Remembering the Alamo: A Personal Journal

"Dawn at the Alamo". Painting by Henry McArdle

Overview: At about 5:30 on the morning of March 6, 1836, Mexican General Antonio López de Santa Anna ordered his soldiers to begin their assault on the Alamo. Once a church but now a fort, the Alamo was defended by about 180 Texas soldiers who were prepared to die for the cause of an independent Texas. This Mini-Q asks you to climb into the skin of one of the Alamo defenders and make five journal entries as events take place inside and outside the walls of the fort.

The Documents:

Document A: Santa Anna Crosses the Nueces
Document B: A Letter to the People of Texas and all Americans
Document C: Texas Declares Its Independence
Document D: Santa Anna’s Plan of Attack (map)
Document E: El Deguello: The Battle Song

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)
Hook Exercise: The Alamo

Directions: In this Mini-Q, you will examine several documents and then write five journal entries in the voice of a person who was actually at the Alamo. First, choose the person you wish to be from the collection of biographies on the following page. Then, on the sheet below, fill out the profile of this person using the bio information and your historical imagination.

Profile Sheet

Full name

Age at the time of the Alamo

Occupation

Place of birth

Marital status/spouse’s name (if married)

Children (if any)

Reason for being at the Alamo

Other personal information (be creative)
Hook Exercise: The Alamo (continued)

Alamo Biographies

Gregorio Esparza
Jose “Gregorio” Esparza was born in 1802, a short walk from the Alamo. Gregorio was a Tejano who was friendly with the Americans. Sometime in late February 1836, he managed to slip his wife and three children into the Alamo through a church window as General Santa Anna approached. Though local Tejanos were offered the opportunity to leave the Alamo before the battle, Gregorio decided to stay. His brother Francisco fought in Santa Anna’s army. Gregorio manned a cannon during the battle.

Daniel William Cloud
Daniel William Cloud was born in Logan County, Kentucky, in 1814. He was a lawyer who left for Illinois in search of clients. In Illinois he found that the “weather was too cold, the fees too low.” He then went south to Texas, where he encountered David Crockett and was asked to join the “Tennessee boys.” Daniel did so and fought with Crockett at the Alamo.

Andrew Duvalt
Andrew Duvalt, a plasterer by trade, was born in Ireland in 1804. He came to Texas by way of Missouri, settled in Gonzales, and became a member of the Gonzales Ranging Company of Mounted Volunteers. He was probably one of the 32 reinforcement troops from Gonzales who managed to make a dash into the Alamo at 3:00 A.M. on March 1, while it was under siege.

Almaron Dickinson
Almaron Dickinson was a 31-year-old artilleryman in the U.S. Army when he settled in Gonzales, Texas, with his young wife, Susanna, in 1831. They were a long way from their home and family in Pennsylvania. In 1835, Dickinson traveled to San Antonio in anticipation of Santa Anna’s march into Texas, and was appointed captain in charge of artillery. As Mexican troops approached the town, his wife and baby daughter, Angelina, joined him behind the walls of the Alamo. On the morning of March 6, 1836, amidst the cannon fire and gunshots, Dickinson ran to his wife and urged her to try to escape. Susanna and their baby were among the few survivors of the attack.

John
A man known only as John is believed to have been the African-American slave of a shop owner named Francis Desauque. John might have had some reading and writing skills, since he worked as a clerk in Desauque’s store. The two men entered the Alamo shortly before Santa Anna arrived in San Antonio. When Desauque was sent out to deliver messages and gather supplies, John remained to defend the fort. Though Desauque escaped the attack, he was later captured and executed.
Remembering the Alamo: A Personal Journal

In 1821 Mexico gained its independence from Spain. The constitution of this new country called for a federal system of government, which gave Texas much control over its own affairs. But government leaders far away in Mexico City now had a problem. Texas had very few people. With hopes of developing the region, the Mexican government decided to offer cheap land to new settlers from outside Mexico if they agreed to three things: live on the land for ten years; pledge loyalty to Mexico; and promise to accept the Catholic religion.

One foreigner who accepted this offer was a Virginia-born American named Stephen Austin. Austin was given large pieces of land on the condition that he bring in new settlers. By 1830 Austin had lured 10,000 Anglos into Texas to live alongside the 4,000 Tejanos who were already there. The Mexican government was pleased with the increase in population, but they knew they were taking a big gamble. The newcomers were mostly from the southern United States. They arrived with their Protestant religion and their American patriotism—and many arrived with slaves. Slavery was generally illegal in Mexico. Would these Anglos play by Mexico’s rules?

The question was put to the test in 1833 when Antonio López de Santa Anna was elected president of Mexico. He and his cabinet announced a new policy of centralization that put power in the hands of the central government in Mexico City. The federal system was gone. Texas would now be tightly controlled from the capital.

Texas colonists held conventions protesting Santa Anna’s actions. Stephen Austin went to Mexico City to argue for a return to a federal system, but was put in prison when his support of independence became known. Austin was eventually released and returned to Texas, but serious rebellion was now in the air. Mexican soldiers in Texas were attacked and driven back toward Mexico City.

Santa Anna was furious. He took over command of the Mexican army and set out to crush the rebellion himself. By February 1836 his troops had crossed the Nueces River and were moving quickly toward San Antonio. There, at a place called the Alamo—a mission turned into a fort—some Texas soldiers under the leadership of James Bowie and William Travis had decided to make a stand. Santa Anna claimed that most of the rebels holed up in the fort were outsiders who had no business fighting on behalf of Texas. He had a point. According to one historian, of the roughly 180 soldiers who manned the Alamo walls, only 29 were Texas-born, including eight Tejanos. The majority of rebels hailed from the United States, and 28 were from Europe.

But now it is the evening of February 21, 1836. A copy of a speech given by Santa Anna to his soldiers as they crossed the Nueces has just reached the Alamo. Your task is to read this speech (Document A) and the four documents that follow and to write five journal entries in the voice of the person you chose in the Hook exercise. You are not just remembering the Alamo, you’re living it. Buena suerte, amigos!
Background Essay Questions

1. In 1821, what was the problem Mexican leaders had with Texas? How did they deal with it?

2. Why did the Mexican government worry about the loyalty of the new settlers?

3. Who became leader of the Mexican government in 1833?

4. Why were Stephen Austin and other Texans unhappy with the new president?

5. Why did the Mexican army set out for Texas?

6. Which country supplied most of the soldiers who defended the Alamo? Why did this anger Santa Anna?

7. Define these terms:
   - federal system
   - Anglo
   - Tejano
   - centralization
   - mission

1821 – Mexico declares independence from Spain
1823 – Stephen Austin receives permission from Mexico to move 300 American settlers to Texas
1830 – Mexico limits U.S. immigration into Texas
1831 – First German immigrants to Texas
1835 – Texas revolution against Mexico heats up at Gonzalez
1836 – March 6: Fall of the Alamo
1836 – April 21: Battle of San Jacinto leads to Texas independence
1836-46 – Years of the Texas Republic
Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing

Understanding the Question

In your own words, describe your task for this Mini-Q.

Pre-Bucketing
Given the task, what is a simple way to bucket this writing exercise?
Document A

Source: A speech given by General Antonio López de Santa Anna to his troops, February 17, 1836.

Note: Santa Anna delivered this speech at the Nueces River, the border between Texas and the rest of Mexico, shortly before his army continued its march north toward San Antonio de Bejar and the Alamo.

Comrades in arms! Our most sacred duties have brought us to these uninhabited lands and demand our engaging in combat against a rabble of wretched adventurers to whom our authorities have innocently and unwisely lavished benefits that even Mexicans did not enjoy, and who have taken possession of this vast and fertile area, convinced that our own [problems in Mexico make] us incapable of defending our soil. Miserable wretches! Soon they will be aware of their folly!

Soldiers! Our comrades have been shamefully sacrificed at Anahuac, Goliad, and Bejar, and you are the ones destined to punish these murderers.

My friends! We will march as long as the interests of the Nation that we serve demand it. The pretenders to our acres of Texas land will soon learn to their sorrow that their reinforcements from New Orleans, Mobile, Boston, New York, and other ports of the North – whence they never should have come – are insignificant; and that Mexicans, generous by nature, will not leave unpunished [those who do] injury or discredit to their country, regardless of who the aggressors may be.

Document Analysis
1. Who gave this speech? Where and when did he give it?

2. According to the speaker, who were the “miserable wretches”? What were two of the things that they did to Mexico?

3. According to the speaker, what mistake was made by Mexican officials?

4. Many of the assembled soldiers listening to this speech were ordinary men recruited from the area around Saltillo in northern Mexico. How do you think they would have responded to this speech?

Writing Journal Entry #1: Date your entry “Evening, February 20, 1836.” (It took three days for a copy of Santa Anna’s speech to travel the 80 miles by horseback from the Nueces River to the Alamo.) Santa Anna’s words certainly get your attention, along with everyone else’s. And the Mexican army is only a few days’ march away! You practically run to your journal.
Commandancy of the Alamo — Bejar, Fby 24th 1836 —
To the People of Texas & all Americans in the world —

Fellow citizens and compatriots — I am besieged by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna — I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man — The enemy has demanded a surrender, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword. I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & and our flag still waves proudly from the walls — I shall never surrender or retreat…. I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch — The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country —

Victory or Death
William Barrett Travis
Lt. Col. comdt

P.S. The Lord is on our side — When the enemy appeared in sight we had not three bushels of corn — We have since found in deserted houses 80 or 90 bushels & got into the walls 20 or 30 head of beeves—Travis

Document Analysis
1. Who was William Travis?

2. Who did Colonel Travis hope would read this letter?

3. What reasons might Travis have had for writing this letter?

4. What effect might this letter have had on the people in the Alamo once it became known?

Writing Journal Entry #2: Date your entry “Evening, February 24, 1836.” It is now four days after your first entry. Clearly, Santa Anna’s army has arrived. Deep down, how do you feel about Travis’s letter to the world? Are you with him all the way? Are you having any second thoughts?
We, therefore, the delegates ... of the people of Texas, in solemn convention assembled ... do hereby resolve and declare, that our political connection with the Mexican nation has forever ended, and that the people of Texas do now constitute a free, Sovereign, and independent republic, and are fully invested with all the rights and attributes which properly belong to Independent nations.

Note: The Town of Washington refers to the town of Washington-on-the-Brazos, some 80 miles northeast of the Alamo.

Document Analysis
1. Who, according to the authors of this document, is giving them the power to declare independence?

2. What do you think might have been the opinion of each of the following people to this Texas Declaration of Independence?
   - A Tejano (Texas-born Mexican) living in San Antonio but not volunteering to defend the Alamo
   - Anglo soldiers defending the Alamo
   - Mexican General Santa Anna

Writing Journal Entry #3: Date your entry “March 4, 1836.” It has taken two days for a copy of the Declaration to make its way to the Alamo. Yesterday, the number of Mexican troops surrounding the Alamo walls increased dramatically. The ground shakes as Mexican artillery pounds the Alamo’s two-feet-thick walls. You huddle with your journal, lift your pen, and write.
**Document D**

**Source:** Map created from various sources.

**Note:** As dawn broke on the morning of March 5, the people in the Alamo could see that the growing Mexican forces had moved their cannons within 200 yards of the fort. That evening, Colonel Travis summoned all of his fighters to the open plaza. He told them that there was no longer any hope of relief from the outside and that their choice was to attempt escape or stay and fight to the end.

![The Alamo, March 5, 1836]

A and B: Generals Cos and Duque  
Combined –700 troops  
C: Colonel Romero  
300 troops  
D: Colonel Morales  
100 troops  
E: General Santa Anna  
400 troops

**Note:** General Sesma had 300 cavalry (positioned behind the lines to catch Mexican deserters and Alamo escapees)

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**Document Analysis**

1. How many troops did Santa Anna employ for his attack on the Alamo?

2. What was Santa Anna’s strategy of attack?

3. What were the indications that an all-out assault on the Alamo was about to happen?

4. What decision did everyone at the Alamo have to face?

**Writing Journal Entry #4:** Date your entry “10:00 P.M., March 5, 1836.” You have just left Colonel Travis and your fellow Alamo fighters. All firing outside the walls has ceased. The guns are quiet. You reach under your blanket and pull out your journal. Refer to details in the map as you write.
March 6, 1836
Light began to appear on the horizon, the beautiful dawn would soon let herself be seen ... a bugle call to attention was the agreed signal and we soon heard that terrible bugle call of death, which stirred our hearts, altered our expressions, and aroused us suddenly from our painful meditations.... A trumpeter ... was the one who inspired us to scorn life and welcome death.


Up to the very hour of the attack the Mexicans maintained the strictest silence. But when the hour for the assault had arrived, a shout went up; then a single bugle note, followed by silence again except for the rush and tramp of soldiers.... By this time the Mexican bands at the southwest battery had struck up the notes of the dreadful deguello, and then, all was confusion, for the Texans were up and at their posts, ready for their last desperate fight.

Note: In Spanish, deguello means "cut the throat." The song was traditionally played by the Spanish army, and now by Santa Anna, to let the enemy know that they were about to be destroyed without mercy. That is, there would be no prisoners.

Document Analysis
1. What was El Deguello?

2. What did the music signify when it was played?

3. What did General Santa Anna hope to achieve by playing the song?

Writing Journal Entry #5: Date your entry, "Dawn, March 6, 1836." Before rushing to your battle station on the north wall, a force bigger than yourself causes you to reach for your journal to write one last entry. The sounds of exploding shells mix with the fateful music.
Bucketing – Getting Ready to Write

Bucketing

Look over all the documents and organize them into your final buckets. Write labels under each bucket and place the letters of the documents in the buckets where they belong. Remember, each bucket will become a diary entry.

Further Organization of Your Diary

On the five lines below, write the time and date of each of the entries to be made in your diary. Dates should be specific. The time can be exact or more general, such as morning or evening.

Entry #1: __________________________________________
Entry #2: __________________________________________
Entry #3: __________________________________________
Entry #4: __________________________________________
Entry #5: __________________________________________
From Thesis to Essay Writing

Mini-Q Journal Outline Guide

Directions: List three details from each document that will go into your journal entry.

Journal Entry #1
Evening, February 20, 1836
1. 
2. 
3. 

Journal Entry #2
Evening, February 24, '36
1. 
2. 
3. 

Journal Entry #3
4:00 P.M., March 4, '36
1. 
2. 
3. 

Journal Entry #4
Evening, March 5, 1836
1. 
2. 
3. 

Journal Entry #5
5 o’clock morn, March 6, '36
1. 
2. 
3.