



Step into Texas History

Class Set 1

FRENCH EXPLORE TEXAS

Over 140 years after the Spanish first explored the land, a French expedition accidentally made its way to Texas. In 1685, La Salle missed his intended destination, which was to have been the mouth of the Mississippi River. Instead he went ashore near Matagorda Bay along the Texas coast. The Frenchmen used wood from one of their ships to build a crude stockade. They called their settlement Fort St. Louis. It was located five miles upstream from the bay along the western bank of Garcitas Creek. For the next few years these Frenchmen, together with a few women and children, lived in Texas. As a result La Salle and his men had contact with many native Texan tribes, and learned much about the land and people of Texas.

Unfortunately, diseases, rattlesnakes, alligators, and hostile Karankawa Indians plagued the small settlement. In early 1687 La Salle and some of the men set off on their final trip to find the Mississippi River. Their goal was to reach the Mississippi and travel upstream to French settlements in Canada. However, several of La Salle's men blamed him for all the problems the expedition had faced and an evil plot to kill La Salle and three members of his party, was carried out. La Salle was murdered on March 19, 1687 near present day Navasota.

Henri Joutel was one of the members of the expedition and a friend to La Salle. He kept a lengthy journal detailing the daily activities of the French. After La Salle was murdered, Joutel and five others found the Mississippi River. They made their way to Canada and finally back to France. During their time in Texas, the French came into contact with different cultures from their own. The French explorers and Native Texans shared knowledge and exchanged goods and services. In his writings, Joutel tells about these experiences.

Joutel's journal was translated and published in English in 1998. The following excerpts from Joutel's manuscript describe some of the lands and people of Texas in the late 17th century.

1. Read the following excerpts from Joutel's journal. Make notes summarizing key points from the readings.
2. After reading each journal entry, you and a partner will summarize key points using visual illustrations. Focus on descriptions of the land and cultural exchanges between the French and Native Texans when illustrating the map of La Salle Expedition in Texas.
3. The locations numbered on the map correspond with the numbers of each Journal Reading.
4. The end product created by you and your partner will be a tapestry of cultural exchange between the French and Native Texans.
5. Use drawings, words, and symbols to summarize key points of each reading on your map.



Step into Texas History

Class Set 2

JOURNAL READING 1

Upon entering Matagorda Bay, January, 1685.

The country was flat and sandy but did nevertheless produce grass. There were also several salt pools. We saw hardly any wild fowl except some cranes and Canada geese. There were tracks of deer which had roamed this area.

"When the Indians saw that we had laid down our weapons, a number of them laid their arms down . . . United with us, the Indians made friendly gestures in their own way; that is, they rubbed their hands on their chests and then rubbed them over our chests and arms. They demonstrated friendship by putting their hands over their ears which meant that they were glad to see us. We returned their greeting in as nearly like manner as we could. All was by sign, for we could not understand each other otherwise . . . we went to the Indians' camp which was rather far from ours, a league [about 2.4 miles] and a half . . . they had about 50 huts, covered with reed or cane mats. A few huts were covered with dried bison hides. They were constructed with poles, bent like staves of a cask, [sides of a barrel] and they looked like large ovens . . . When we passed a little cove . . . we took a certain pleasure in watching the Indians fish. Some of the natives had landed a dolphin, a fish that is plentiful in this bay . . . The women brought us a few pieces of fresh meat and morsels of dolphin. I admired the way in which they cut their meat with one hand and placed a foot on the other end . . . In leaving we saw that the Indians had a large number of canoes, as many as 40 of different kinds. La Salle also noticed that they had been constructed all-in-one piece."



Step into Texas History

Class Set 2

JOURNAL READING 2

Description of the land around the French settlement, Fort St. Louis

"The settlement was located about two leagues inland on the banks of a river which had been named for the bison . . . Toward the west and southwest there was prairie, very level, that continued beyond our view . . . Beautiful, good grasses grow here serving as pasturage to an infinite number of bison . . . the country is quite beautiful all around . . . there are woods . . . also some ravines . . . there are fields of wild flowers . . . Some oaks are always green and never lose their leaves. Other oaks are like ours in France . . . One finds here many creeping vines and other vines that climb trees and bear many grapes. Also I noticed certain plants . . . that look almost like figs. But the leaves are full of quills. One must strip the fruit before eating it . . . One of our soldiers even died from having eaten the fig greedily without wiping it.

A listing of the local game must begin with the bison which are very numerous, and it could be said that they were our daily bread. After bison, there are deer, the turkey, Canada geese, other geese, swans, cranes, ducks, sandpipers . . . We also had a large number of tortoise . . . There also were many crocodiles . . . in the rivers in this area. When they came out they made me fear for our pigs who were often in the river wallowing to refresh themselves. I killed several of them [the crocodiles]."



Step into Texas History

Class Set 2

JOURNAL READING 3

Ten miles west of the Brazos River near the hunting camp of the Cenis (Caddo) Indians, February/March 1687. La Salle and some of his men were making their final attempt to find the Mississippi River. Then they planned to journey to Canada.

"The country was as lovely to the eye as one might wish, crisscrossed as it was with many streams of clear, good water. It appeared that nature took pleasure in forming this country and arranging the woods from place to place. For the most part these woods were oak and walnut, the nuts of which are very good and taste the same as those in France, but the shell is harder. We found many nuts beneath the trees, and they were very good. As the hunting was good in this area, and the fishing was too, it was not necessary [for the Indians] to worry much about planting. Moreover, they had enemies who drove them away whenever they had the opportunity . . . when they were in a place of some abundance, they stayed there a while until everything was consumed and they had even eaten their corn if they had planted it. One of the Indians had a finely dressed deerskin that was white as snow. I asked him by signs if he wanted to exchange it for a few needles; I showed him two and demonstrated the purpose they served. Threading each one, I showed him how to sew . . . I gave him two more needles, and the skin provided a means for us to make shoes that would be much more comfortable . . . Finally, after they had spent part of the day with us, we gave them something to eat; afterwards we gave them a few trinkets, and they returned to their village . . . [Later the Indians gave the Frenchmen . . .] dressed skins, some bison, some deer, which were their riches."



Step into Texas History

Class Set 2

JOURNAL READING 4

(Caddo) villages near Neches River and San Pedro Creek. Joutel and a few others arrived March 30, 1687, 11 days after the murder of La Salle. Joutel and his small party were trying to reach the Mississippi River and make it to French settlements in Canada.

"We made camp on the other side of the river [the Trinity River] about three leagues from the crossing. We found a country of valleys and hills of medium height on which there were many trees, mostly oak and walnut, which did not grow as large as those we had seen earlier, perhaps because the soil was rocky . . . The next day, the 30th, which was Easter, we continued our route . . . The pine trees were quite lovely and very straight, but their cones were very small. The land seemed to contain iron ore as the soil and rocks were reddish and heavy. Even the water itself gave that indication in some places and did not taste very good . . . we saw three men . . . They were coming from the direction of the Cenis' [Caddo Indian] village . . . They offered us both of their baskets of cornmeal and indicated to us that their chiefs were waiting for us in their village. They let us know that they had plenty of corn for us if we needed it. We gave them a knife and a few strands of beads . . . [One Indian was] dressed like a Spaniard. [He] showed me a printed paper . . . all of it in Spanish. This confirmed for me what the previous tribes had told us that there was no doubt that there were Spaniards around.

. . . We remained at this place for a good length of time . . . It is the women who do almost all the work around the hut whether to collect wood, pound corn, or almost everything there is to do. They even hunt. When the men have killed some animals, usually it is the women who go to collect the meat."



Step into Texas History

Class Set _____

JOURNAL ENTRY 5

While continuing on their journey, Joutel and his men came upon some Caddo tribes in northeast Texas. Joutel and five others later made their way to Canada and eventually returned to France.

"...we passed by a village... We stopped there to feed our horses and trade for more corn and meal... We were not too well received by the [Caddoan tribe]... In due course, we were taken to the chief's hut. The elders appeared there afterwards, having been advised of our arrival;... When all the elders had gathered that evening, we made it understood that we had come to visit them and to make peace with them, and that we wished to go to our own country to collect goods to give them and their allies, and that then we would bring men to settle and live among them... That evening they presented us with smoked meat to eat that had been brought to the hut for that reason. A short while later they served us a porridge made with acorn meal... but this did not seem very palatable to me, [didn't taste good]. I may even assert that one must be very hungry to eat it... On the next day, the elders assembled. They prepared mats and seats outside the hut where they indicated that we should go sit... we made a present to them of two hatchets, six knives, a few beads, some rings, needles and other similar things...

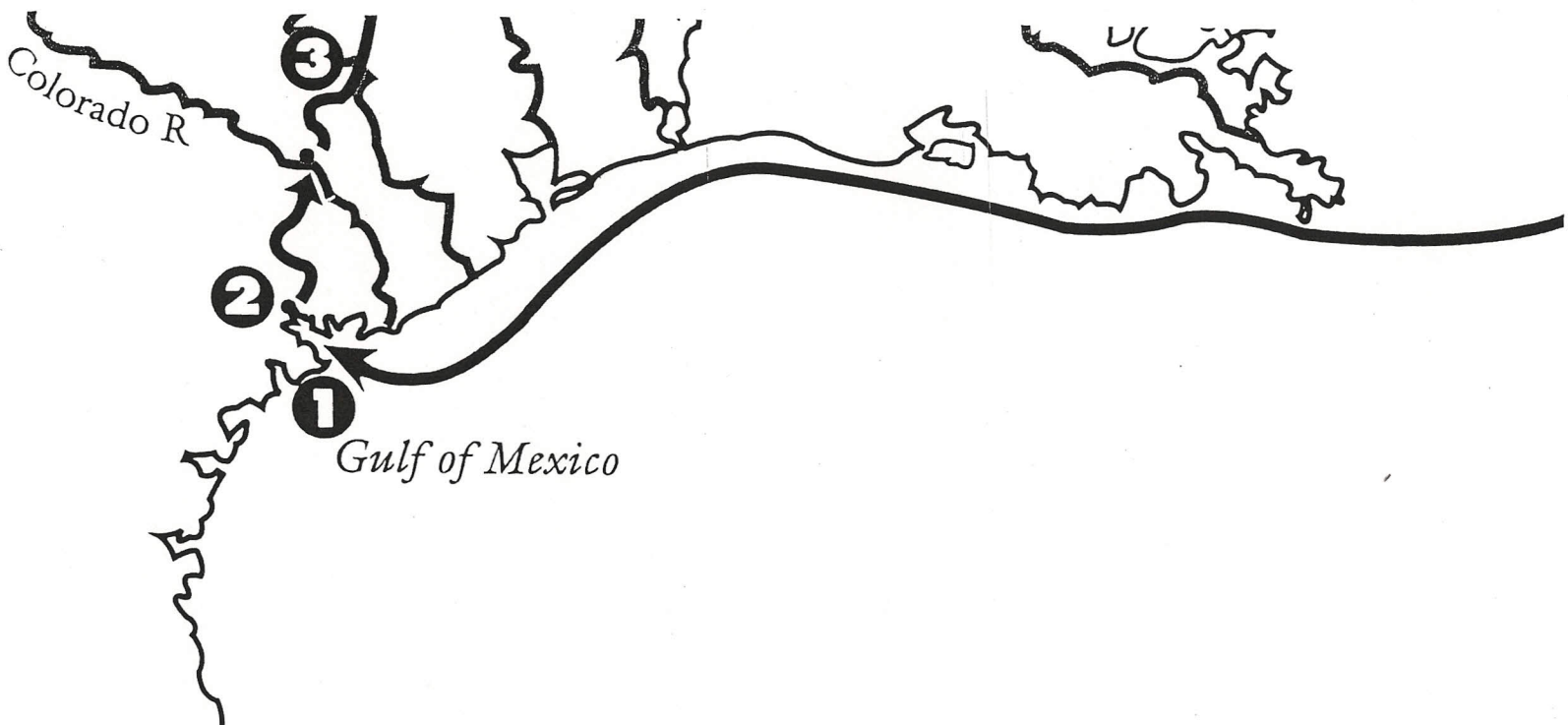
Along the way to our new location, we passed various other huts and saw men and women cultivating their fields of corn, beans, and pumpkins...

As soon as we arrived at the chief's hut, where we found more than 200 people had come to see us... we let them know that we were going to our country with the plan to return soon and bring them goods and all they might need. We then made the usual presents to them of hatchets, knives, beads, needles and pins, telling them that when we returned we would bring them more."



Step into Texas History

Student Handout 1



Name _____ Date _____ Class _____



Step into Texas History

Student Handout 4



La Salle Chronology

1643	La Salle is born in Rouen, France.
1671-81	La Salle explores the Great Lakes and Midwest regions of the U.S.
1682, January	La Salle expedition heads south on the Mississippi.
April	Discovery of the mouth of the Mississippi. Half of the continent is formally claimed for France and Louis XIV.
September	La Salle returns to Illinois.
November	La Salle sails for France to gather support for his plan to reach the Mississippi from the Gulf of Mexico and start a permanent settlement.
1684, April	Louis XIV commissions La Salle to carry out his plan.
August	About 300 people depart from France aboard <i>L'Aimable</i> , <i>Belle</i> , <i>Le Joly</i> and <i>Saint-Francois</i> .
September	Most of the fleet arrives at Santo Domingo. Spanish pirates had seized <i>Saint-Francois</i> a few days earlier.
November	The three remaining ships sail toward the presumed mouth of the Mississippi.
1685, January	Landfall on Texas Gulf Coast.
February	<i>Belle</i> safely enters Matagorda Bay.
February	<i>L'Aimable</i> runs aground trying to enter narrow channel. Many of the supplies needed for the founding of the colony are lost.
March	<i>Le Joly</i> leaves for France. About 180 people stay to found the colony.
March	La Salle sets out with 52 men in five canoes to reconnoiter "Baye St. Louis" and find a favorable site for a permanent settlement.
April	Fort St. Louis construction begins.
June	Group of 70 colonists departs from an island camp, headed for Fort St. Louis.
July	Joutel and his contingent, who had stayed behind at the island camp, arrive at Fort St. Louis on the <i>Belle</i> .
October	La Salle and 50 men go in canoes to search for the mouth of the Mississippi. The <i>Belle</i> follows with 37 men. No contact between the two groups for a month.
December	The land party finds <i>Belle's</i> Capt. Richaud and his men murdered in their sleep.
1686, January	La Salle leaves the <i>Belle</i> again to explore by land.
February	The <i>Belle</i> wrecked in storm.
March	La Salle party reaches anchorage; the <i>Belle</i> is not there.
March	La Salle party returns to Fort St. Louis.
May	Six survivors from the <i>Belle</i> reach Fort St. Louis in a canoe. She ran aground very shortly after La Salle's departure; these people stayed on Matagorda Peninsula near the wreck for three months.
1687, January	La Salle leaves for Illinois with 17 men to seek assistance, leaving only 20 people behind at the fort. Illness and hostile natives already have claimed the rest.
March	La Salle is assassinated by his own men.
April	Spanish expedition of Rivas and Iriarte finds the remains of the <i>Belle</i> .
1688, December or 1689, January	With colonists weakened by smallpox, Indians capture Fort St. Louis. A few children taken captive, later rescued by the Spanish.
1689, April	Gen. Alonso de Leon's expedition finds the remains of Fort St. Louis.

The Murder of La Salle • 1687 •

Rene Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, looked longingly out the gate of the makeshift post that he had built in what is now East Texas. It was January 7, 1687, and the French explorer and several of his followers were about to leave the place they called Fort Saint Louis to begin a long, overland journey. They hoped it would take them to the Illinois country and eventually to Canada.

La Salle and his men had sailed from France aboard several ships and landed at Matagorda Bay in 1685. They thought they had reached the mouth of the Mississippi River, which La Salle had discovered on a previous expedition in 1682. When, a few days later, his ship, the *Aimable*, was wrecked off the Gulf Coast, La Salle and about three dozen followers found themselves lost in the wilderness.

The stranded Frenchmen eventually realized that they were nowhere near the Mississippi. They built Fort Saint Louis to protect themselves from the elements and the Indians who lived in the neighborhood. Several attempts to find the Mississippi failed, and La Salle decided to try one more time to escape from this unfamiliar land.

As the party of seventeen men and five horses passed through the gates of Fort Saint Louis, the twenty people who would remain behind gathered to wish them farewell. With La Salle was his older brother, who was a priest, two nephews, several soldiers, a friar, a surgeon, and a couple of Indian guides and hunters. Historian Francis Parkman described the beginning of the journey in great detail in his classic book, *La Salle and the*

Discovery of the Great West:

It was a bitter parting, one of sighs, tears, and embracings,—the farewell of those on whose souls had sunk a heavy boding that they would never meet again. Equipped and weaponed for the journey, the adventurers filed from the gate, crossed the river, and held their slow march over the prairies beyond, till intervening woods and hills shut Fort St. Louis forever from their sight.

The travelers. . . wore the remains of the clothing they had worn from France, eked out with deer-skins, dressed in the Indian manner; and some had coats of old sail-cloth. . . . They suffered greatly from the want of shoes, and found for a while no better substitute than a casing of raw buffalo hide, which they were forced to keep always wet, as, when dry, it hardened about the foot like iron. At length they bought dressed deer-skin from the Indians, of which they made tolerable moccasins. . . . At night, they usually set a rude stockade about their camp; and here, by the grassy border of a brook, or at the edge of a grove where a spring bubbled up through the sands, they lay asleep around the embers of their fire, while the man on guard listened to the deep breathing of the slumbering horses, and the howling of the wolves.

When La Salle's party was a little more than two months out of Fort Saint Louis, wandering aimlessly through the region that lies northwest of today's city of Houston, the Frenchman began to worry. Several of his men had failed to return from a scouting party. (As it turned out, three of them, including one of La Salle's nephews, had been murdered by the others.) La Salle decided to look for them the following day. Accompanied by the friar and an Indian scout, he set out on March 19, 1687. The friar later wrote of the Frenchman's temperament during the journey:

All the way, he spoke to me of nothing but matters of piety, grace, and predestination; enlarging on the debt he owed to God, who had saved him from so many perils during more than twenty years of travel in America. Suddenly, I saw him overwhelmed with a profound sadness, for which he himself could not account. He was so much moved that I scarcely knew him.

As La Salle and his companions continued on their journey, they noticed a pair of eagles flying high above them. Believing that the missing men's camp was probably nearby, La Salle fired a shot into the air. When one of the missing men followed the sound to reach them, La Salle asked where his nephew and the others were. According to Parkman's account,

The man, without lifting his hat, or any show of respect, replied in an agitated and broken voice, but with a tone of studied insolence, that Moranget [the nephew] was strolling about somewhere. La Salle rebuked and menaced him. He rejoined with increased insolence, drawing back. . . while the incensed commander advanced to chastise him. At that moment a shot was fired from the grass, instantly followed by another; and, pierced through the brain, La Salle dropped dead. . . . The murderers now came forward, and with wild looks gathered about their victim. . . . With mockery and insult, they stripped it [the corpse] naked, dragged it into the bushes, and left it there, a prey to the buzzards and the wolves.

Thus, in the vigor of his manhood, at the age of forty-three, died Robert Cavelier de la Salle. . . without question one of the most remarkable explorers whose names live in history.

The perpetrators of the crime were La Salle's surgeon, Liotot,

and a man named Duhaut. Apparently, both were frustrated by their leader's inability to rescue them from what they believed would be certain death in the wilderness of East Texas. The men's loss of patience cost France the life of the man who, only a few years earlier, had stood at the mouth of the Mississippi River and claimed its entire watershed for his king.

Later that year, La Salle's murderers were executed by other members of their party. The few remaining wanderers finally found their way to Arkansas Post, a small French fort at the mouth of the Arkansas River. The men left behind at Fort Saint Louis were killed by Indians or assimilated into their tribes.