

# ... I call on you in the name of Liberty

## ★ LESSON ONE ★

**G**iven the public's fascination with all things related to the Alamo, few are held in higher esteem than an emotion-packed letter written on February 24, 1836, by the 26-year-old commander of the Alamo, William Barret Travis. Only 11 sentences long, the document is a masterpiece of American patriotism and propaganda and its words have long inspired generations of Texans.

The letter is more than a plea for help. It reflects its author and his times. Making sense of historical documents, especially those written in the early 19th century, is a challenge for any student regardless of learning style and ability. To meet this challenge, students will utilize the DESCRIBE primary source analysis strategy developed by the faculty of Dominican University School of Education, River Forest, Illinois.

### OBJECTIVE

- ★ Students will analyze the Travis letter using the **DESCRIBE** strategy.
- ★ Students will be able to discuss and draw conclusions about the purpose and meaning of the letter.
- ★ Students will be able to explain larger themes addressed in the letter and how these themes reflected and influenced Texas and American history.

### TEKS

7.1C, 7.3B, 7.3C, 7.21B, 7.21B, 7.21D, 7.21F, 7.22A, 7.22B, 7.22D

### RESOURCES

- ★ Copy of the William B. Travis, February 24, 1836 letter and transcript
- ★ **DESCRIBE** strategy poster
- ★ **DESCRIBE** strategy instructions
- ★ **DESCRIBE** graphic organizer
- ★ Pens and pencils

## WARM UP

Ask students if they've ever read an article in a magazine or other publication that inspired or motivated them in some way. Call on volunteers to share and ask them how the article influenced their thinking and behavior. Ask them if they can recall any historical documents or speeches that have inspired people to respond in a certain way (Martin Luther King Jr.'s, "I Have A Dream" speech is one example). Tell students they will be reading and analyzing arguably the most famous letter in Texas history to learn why its words have endured the test of time.

## ACTIVITY STEPS

1. Review with students the circumstances leading up to the siege of the Alamo.
2. Provide students with an image of Travis' original letter in hard copy or projected on a screen. Explain that this letter was the first of several letters written by Travis during the siege.
3. Read the letter aloud slowly to the class as the students follow silently.
4. Call on several students to give their initial impressions.
5. Next, tell students they are going to analyze the letter to see if there are perhaps other messages Travis was conveying to his audience.
6. Distribute copies of the Travis letter transcript and the **DESCRIBE** graphic organizer to each student.
7. Divide the letter into 3 sections. Make sure students identify the sections on their copies. (See Teacher Copy of the Travis letter **DESCRIBE** strategy for suggestion. You can divide the letter in any number of combinations, but for this strategy, three would be best.)
8. Display a copy of the **DESCRIBE** strategy poster to the class. Go over each letter in the **DESCRIBE** acronym with students to help them understand each step of the process.
9. Use the **DESCRIBE** strategy teacher instructions provided to guide students through the analysis process. You will need to model the strategy aloud using Section I of the letter.
10. Once you've modeled Section I, have the students analyze Section II on their own (or you may choose to put them in pairs).
11. When students have completed their analyses, discuss their findings.
12. Ask students to complete the "wrap up" questions in the next section.

## WRAP UP QUESTIONS

- ★ From your analysis, what other message is Travis trying to convey other than a call for reinforcements?
- ★ What does this letter tell us about the personality and character of William B. Travis?
- ★ How does this letter help us better understand the issues surrounding the Texas Revolution?
- ★ In your opinion, what point is Travis trying to make in addressing the letter to "... All Americans in the world"?
- ★ If Travis had given you this letter to review and critique before it was dispatched by courier, what, if any, changes would you recommend to him? How would your changes affect people differently from the original?
- ★ In your opinion, does this letter deserve to be ranked among the most important in Texas and American history? Why or why not?

## EXTENSION

Ask students to write a response to the Travis letter. Their response should include an explanation of the circumstances at Goliad and Gonzales and the challenges of providing reinforcements to the Alamo.

# The Travis Letter

Commandancy of the Alamo  
Bejar, Feby. 24th. 1836 —

To the People of Texas &  
all Americans in the world —

Fellow citizens & 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 at  
discretion, otherwise, the garrison  
are to be put to the sword, if  
the fort is taken — I have answered  
the demand with a cannon  
shot, & our flag still waves  
proudly from the walls — I  
shall never surrender or retreat.

Then, 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 deter-  
mined 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 Basset 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 and got into  
the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves —

*Travis*

# The Travis Letter

Commandancy of the Alamo  
Bejar, Feby. 24th. 1836 —

## SECTION I

To the People of Texas &  
all Americans in the world —

Fellow citizens & 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 at  
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are to be put to the sword, if  
the fort is taken — I have answered  
the demand with a cannon  
shot, & our flag still waves  
proudly from the walls — I  
shall never surrender or retreat.

## SECTION II

Then, 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  
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country — Victory or Death.

*William Basset Travis.*  
*Lt. Col. comdt*

## SECTION III

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 and got into  
the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves —

*Travis*

# DESCRIBE

## GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

### 2 Concept/Unit

### 1 Title and description of document

### 3 Unique features

### New vocabulary

### 4 Read - Ask a question - Answer

a.

b.

c.

### 5 Bring it all together

# DESCRIBE

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## ★ PRIMARY SOURCE STRATEGY ★

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**D**escribe the document

**E**xplain the concept

**S**tate the unit

**C**omb for *unique* features and *new* vocabulary

**R**ead, and as you read ask yourself, “what is this about?”

**I**ndicate your responses in the appropriate box

**B**ring it all together

**E**xamine findings

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# ★ TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS ★

## Graphic Organizer

### **Describe the document.**

[Box 1] Include title, audience, date of letter, physical characteristics, etc.

### **Explain the event.**

[Box 2] Siege of the Alamo

### **State the unit.**

[Box 2] The Texas Revolution

### **Comb through the document for unique features and new vocabulary.**

[Box 3] Use the margins for notes and underline vocabulary. Model skimming through the document, thinking aloud to demonstrate your thought process. As students follow along, you may want to stop every few minutes to encourage discussion and annotate the document accordingly. Using context clues, have students discuss possible definitions of vocabulary words and discuss margin notes to clarify meaning. Summarize the information.

### **Read and ask yourself, “What is this paragraph/section about?”**

Read aloud the first section of the letter and model answering the question.

### **Indicate responses in the appropriate box.**

[Box 4, SECTION A] Write your response.

[Box 4, SECTIONS B & C] Students will complete on their own.

### **Bring it all together.**

[Box 5] When students have finished processing the entire document, together develop a list of statements summarizing the main ideas and write them down.

### **Examine findings.**

Review the entire graphic organizer with the class, asking questions and requesting further information.



not all departed - the success of  
being re-imposed is long &  
with no doubt increase to three or  
four thousand in four or five days  
if this call is rejected, I am not  
wondering to obtain myself as long as  
possible & this takes a soldier  
who never gets to bed & is that it  
his own honor & that of his  
country -

Secretary of War  
William Bradford Tracy  
St. Col. Comd

When the money offered in 1811  
we had not three hundred of course -  
we have since found in several  
places 80 or 90 hundred - got into  
the 1814 20 or 30 had 1/2 of course -  
I think

There is some one with a plan, very long  
concerns some, it will do, the other must  
have been an abject, made before the plan. He was  
that of the same, when I got nothing, in all  
the country, in 1811  
when I got the no  
but 100, advanced to  
the 1812, not yet into time  
at all, every

Col. Thomas to the the Federal  
under the command of Gen. Lane  
and should not be done  
nothing done right the  
as the Army, when in  
Congress in 1811, made  
but I hope that Army  
our wide branches of  
nothing done right the  
as the Army, when in  
Congress in 1811, made  
but I hope that Army

but movement  
I think

# TRAVIS LETTER

## ★ DOCUMENT ANALYSIS ★

### Part I.

1. For what purpose is Travis writing this letter?

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2. Why did Travis address his letter “To the People of Texas and all Americans in the world?”

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3. What is the situation at the Alamo at this time?

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4. Using context clues, what do you think these words/terms mean?

besieged: \_\_\_\_\_

discretion: \_\_\_\_\_

garrison: \_\_\_\_\_

dispatch: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Summarize Travis’ general impression of his situation.

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6. List three topics Travis addresses in the letter.

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7. What three adjectives would you use to describe Travis? Explain.

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8. What one question would you like to ask William B. Travis?

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**Part II.**

**1.** What quote from this letter do you find to be most memorable?

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**2.** What is your reason for choosing this quote?

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**3.** Make one prediction based on information from the letter.

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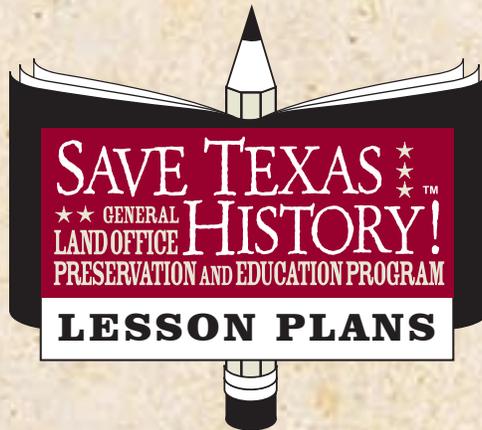
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- Lesson 1** The Great Military Map of Texas
- Lesson 2** Commemorative Maps of Texas
- Lesson 3** A Call to Arms
- Lesson 4** The Saga of Sam McCulloch
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