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7th Grade Social Studies

U.S. History from the Revolution to Reconstruction

Class 110— Close Reading

February 17, 2020

**Focus**: answer the following questions based on a school night on a sheet of paper:

1. On average, what time do you go to sleep?
2. On average, what time do you wake up?
3. On average, how many hours of sleep do you get?

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**Student Objectives**:

1. I will close read and answer questions about middle/high schoolers sleep patterns.
2. I will draft a persuasive argument.

**Homework:**

-Read and outline Chapter 11, Section 4 pgs. 364-369 (due 2/18)

-Chapter 11 Map Quiz Thursday 2/20

-Chapter 11 Test Friday 2/21

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7th Grade Social Studies

U.S. History from the Revolution to Reconstruction

Class 111— The Gold Rush

February 18, 2020

**Focus**: Analyze the following quote and answer the this question. What was the reason many individuals went to the California gold fields? “You know, dearest, I do not want to be separated from you—but we have been struggling against the advances of poverty, and if by our separation a few months can rid ourselves of all that for the future and make ourselves, by a few months deprivation of each other’s society, comfortable in money matters, how much better it will be, that to put an end to our prospects and doom ourselves, to steady and profitless storekeeping till Creditors come in and take all, merely because it is hard and trying to be apart and at a long distance for some months.”

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**Student Objectives**:

1. I will analyze the importance of the Gadsden Purchase.

2. I will analyze Mexican-American relations in the new land won by the United States.

3. I will identify the importance of the California Gold Rush.

**Homework:**

-Chapter 11 Map Quiz Thursday 2/20

-Chapter 11 Test Friday 2/21

**Handouts**:

none

I. Gadsden Purchase

II. Mexican-American Relations

III. The Gold Rush

**Key terms/ideas/ people/places**:

49ers Sutter’s Mill James Marshall Lynch Law Vigilante

Gadsden Purchase

**By the end of class today, I will be able to answer the following**:

**Who** discovered gold?

**Why** did many travel to California? Did they plan to return?

**Where** was gold discovered?

Notes

Class 111— The Gold Rush

February 18, 2020

**Gadsden Purchase:**

* 1853 last piece of Manifest Destiny
* Paid $10 million dollars for Mexico
* Bought for Rail Road

**Gold Rush**:

* Gold Discovered at Sutter’s Mill, near present day Sacramento
  + Neither Sutter nor James Marshall (the man who originally finds the gold) get rich. In fact, Marshall is so poor that there was a newspaper add taking up a collection to support the man in his old age.
* “Seen the elephant”
  + the unknown, the adventure-head to CA
* People who go looking for gold are called:
  + Prospectors
  + 49ers
  + Argonauts
* Many people go to get out of debt and then plan on returning-the question always becomes when does one have enough to return home
* Vigilante justice appears-“lynch law”
  + Quick in execution, democratic, and inexpensive
    - Man steals horse, convicted-25 lashes

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7th Grade Social Studies

U.S. History from the Revolution to Reconstruction

Class 112— The Donner Party

February 19, 2020

**Focus**: Why, in traveling west, was timing everything?

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**Student Objectives**:

1. I will analyze the trek of the Donner Party and the difficulty of determining fact from fiction.

**Homework:**

-Chapter 11 Map Quiz Thursday 2/20

-Chapter 11 Test Friday 2/21

**Handouts**:

10 Things you Should Know About the Donner Party

I. Background on Donner Party

II. What happened?

**Key terms/ideas/ people/places**:

Donner Party Donner Pass Sierra Nevada

**By the end of class today, I will be able to answer the following**:

Why is there so much myth surrounding the Donner Party?

Notes

Class 112— The Donner Party

February 19, 2020

Donner Party:

* left Independence in early May 1846
* Get stuck in the Sierra Nevada
* Cannibalism
* Of roughly the 81 people, only half survived

The Donner Party started its trip dangerously late in the pioneer season.

Travel on the California Trail followed a tight schedule. Emigrants needed to head west late enough in the spring for there to be grass available for their pack animals, but also early enough so they could cross the treacherous western mountain passes before winter. The sweet spot for a departure was usually sometime in mid to late-April, yet for unknown reasons, the core of what became the Donner Party didn’t leave their jumping-off point at Independence, Missouri until May 12. They were the last major pioneer train of 1846, and their late start left them with very little margin for error. “I am beginning to feel alarmed at the tardiness of our movements,” one of the emigrants wrote, “and fearful that winter will find us in the snowy mountains of California.”

They fell behind schedule after taking an untested shortcut.

After reaching Wyoming, most California-bound pioneers followed a route that swooped north through Idaho before turning south and moving across Nevada. In 1846, however, a dishonest guidebook author named Lansford Hastings was promoting a straighter and supposedly quicker path that cut through the Wasatch Mountains and across the Salt Lake Desert. There was just one problem: no one had ever traveled this “Hastings Cutoff” with wagons, not even Hastings himself. Despite the obvious risks—and against the warnings of James Clyman, an experienced mountain man—the 20 Donner Party wagons elected to break off from the usual route and gamble on Hastings’ back road. The decision proved disastrous. The emigrants were forced to blaze much of the trail themselves by cutting down trees, and they nearly died of thirst during a five-day crossing of the salt desert. Rather than saving them time, Hasting’s “shortcut” ended up adding nearly a month to the Donner Party’s journey.

The emigrants lost a race against the weather by just a few days.

Despite the Hastings Cutoff debacle, most of the Donner Party still managed to reach the slopes of the Sierra Nevada by early November 1846. Only a scant hundred miles remained in their trek, but before the pioneers had a chance to drive their wagons through the mountains, an early blizzard blanketed the Sierras in several feet of snow. Mountain passes that were navigable just a day earlier soon transformed into icy roadblocks, forcing the Donner Party to retreat to nearby Truckee Lake and wait out the winter in ramshackle tents and cabins. Much of the group’s supplies and livestock had already been lost on the trail, and it wasn’t long before the first settlers began to perish from starvation.

The majority of the Donner Party emigrants were children.

Like most pioneer trains, the Donner Party was largely made up of family wagons packed with young children and adolescents. Of the 81 people who became stranded at Truckee Lake, more than half were younger than 18 years old, and six were infants. Children also made up the vast majority of the Donner’s Party’s eventual survivors. One of them, one-year-old Isabella Breen, would go on to live until 1935.

A few pioneers managed to hike to safety.

On December 16, 1846, more than a month after they became snowbound, 15 of the strongest members of the Donner Party strapped on makeshift snowshoes and tried to walk out of the mountains to find help. After wandering the frozen landscape for several days, they were left starving and on the verge of collapse. The hikers resigned themselves to cannibalism and considered drawing lots for a human sacrifice or even having two of the men square off in a duel. Several members of the party soon died naturally, however, so the survivors roasted and consumed their corpses. The gruesome meat gave them the energy they required, and following a month of walking, seven of the original 15 made it to a ranch in California and helped organize rescue efforts. Historians would later dub their desperate hike “The Forlorn Hope.”

A Donner Party member murdered two people for use as food.

During the “Forlorn Hope” expedition, the hiking party included a pair of Indians named Salvador and Luis, both of whom had joined up with the Donner emigrants shortly before they became snowbound. The natives were the only members of the group who refused to engage in cannibalism, and they later ran off out of fear that they might be murdered once the others ran out of meat. When the duo was found days later, exhausted and lying in the snow, an emigrant named William Foster shot both of them in the head. The Indians were then butchered and eaten by the hikers. It was the only time during the entire winter that people were murdered for use as food.

Not all of the emigrants engaged in cannibalism.

As their supplies dwindled, the Donner emigrants stranded at Truckee Lake resorted to eating increasingly grotesque meals. They slaughtered their pack animals, cooked their dogs, gnawed on leftover bones and even boiled the animal hide roofs of their cabins into a foul paste. Several people died from malnutrition, but the rest managed to subsist on morsels of boiled leather and tree bark until rescue parties arrived in February and March 1847. Not all of the settlers were strong enough to escape, however, and those left behind were forced to cannibalize the frozen corpses of their comrades while waiting for further help. All told, roughly half of the Donner Party’s survivors eventually resorted to eating human flesh.

The rescue process took over two months.

Of the five months the Donner Party spent trapped in the mountains, nearly half of it took place after they had already been located by rescuers. The first relief parties reached the settlers in February 1846, but since pack animals were unable to navigate the deep snowdrifts, they only brought whatever food and supplies they could carry. By then, many of the emigrants were too weak to travel, and several died while trying to walk out of the mountains. Four relief teams and more than two-and-a-half months were eventually required to shepherd all the Donner Party survivors back to civilization. The last to be rescued was Lewis Keseberg, a Prussian pioneer who was found in April 1847, supposedly half-mad and surrounded by the cannibalized bodies of his former companions. Keseberg was later accused of having murdered the other emigrants for use as food, but the charges were never proven.

One rescuer singlehandedly led nine survivors out of the mountains.

Perhaps the most famous of the Donner Party’s saviors was John Stark, a burly California settler who took part in the third relief party. In early March 1847, he and two other rescuers stumbled upon 11 emigrants, mostly kids, who been left in the mountains by an earlier relief group. The two other rescuers each grabbed a single child and started hoofing it back down the slope, but Stark was unwilling to leave anyone behind. Instead, he rallied the weary adults, gathered the rest of the children and began guiding the group singlehandedly. Most of the kids were too weak to walk, so Stark took to carrying two of them at a time for a few yards, then setting them down in the snow and going back for others. He continued the grueling process all the way down the mountain, and eventually led all nine of his charges to safety. Speaking of the incident years later, one of the survivors credited her rescue to “nobody but God and Stark and the Virgin Mary.”

Only two families made it through the ordeal intact.

Of the 81 pioneers who began the Donner Party’s horrific winter in the Sierra Nevada, only 45 managed to walk out alive. The ordeal proved particularly costly for the group’s 15 solo travelers, all but two of whom died, but it also took a tragic toll on the families. George and Jacob Donner, both of their wives and four of their children all perished. Pioneer William Eddy, meanwhile, lost his wife and his two kids. Nearly a dozen families had made up Donner wagon train, but only two—the Reeds and the Breens—managed to arrive in California without suffering a single death.

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7th Grade Social Studies

U.S. History from the Revolution to Reconstruction

Class 113— Map Quiz and Davy Crockett’s Death

February 20, 2020

**Focus**: Review your map.

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**Student Objectives**:

1. I will complete my map quiz to the best of my ability.

2. I will analyze primary and secondary sources to determine the truth about an historical event.

**Homework:**

-Chapter 11 Test Friday 2/21

**Handouts**:

Death of Davy Crockett

I. Map Quiz

II. Davy Crockett’s Death

**Key terms/ideas/ people/places**:

Davy Crockett Santa Anna Alamo

Jòse Enrique de la Peña Memoir George M. Dolson Letter

Ramòn Martìnez Caro

**By the end of class today, I will be able to answer the following**:

**How** did Davy Crockett die?

# David Crockett’s Mysterious Death

On March 6, 1836, the famous siege at the Alamo came to both a sad and historical end for those fighting to achieve Texan independence. More than a thousand Mexican troops under the command of General Antonio López de Santa Anna stormed the old Spanish mission killing all 180 defenders. Amongst those that lay among the deceased were the famous knife fighter, Jim Bowie, the commander of the garrison, William Travis, and the famed frontiersman David Crockett. Historians have written countless pages about this famous siege, Hollywood has embraced the fallen heroes in numerous films, and the battle cry “Remember the Alamo!” is still taught to school children today. Yet, with all that has been written about the Alamo in the past 175 years there is still major controversy surrounding that day—how exactly did the most famous defender, Davy Crockett, meet his demise? Did Crockett die in the melee of battle, or did he survive the carnage only to be executed? Historians have tried to find facts supporting both theories, but as author Stephen Harrigan states, “it is not an easy thing to get the facts straight when there are almost no straight facts, when the real story has been buried in so many layers of myth and countermyth as to be nearly irretrievable.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Historian Michael Lind attempts to clarify the problem of Crockett’s death by breaking down the controversy into two theories: the corroboration (cor·rob·o·ra·tion) theory and the contamination theory. According to Lind, the corroboration theory “holds that all of the accounts of Crockett’s execution reflect a real event; any differences among them can be attributed to confusion and the vagaries of memory.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Thus, those that believe in the corroboration theory believe Crockett was indeed executed, even though there are different versions of the same event.

In contrast to the corroboration theory, the contamination theory “holds that the story of Crockett’s execution was an erroneous rumor, which made its way into Texan and American newspapers and thence into memoirs written later by both North Americans and Mexicans.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Thus, historians are divided amongst those that believe Crockett died during the fighting (the contamination theory) and those that argue that Crockett was captured along with five or six others, and then sentenced to death by Santa Anna (the corroboration theory). There is a third theory, but it is safe to say that it is merely folklore, as it has Crockett surviving the battle and being forced to work as a slave in a Mexican mine.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The piece of evidence most used by historians to attempt to find the truth about Crockett’s death is the manuscript of Jòse Enrique de la Peña (Appendix A). Professor James E. Crisp notes that the de la Peña manuscript is actually two pieces. The first piece is de la Peña’s diary (this section of the manuscript does not mention Crockett’s name). De la Peña then took his diary and created an “extended narrative supplemented with information…gathered after the [battle].”[[5]](#footnote-5) However even with the manuscript identified as two separate pieces, there are still three possible flaws surrounding de la Peña’s work. First and foremost, historians question whether or not de la Peña’s manuscript could be a forgery. Secondly, if the work is real, is de la Peña telling the truth? And lastly, did de la Peña even know who David Crockett was?[[6]](#footnote-6)

There are three reasons why some historians believe de la Peña’s manuscript to be a forgery. These historians question the content of the manuscript and how some of the facts do not appear to be entirely accurate. Secondly, de la Peña’s manuscript was originally written in Spanish and had to be translated into English. Historians question the accuracy and quality of the translation. And lastly, since the manuscript appears to be both a diary and a memoir, historians question the very nature of the document.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In 2000, David B. Gracy II, professor and director of the Center for the Cultural Record and Graduate School of Library and Science at the University of Texas at Austin, undertook the task of validating whether or not the de la Peña manuscript was real or was a forgery. Here were his findings:

(1) The physical characteristics of the Peña document conform to the characteristics known and expected of documents of the period of the 1830s and 1840s in which the manuscript purportedly was written.

(2) No physical characteristic of paper, ink, and condition of the document alone, and especially none of them in combination, point to the Peña document being a twentieth-century forgery of an item dating from the period of the 1830s and 1840s.

(3) Neither does the penmanship exhibit signs of forgery….More importantly the characteristics of the penmanship at critical points in the document correspond to those exhibited in unquestioned examples of Peña’s handwriting.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Even with Gracy’s use of modern science to validate the authenticity of de la Peña’s manuscript, some historians are still skeptical that it is actually not a forgery. De la Peña’s manuscript is written in two different types of handwriting. (Gracy acknowledges this fact but counters it by pointing out that creating two different types of handwriting only makes the creation of the forgery more complex and would draw greater scrutiny to the document being forged).[[9]](#footnote-9) Furthermore, forging historical documents is not all that uncommon. Forgers have created such documents as an Adolf Hitler diary and even letters linking John F. Kennedy to Marilyn Monroe and the mafia.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The de la Peña manuscript is not the only piece of evidence that tells the story of Crockett’s execution. George M. Dolson (Appendix B), a Texan officer and interpreter at a prisoner-of-war camp for Mexican soldiers, also contributes to the belief that Crockett was executed. Dolson was asked to translate a statement from a Mexican officer that had witnessed the executions ordered by Santa Anna at the Alamo. Historian James E. Crisp argues that “The [Mexican] officer described Crockett’s death, giving details of the scene that were confirmed the following year when Santa Anna’s personal secretary, Ramòn Martìnez Caro (Appendix C), published an account of the incident….”[[11]](#footnote-11) (Even though the Caro account corroborates with Dolson’s letter, Caro does not mention any names of those that were executed). Dolson then wrote a letter to his brother in which he re-told the story Dolson had translated for the Mexican soldier.

Other contemporary accounts lead historians down a different path in terms of finding the truth of Crockett’s death. Susannah Dickinson, a widow of one of the defenders, and Joe, Travis’s slave, both stated they saw Crockett’s body where it had fallen in combat. In fact, none of the contemporary accounts coming out of Texas identified Crockett as one of the executed. Instead, many of the accounts actually had Travis or Bowie or both men committing suicide after they believed the battle to be lost. As months passed from the actual date of the Alamo, the accounts began to state that either Crockett, Bowie, Travis, or all three were actually executed by Santa Anna. The *New Orleans True American* printed the following story from Andrew Briscoe, a Texas settler, a few weeks after the battle, “Colonels James Bowie and Crockett were among the slain; the first was murdered in his bed in which he had been confined by sickness. The later [sic] fell fighting like a tiger.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Stephen Harrigan was correct, the truth about David Crockett is indeed buried in myth. Was the famed frontiersman executed or did he go out “fighting like a tiger?” There is certainly evidence supporting both stories, and yet the evidence still leaves doubt in historians’ minds as they continue to debate the demise of the “king of the wild frontier.”

(Appendix A)

Jòse Enrique de la Peña Memoir

Some seven men had survived the gener-al carnage and, under the protection of General Castrillon, they were brought before Santa Anna. Among them was one of great stature, well proportioned, with regular features, in whose face there was the imprint of adversity,b ut in whom one also noticed a degree of resignation and nobility that did him honor. He was the naturalist David Crockett, well known in North America for his unusual adven-tures, who had undertaken to explore the country and who, finding himself in Bejar at the very moment of surprise, had taken refuge in the Alamo, fearing that his status as a foreigner might not be respected. Santa Anna answered Castrillon's inter-vention in Crockett's behalf with a gesture of indignation and, addressing himself to the sappers, the troops closest to him, ordered his execution. The commanders and officers were outraged at this action and did not support the order, hoping that once the fury of the moment had blown over these men would be spared; but sev-eral officers who were around the presi-dent and who, perhaps, had not been pre-sent during the moment of danger, became noteworthy by an infamous deed, surpassing the soldiers in cruelty. They thrust themselves forward, in order to flat-ter their commander, and with swords in hand, fell upon these unfortunate, defenseless men just as a tiger leaps upon his prey. Though tortured before they were killed, these unfortunates died with-out complaining and without humiliating themselves before their torturers. It was rumored that General Santa Anna was one of them; I will not bear witness to this, for, though present, I turned away horrified in order not to witness such a barbarous scene.

(Appendix B)

George M. Dolson Letter

I am employed a considerable part of my time in interpreting Spanish for Colonel James Morgan,14 commander of this station. He sent for me yesterday and told me there was a communication of importance from one of Santa Anna's officers, which he wished me to interpret; accordingly the officer of the day was dispatched for the Mexican officer, who came in in a few minutes, and the Colonel's quarters were vacated of all, save us three. The Mexican was then requested to proceed with the statement ac-cording to promise; and he said he could give a true and correct account of the proceedings of Santa Anna towards the prisoners who remained alive at the taking of the Alamo. This shows the fate of Colonel Crockett and his five brave companions-there have been many tales told, and many suggestions made, as to the fate of these patriotic men; but the following may be relied on, being from an individual who was an eye witness to the whole proceedings. The Colonel has taken the whole in writing, with the officer'sn ame attached to it, which he observedt o him, if he had the least delicacy, he might omit, but he said he had not and was willing to be qualified to it in the presence of his God, and General Santa Anna, too, if necessary. He states that on the morning the Alamo was captured, between the hours of five and six o'clock, General Castrillon, who fell at the battle of San Ja-cinto, entered the back room of the Alamo, and there found Crockett and five other Americans, who had defended it until defence was useless; they appeared very much agitated when the Mexican soldiers undertook to rush in after their General, but the humane General ordered his men to keep out, and, plac-ing his hand on one breast, said, "here is a hand and a heart to protect you; come with me to the General-in Chief, and you shall be saved." Such redeeming traits, while they ennoble in our es-timation this worthy officer, yet serve to show in a more heinous light the damning atrocities of the chief. The brave but unfortu-nate men were marched to the tent of Santa Anna. Colonel Crockett was in the rear, had his arms folded, and appeared bold as the lion as he passed my informant (Almonte.) Santa Anna's interpreter knew Colonel Crockett, and said to my in-formant," the one behind is the famous Crockett."W hen brought in the presence of Santa Anna, Castrillon said to him, "Santa Anna, the august, I deliver up to you six brave prisoners of war." Santa Anna replied, "who has given you orders to take prisoners, I do not want to see those men living-shoot them." As the monster uttered these words each officer turned his face the other way, and the hell-hounds of the tyrant despatched the six in his presence, and within six feet of his person. Such an act I consider murder of the blackest kind.

Appendix C

Ramòn Martìnez Caro

Among the 183 killed there were five who were discovered by General Castrillon hiding after the assault. He took them immediately to the presence of His Excellency who had come up by this time. When he presented the prisoners he was severely reprimanded for not having killed them on the spot, after which he turned his back upon Castrillon while the soldiers stepped out of their ranks and set upon the prisoners until they were all killed. . . . We all witnessed this outrage which humanity condemns but which was committed as described. This is a cruel truth, but I cannot omit it.

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7th Grade Social Studies

U.S. History from the Revolution to Reconstruction

Class 114—Test

February 21, 2020

**Homework**:

-Read and take notes on Chapter 12, Section 1 pgs. 384-389 (due 2/24)

-Read and take notes on Chapter 12, Section 2 pgs. 390-395 (due 2/25)

-Read and take notes on Chapter 12, Section 3 pgs. 396-401 (due 2/26)

-Read and take notes on Chapter 12, Section 4 pgs. 402-405 (due 2/27)

-Chapter 12 Test Friday 2/28

1. Stephen Harrigan, "Davy Crockett and the Alamo: Thoughts on Truth, Fiction, and Smelling a Rat," *The Magazine of Western History* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 58-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michael Lind, "The Death of David Crockett," *The Wilson Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thomas Lawrence Connelly, "Did David Crockett Surrender at the Alamo? A Contemporary Letter," *The Journal of Southern History* 26, no. 3 (August 1960): 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. David B. Gracy II, "'Just as I have Written It': A Study of the Authenticity of the Manuscript of Jose Enrique de la Pena," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 105, no. 2 (October 2001): 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Lind, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gracy II, 256-257. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Ibid.,* 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Ibid*., 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Ibid*., 258-259. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. James E Crisp, "Crockett Controversy Continues." *The Wilson Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Lind, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)