby towns form a community of more than 1 million people. The city is the capital of Oklahoma, which is nicknamed the Sooner State.

Guthrie, Oklahoma, was settled in a hurry. It sprang up during the land rush of 1889. Today, many beautiful buildings that went up soon after the land rush can still be seen.

Lesson Summary

I hope you enjoyed this big rig tour of the Southwest. We passed through the states of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma.

On the way back, I asked the children in my truck what words they would use to describe the Southwest. The first word they came up with was *big*. This region has big caverns, a big canyon, a big capitol building, and a big dam. Their next two words were *hot* and *dry*. Much of the Southwest is desert. Plants, animals, and people all have to adapt to its hot, dry climate to survive.

The last word the children chose was *beautiful*. I asked them which places seemed beautiful. “Monument Valley,” they answered “along with the Grand Canyon and Carlsbad Caverns.” After thinking about this some more, one child added, “I think Hoover Dam is beautiful, too.” My dad would have liked that answer. He would have liked it a lot.

Researching a City in Your State

You just read about different cities in the Southwest and the landforms in these areas. How do landforms and resources affect where cities are located? To answer questions like this one, you can learn more about the settlers who established a city. This can help you understand why cities are located in some places but not others.

To learn why an area attracted settlers, you can research a city's landforms and resources. This map of Minnesota shows the features near the city Minneapolis.

Researching Landforms in a City

Most states have several large cities. To learn why a city in your state is located where it is, you can research that city. First you need to choose a city to research. For example, if you live in Minnesota, you might choose to learn more about the city Minneapolis.

Landforms can affect where people establish cities. A valley might attract more settlers than a place with lots of mountains. A desert that is hot and dry might attract less settlers than a plain with healthy soil.

To find what landforms are near a city, first make a map of that state, like this one of Minnesota.

Place the city on it. Use the Internet or an atlas to research what landforms are near the city. Make a key for these landforms. For instance, in this map, triangles represent mountains, and wavy blue lines represent rivers. Mark the landforms on the map. Which landforms are near the city you chose?





Writing an Explanation About a City

Now it's time to observe the map you made. Based on your observations, write an explanation about why you think the city is located where it is. For instance, based on the Minnesota map, an explanation might be that people settled in Minneapolis because there is the Mississippi River running through it and people could use the water. There are also no mountains there, which makes it easy to access.

When you have written down your explanation, you can research the city's history. Use sources from the Internet or library to learn about why settlers lived there. You can also research the resources in that area that the settlers used. How did landforms and resources influence settlement?

The settlement of Minneapolis began in 1849, and it became a city in 1867. There is a waterfall there that helped the city flourish by providing power. With this resource, Minneapolis had a thriving flour and lumber industry that attracted people.

Revise your explanation based on your research, and then share it with a partner. Have your partner answer these questions: Does your evidence support your explanation? How could your explanation be improved?

Minneapolis is on flat land located near the Mississippi River and waterfalls. These features attracted settlers.



Freedom—or Death

Before Texas was a state, it was the home of American Indians. It was a colony of Spain and then Mexico. And then it was an independent nation. How did one battle help shape the history of Texas?

BOOM! BOOM! The walls of the Alamo shook as the cannons fired. The sound of rifles was heard nearby. The shouts of the men outside grew more desperate as the Mexican army advanced. No one expected to make it out of the room alive. Would this be the end of their dreams for Texas?

The date was March 6, 1836. For days, a small army of Texan soldiers had been defending the mission. It was their small army against thousands of Mexican soldiers. They had hoped that other Texans would join them, but no help arrived.

General Santa Anna's army was outside the walls. Mexican soldiers had circled the Alamo cutting off escape routes. His men flew a red flag that meant the general would show no mercy to the Texan rebels. No prisoners would be taken. This small group of Texans was determined to try to win their freedom. For Texas, they were willing to fight until death.

Texan soldiers fought the Mexican army at the Battle of the Alamo. They would fight until death for Texas.





Between Two Countries

For thousands of years, American Indians lived in Texas, hunting and farming in the hot, dry climate. In the 1500s, Spanish settlers arrived, and built missions and towns. Spain claimed Texas as part of its Mexican colony.

In the summer of 1821, an American named Stephen F. Austin rode his horse through Spanish Texas. The United States was not yet 50 years old, but already Americans were pushing west. Austin's father had permission from Spain to settle 300 families in Texas, and Stephen was looking for good land.

Stephen decided to build a settlement between the Colorado and Brazos rivers. Each family would receive a large amount of land for a very low cost.

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain. At first, Mexico was happy about the new settlers in Texas. To the Mexicans, U.S. settlers would be good citizens who would help protect Mexican land. To the new settlers, the colony was a chance for cheap land—and new lives.

Stephen F. Austin brought new settlers to Texas. Each family got more than 4,400 acres of land.

The Texas Revolution Begins

Within ten years, thousands of Americans had settled in Texas. They were used to living in the United States. They wanted more independence than they had in Mexico. So they demanded that Texas become a separate Mexican state.

Mexican leaders were worried. Too many Americans were moving to Texas and making demands. Mexican officials said that no more Americans could move to Texas. And Mexico refused to let Texas become a state.

Stephen F. Austin visited Mexico to smooth things between the Texans and the Mexican government. But officials threw him in jail. Some officials thought Austin wanted independence for Texas. Austin spent more than a year in jail. When he got out, he understood that Texans needed to fight Mexico for their freedom.

In October 1835, tensions between Texas and Mexico erupted into war. Austin led 400 soldiers to San Antonio to fight. The Texans won that small battle.

In February 1836, General Santa Anna brought his army to San Antonio. The Texans were ready for him. Brave fighters, including Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, and William Travis, stood up against Santa Anna's troops. For 13 days, the Texans and the Mexicans had a standoff at the Alamo.

During fighting, Texan soldiers dared Santa Anna to "come and take" their prized cannon. At the Alamo, this cannon remains as a reminder.



Freedom for Texas

Texans declared their independence on March 2. Texas became the Republic of Texas, a free nation. But Mexico would not let Texas go.

On March 6, the Mexican army attacked the Alamo again. The Texans put up a fierce fight, but the mission fell under Santa Anna's control. Only the women and children, and a few enslaved African Americans, survived the bloody fight. Stories from those who witnessed the battle enraged Americans. Many people now joined the Texan army to fight the Mexicans.

A few weeks later, a Texan general named Sam Houston defeated Santa Anna's army at the Battle of San Jacinto. Texas then declared victory. The rebels had won their independence from Mexico.

Today, the Alamo sits in downtown San Antonio, Texas. Much of the old mission is gone, but a small chapel still stands. Its walls show scars from the fighting. People from all over the world visit the Alamo. They listen to guides describe the fighting, and they learn how the Texans fought for their freedom.

For Texans, the battle at the Alamo was an important step in their battle for freedom. It led the way for Texas to become an independent nation, if only for a short time. ♦



Many flags have flown over Texas during its history. Above, you can see six of them, including the U.S., Mexican (green, white, and red) and Spanish (red, yellow, red) flags.