The opportunity to own cheap, abundant land in Mexican Texas was a powerful incentive for many Americans to pack up and set out for Austin’s colony. Mexican authorities, however, did not want just anyone settling their land. They wanted to make sure the people coming to Texas met high standards of responsibility and conduct. Good settlers meant a prosperous and peaceful Texas, but how could the government of Mexico be sure they were getting good people?

The government of Mexico believed one way to help ensure the “quality” of settlers was to require documentation verifying the person’s good character. Character is a set of qualities that defines a person: honest or dishonest, responsible or irresponsible, reliable or unreliable, etc. The quality of settlers colonizing Texas was so important to Mexican authorities that they put it into law. The 1825 Colonization Law of Coahuila y Texas stated in part, “the new settlers who present themselves for admission shall prove their Christianity, morality, and good habits...”

How could settlers prove they had good character? Before traveling to Texas, potential colonists would ask community leaders, politicians, and other influential citizens to write letters of recommendation on their behalf. These letters would be hand carried to Texas by the settler and offered to Stephen F. Austin as evidence of good character and eventual acceptance into the colony.

Among the archives at the Texas General Land Office is a group of documents called the Spanish Collection. Within the Spanish Collection are actual letters of recommendation brought by colonists. These letters reveal the expectations of the Mexican government.

GOALS

★ Define the word character and how it relates to your personal life.
★ Read and analyze the Letters of Recommendation from potential colonists.
★ Write a letter of recommendation for the “ideal settler.”

TEKS

SOCIAL STUDIES 7.11
(A) Analyze why immigrant groups came to Texas and where they settled.

SOCIAL STUDIES 7.16
(B) Identify civic responsibilities of Texas citizens.

VOCABULARY

character
a set of qualities that define a person.

RESOURCES

Are You a Person of Character? Self Evaluation handout
Letters of Recommendation (copies of original documents and accompanying transcripts)

ANTICIPATORY SET

Provide each student with a copy of the Are You a Person of Character? Self-Evaluation handout. After completing the handout, ask for volunteers to share their responses with the class. Ask them if their answers would be different if someone else were evaluating their character. If so, how would they explain the differences?

Write the following quote from Stephen F. Austin on the board and read it aloud:

“You must examine the Red River emigrants very closely, and take care that no bad men get in...” –Stephen F. Austin, 1823

Ask students what they think Austin meant by “bad men” and why this would be a concern to him. What could the government of Mexico do to prevent “bad men” from becoming citizens of Mexican Texas? Its answer to this challenge was to require settlers to bring with them letters of recommendation to show they were people of good character. Tell the students they will be reading and analyzing actual letters of recommendation brought by settlers.
ACTIVITY STEPS

1. Divide the class into groups of four students each.
2. Provide each group with copies of the 12 letters, blank copy paper and bold markers.
3. Each group member will be responsible for reading three letters and compiling a list of as many character traits as he or she can identify, writing each trait on one sheet of copy paper in large letters.
4. When each person has finished, as a group, analyze each character trait to determine how it would be beneficial to the success of a community.
5. When finished, the group members will choose four traits from their list they feel are the most important and discuss how these character traits are still valued in our time and why.
6. Each group should present its findings to the class. Students should be prepared to defend their choices when questioned by classmates. On the board, list each group’s choices for most important character traits.
7. When all groups have finished presenting, have the students write a “Letter of Recommendation” for an imagined ideal settler using the character traits listed on the board.
8. Have students share their letters to the class.

WRAP UP QUESTIONS

1. Is there such a thing as an ideal settler? Explain.
2. Could this system be abused? Explain.
3. When will you need a letter of recommendation in the coming years? What might you need recommendations for in high school? College? Career?
4. What would you want someone to say in a recommendation written about you?
5. Who would you ask to write your recommendation letter if you had to have one next week? What would it say?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

★ Have your students choose one of the wrap up questions and write a response to share with the class.
★ Have students contact a local company and ask to speak to a Human Resources officer. Ask him/her what the standards of conduct are at the company and make a list. Compare them to 19th century standards and create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting both lists, and have them draw conclusions about how our views about character have changed.
★ Compile a list of the positive and negative aspects of the Mexican government’s “letter of recommendation” plan. Have your students debate whether the plan should be kept the way it is, modified, or create an alternative plan.
★ Ask your students to imagine they are Stephen F. Austin. Write a letter to the government in Mexico City explaining why the letters of recommendation are not effective in keeping unlawful people out of Texas. Give specific reasons why.

EXTENSION

Beginning in the early 1830s, the conflict between Anglo settlers and the Mexican government escalated into war. Many of the settlers fighting against Mexico brought letters of recommendation with them to Texas promising to obey the laws.

Why had these settlers chosen to fight a government they had sworn to obey? Was it justified? Why or why not?

Have students research the causes of the Texas Revolution for answers to these questions.
1. ☐ TRUE ☐ FALSE I do what needs to be done.

2. ☐ TRUE ☐ FALSE I am reliable and dependable.

3. ☐ TRUE ☐ FALSE I never make excuses or blame others.

4. ☐ TRUE ☐ FALSE I am honest. I don’t lie, cheat or steal.

5. ☐ TRUE ☐ FALSE I am a good and dependable friend.

6. ☐ TRUE ☐ FALSE I work hard at being successful.

7. Do you think you are a trustworthy person? Why or why not?
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

8. Would someone who knows you give the same answers you just provided?
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

9. Why would the answers be the same or different?
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
State of Arkansas
Saline County
6th day of October 1852

This is to certify, that we, the undersigned, have been intimately acquainted with the bearer Isaac Jones Esq, for several years past, and do not hesitate to say, and do cheerfully recommend him to be a good and useful citizen of moral and temperate habits, upright in his integrity, a good mechanic, capable of justice and on the whole, believe him in every way a serviceable, useful man and at any time he shall therefore, or the more cheerfully recommend him to the confidence of the Citizens of any country in place when he may thereafter be disposed to locate himself.

William Peter Craft
John G. Cooper
Joseph Miller

Wm. Harrocks
Owen Elyea
Ashton Brackley

STATE OF ILLINOIS
GALLATIN COUNTY

6th of March, 1832

This is to certify that we the subscribed have been intimately acquainted with the bearer Isaac Jones, Esq. for several years past and do not hesitate to say, and do cheerfully recommend him to be a good and useful citizen of moral and temperate habits, strict to his integrity, a good mechanic, inflexible in justice, and on the whole believe him in every way a serviceable, useful man and citizen in character, therefore we the more cheerfully recommend him to the confidence of the citizens of any Country or place where he may hereafter be disposed to locate himself–

William Datron, Capt.  William Herod
WILLIAM DATRON, CAPT.  WILLIAM HEROD

John G. Cooper  William Harrelson
JOHN G. COOPER  WILLIAM HARRELSON

Charles Mills  Owen Riley
CHARLES MILLS  OWEN RILEY

The State of Alabama 3 whereas William Shepard of the
State and County aforesaid has Communicated to
us Joseph Martin and Isaac Denton Justices of the
peace in and for the County of Perry that he
intends removing to the Province of Texas that he
may obtain land and for the purpose of
Agriculture we therefore Certify that we have
Due acquaintance with William Shepard and
we believe him to be a worthy Citizen of this
Community we believe he says his Last Contracts
provided well for his family and is of Temperate
Industrious steady habits living in the greatest
Peace and quietness with his Neighbours and the
Citizens in General August the 1st 1838

We the under named
Subscribers do concur
in the above recommendation

William Goodwin
H. A. Hill

Wiley Rodriguez
John Gardner
David Batfield
William Carpenter
Samuel H. Boggs

Joseph Martin
Justice of the Peace

Isaac Denton
Justice of the Peace

H. A. Phillips

STATE OF ALABAMA
PERRY COUNTY

State and County aforesaid has communicated to us Joseph Martin and Isaac Denton, Justices of the Peace in and for the County of Perry that he intends removing to the Province of Texas that he may obtain Land and for the purpose of Agriculture, we therefore certify that we have due acquaintance with William Shepard and we believe him to be a worthy citizen of this Community we believe he pays his Just Contracts provides well for his family and is of Temperate, Industrious, Steady habits Living in the Greatest peace and quietness with his neighbors and the Citizens in General

August the 2nd 1830

We the undersigned subscribes to concern in the above recommendation

Win. H. Peoples
WM. H. PEOPLES

William W. Goodwin
WILLIAM W. GOODWIN

A. B. HILL
A. B. HILL

Wiley R. Gandy
WILEY R. GANDY

John Gandy
JOHN GANDY

William Carey
WILLIAM CAREY

Samuel H. Bogle
SAMUEL H. BOGLE

Joseph Martin
JOSEPH MARTIN
Justice of the Peace

Isaac Denton
ISAAC DENTON
Justice of the Peace

Jesse H. Peoples
Captain

H. L. Brodnax
H. L. BRODNAX

State of Louisiana
Parish of Washington

I, Thomas C. Warner, Judge in and for
the Parish aforesaid:

Do hereby certify that I have been
acquainted with Mr. William Peacock, the Bearer hereof,
for these many years past, that he is and has been a Citizen
for a number of years, and that he of said Parish, for a number of years, and that he
has ever supported and maintained a Character ever
impeccable, that he is a Man of property, Planting or
Farming his occupance, that he is inducible, sober,
Honorable and industrious, and due to whom respect is
due... (and as he contemplates exploring the province
of Texas) as such I recommend him to those to
whom it may Concern.

Given under my hand and the Seal of
this 17th day of February,

A.D. 1830.

Thos. C. Warner,
Judge.
I, Thomas C. Warner Parish Judge in and for the Parish aforesaid –.

Do hereby certify that I have been acquainted with Mr. William Peacock, the Bearer himself for these many years past, that he is and has been a citizen of said Parish for a number of years, and that he has ever supported and maintained a Character unimpeachable, that he is a man of property, planting or farming his occupations, that he is peaceable, Sober, Honest, and Industrious, and one to whom respect is due. And as he contemplates exploring the province of Texas, as such I recommend him to those it may concern–.

Given under my hand and the Parish this 17th day of February

A.D. 1830.–

THOS E. WARNER
Parish Judge
Nacogdoches, June 4th, 1833

Messrs. Austin & Williams

Gentlemen,

William Manwaring -

...having a native of England, unmarried of the age of thirty-five years - wishes to settle himself in your colony. He states this mode of soliciting to be accepted by you as one of your colonists, because the bad roads, and the extraordinary high water prevents his going to your place until next autumn.

Mr. Manwaring has lived with me for the last four months as a gardener, and I can say with confidence that he is a very sober, honest, industrious man. And I beg of you to admit him as one of your colonists. If you grant him that favor, please send him this certificate by return of mail.

I am, Gentlemen, with respect,

Villa de - Austin

Adolfo Hernán

NACOGDOCHES
JUNE 4TH, 1833

Messrs Austin & Williams

Gentlemen,

William Manwaring

A native of England, unmarried, of the age of thirty five years – wishes to settle himself in your colony, he takes this mode of soliciting to be accepted by you as one of your colonists – because the bad roads and the Extraordinary high waters prevents his going to your place until next autumn.

Mr. Manwaring has lived with me for the last four months as a gardener, and I can say with confidence that he is a very sober, honest & industrious man, and I beg of you submit him as one of your Colonists – if you grant him that favor, please send him his Certificate by return mail.

I am gent’n whit respect

Villa de Austin

VILLA DE AUSTIN

ADOLFO STERNE

(rubric)
Junction, Alabama
20th November 1834

I Shelby Corzine, the bearer hereof, intending to visit the province of Texas and probably to reside there with his family, I take pleasure in stating that I have been acquainted with Mr. Corzine— that he is a gentleman of an impeccable character and that he has always sustained the reputation of an amiable and highly worthy citizen. I recommend him to the friendship and civilities of the good people among whom he dwelleth, with the assurance that he will be a most useful and valuable citizen.

John Gayle

The State of Alabama: I James Savage, Clerk of the Circuit Court of said County, Sumter County of Sumter, do certify, that I have been long acquainted with Mr. Gayle, present Governor of the State of Alabama, and am well acquainted with his handwriting, that the above is his handwriting and that he was Governor of the State of Alabama at the above date and still remains so. I do further certify that I have been long acquainted with Shelby Corzine Esq., who has practiced law in this State, that his character is unimpeachable, that he is a moral worthy Citizen and has always been respected by all who knew him; it is fully worthy of the confidence and protection of all good Citizens wherever he may settle. I sign my hand and private seal having no Seat of Office the 20th day of January 1835.

James Savage
TUSKALOOSA ALABAMA

20TH NOVEMBER 1834

Mr. Shelby Corzine, the bearer hereof, intending to visit the province of Texas and probably to remove there with his family, I take pleasure in stating that I have been acquainted many years with Mr. Corzine – that he is a gentleman of unimpeachable character, and that he has always sustained the expectation of an amiable and highly worthy citizen. I recommend him to the friendship and civilities of the good people among whom he settles, with the assurance that he will be a most useful and valuable citizen.

John Gayle

JOHN GAYLE

The State of Alabama (I James Clark of the Circuit Court of said County Sumter County) of Sumter, do hereby certify, that I have been long acquainted with John Gayle present Governor of the State of Alabama and am well acquainted with his hand writing, that the above is his hand writing and that he was Governor of the State of Alabama at the above date and still remains so. I do further certify that I have been long acquainted with Shelby Corzine Esq. who has practiced law in this state, that his character is unimpeachable, that he is a moral worthy citizen, and has always been respected by all who knew him; he is fully worthy of the confidence and protection of all good citizens wherever he may settle—Witness my hand and private seal having no seal of office this 2nd day of January 1835.

James Savage (Seal)

JAMES SAVAGE

To the Illustrious Ayuntamientos of Austin

Being solicited by Mr. John Shannon to state what I know concerning his character—What I say is following: I have been personally acquainted with Mr. Shannon eight years during which time he has uniformly supported the character of an honest, civil, industrious, and useful citizen. I sincerely wish we had many such emigrants. Therefore I hope your honourable body will admit all such men with sentiments the highest esteemed I am.

O Francis Holland

Jan. 27th 1831
TO THE

ILLUSTRIOUS AYUNTAMIENTO OF AUSTIN

★

Being solicited by Mr. John Shannon to state what I know concerning his character – What I say is following. I have been personally acquainted with Mr. Shannon eight years during which time he has uniformly supported the Character of an honest, civil, Industrious and useful citizen. I sincerely wish we had many such emigrants.

Therefore I hope your Honorable ^ will admit all such men – with Sentiments the highest esteemed, I am

Francis Holland

FRANCIS HOLLAND

Jan. 27, 1831

Col. J. F. Austin Sir,

We have been for some length of time acquainted with Mr. John W. Mayo who has since our knowledge of him supported a good character and we consider him an honest and industrious man.

San Felipe de Austin Feb. 26th 1830

Joshua Fitch

[Signature]
COL. S.F. AUSTIN

Sir

We have been for some length

of time acquainted with Mr. John W. Mayo

who has since our knowledge of him supported a

good character and we consider him an honest

and industrious man.

San Felipe de Austin

SAN FELIPE DE AUSTIN

Feb. 26th 1830

Joshua Fletcher

JOSHUA FLETCHER

F. White

F. WHITE

We do certify that John Cronkrite and Albert Slowe of Wayne County of Lauter State of New York is of good and moral character, industrious habits, and dated Wayne Nov. 24th 1820.

Benjamin Slowe
Charles Bantile
Oliver S. Bantile
We do certify that John Cronkite and Albert Silsbee of Wayne, County of Steuben, State of New York, is of good and moral character, industrious habits, etc.

dated Wayne – Nov. 3, 1830

Benjamin Lake
BENJAMIN LAKE

Charles Bartles
CHARLES BARTLES

Oliver S. Bartles
OLIVER S. BARTLES
The State of Alabama, in the County of Perry, 7th day of July, 1838, Do the undersigned subscribe to the recommendation of Jesse Evans for the purpose of taking up land and for the purpose of agriculture.

We, therefore, certify that we know Jesse Evans to be a worthy citizen of this community, of temperate and industrious habits, we believe he pays all his just contracts and provides well for his family, is the greatest peace and harmony. We certify this and the citizens in general attest our hands and seal.

17th Day of July, 1838

Jesse Evans
Justice of the Peace

Isaac Denton
Judge of the Peace

The undersigned subscribe to the above recommendation of Jesse Evans.

July 22, 1838

E. Curran

William Scott

Mary M. Sanders

John Sanders

Henry B. Boudinot

Ralph Low

Whereas Jesse J. Evans of the State and County aforesaid makes known to us Joseph Martin and Isaac Denton, Justices of the peace in and for the County of Perry that he intends removing to the province of Texas that he may obtain Land and for the purposes of Agriculture – we therefore certify that we know the said Jesse J. Evans and we believe him to be a worthy citizen of this Community of temperate and industrious habits, we believe he pays all his Just Contracts and provides well for his family while the greatest peace and harmony Exists between him and the Citizens in General witness our hands and Seals this 17th Day of July, 1830.

[Signature: Joseph Martin]

JOSEPH MARTIN
Justice of the Peace

[Signature: Isaac Denton (Seal)]

ISAAC DENTON
Justice of the Peace

We the under named subscribers concur in the above Recommendation of Jesse J. Evans

July 22nd 1830

[Signature: John Bailey]

JOHN BAILEY

[Signature: Richard B. Watson]

RICHARD B. WATSON
Senator for the County of Perry
State of Alabama

[Signature: Jesse B. Navé]

JESSE B. NAVÉ
Shff PC

[Signature: A. Gorman]

A GORMAN
AJC for PC

The United states of America
State of Missouri
County of Washington. I, to all to whom these presents shall come greeting,

John Buckley, presiding Justice of the County Court of Said County,

Do hereby certify that I have been personally acquainted with the person
hereof James T. Perry in the County
appraiser for about Twelve years and
he has always been respected as an industrious, honest, good and peaceable citizen
And whose moral character has always
stood fair. And also is a believer
in the Christian Religion

Given under my hand and seal
this Twentieth day of March in the
year of our Lord 1830

John Buckley

[Seal]
To all to whom these presence shall come Greeting.
I John Brickey presiding Justice of the County Court of said County Do hereby certify that I have been personally acquainted with the bearer hereof James F. Perry of the County aforesaid for about thirteen years, and he has always been respected and industrious, honest, good and peaceable citizen And whose moral character has always stood fair and also is a believer in the Christian religion.
Given under my hand and seal this twentieth day of March in the year of our Lord 1830.

John Brickey (Seal)
JOHN BRICEKEY
State of Texas, Bexar county, Dec. 20, 1830—

We, the undersigned, are acquainted with Francis Coiteux, a resident of this county, and say that we believe him to be a man of good moral character, and further, that we believe him to be a believer in the Christian Religion, and moreover, we know him to have been born and raised under the Spanish Government in upper Louisiana.

[Signatures]

STATE OF MISSOURI
PERRY COUNTY
DEC 20TH 1820

We the undersigned are acquainted with Francis Coiteux (a resident of this county) and say that we believe him to be a man of good moral character; and furthermore, that we believe him to be a believer in the Christian Religion — and moreover we know him to have been born and raised under the Spanish Government in upper Louisiana.

M. Wilkinson
M. WILKINSON

J. Pratte
J. PRATTE

C. Valle
C. VALLE

R.E. Brown
R.E. BROWN

Thomas Riney
THOMAS RINEY

Parish St. Tammany, Louisiana.

Elisha Roberts, Sr. of this parish, having an intention to travel for his pleasure & for the purpose of satisfying his mind respecting that country west of the Mississippi, in which voyage it might be necessary for him to show some evidence of his fair fame and good character. He therefore petitioning of said parish whose names are heretofore subscribed, do certify, that Elisha Roberts has resided in this parish for upwards of seven years, he is a man of independent property, upright in his dealings, and his character unimpeachable.

And recommend him to the friendship of all good men.

To which certificate we have subscribed our names, and designate our places of residence this 29th day of April 1839.

Residents of Covington

Fred T. Levee

Jno. Gillmore

Thomas Tate

Robert McAlpine

Wm. Hallory

James Boyd

William Wadley

L. Halley

L. Teacle.
PARISH ST. TAMMANY

LOUISIANA

Elisha Roberts Esq., of this Parish, having an intention to travel for his pleasure & for the purpose of satisfying his mind respecting that Country west of the Mississippi, “In which voyage it might be necessary for him to show evidence of his fair fame and good character,” We therefore citizenry of said Parish whose names are hereunto subscribed, do certify, that Elisha Roberts has resided in this Parish for upwards of seven years, he is a man of independent property, upright in his dealings, and his character unimpeached. And recommend him to the friendship of all good men. To which certificate we have signed our names, and designated our places of residence

This 29th day of April 1822.

Residents of Covington

H. T. Tyson
H. T. TYSON

Obed Kirkland
OBED KIRKLAND

Jn. Gilmore
J. N. GILMORE

Elisha Roberts
ELISHA ROBERTS

Thomas Tate
THOMAS TATE

Robert McKay
ROBERT MCKAY

Sam Mallory
SAM MALLORY

Lyman Briggs
LYMAN BRIGGS

William Bagby
WILLIAM BAGBY

D. Searles
D. SEARLES