

# TEXAS AND THE MEXICAN WAR

**A re-creation of the conflict between pro-war and anti-war factions,  
debating whether or not the United States should annex Texas**

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# How did the Manifest Destiny historical myth influence the debates in Congress?

This historical re-creation of the thrust of Manifest Destiny, the Texas issue, and the coming of the Mexican War has been designed to invite student participation in the decision and problem-solving process faced by Congressional figures during the 1840s. The Pro-war and the Anti-war factions meet head to head on the issues of western expansion and Manifest Destiny. Between these two powerful forces stands an Undecided faction: Important persons of the day who seek compromise rather than war, peace rather than conflict. As members of one of these three groups, students relive the spirit of Manifest Destiny while re-creating the democratic process that led a nation ultimately to war with Mexico and the acquisition of the entire continent from ocean to ocean. Specifically your students will experience the following:

## **Knowledge**

1. Learning that the western expansion movement was a blend of the democratic process and the spirit of the times (Manifest Destiny)
2. Recognizing that the process of declaring war against Mexico was not unanimous; powerful arguments existed on both sides
3. Understanding that the decision to acquire the Western lands was motivated by a unique philosophical belief: Americans were acting out their destiny
4. Learning that a nation's growth is a long, slow process characterized by continual conflict and challenge

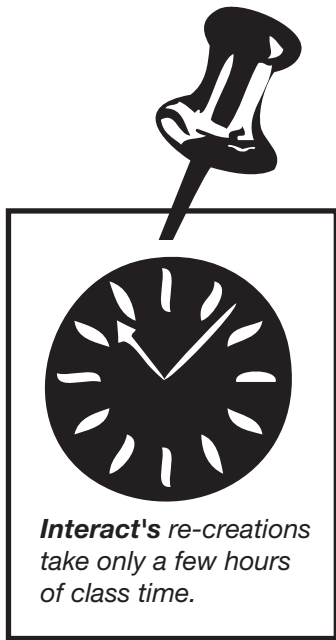
## **Attitudes**

1. Solving problems when two powerful points of view are in conflict is very difficult
2. Realizing that when conflict, opinion, and compromise merge into decision, a feeling of powerful unity emerges
3. Understanding that while coping with a problem, persons need to use alternative ways to make the democratic process work

## **Skills**

1. Working effectively with others in planning, executing, and evaluating group activities
2. Making individual and small group decisions
3. Organizing and presenting information clearly and accurately
4. Using various types of information and contrary points of view as sources for a specific purpose

## OVERVIEW



Four class periods—or days—are needed for this re-creation of the Mexican War and the annexation of Texas.

### Day 1

In the first hour students are given background information concerning events of this period in history. Students are divided into three Congressional factions: Pro-war, Anti-war, and Undecided. With the aid of general and specific information provided, these factions meet and assign specific arguments to present during the second hour. An overnight assignment is provided.


### Days 2-3

During the second and third hour the classroom is divided with the three Congressional factions seated to the left, right, and center of the chairperson. (You will likely be the chairperson.) The Pro-war and Anti-war faction members speak alternately for and against Issue 1. After each side's argument is presented, the Undecided speakers ask questions of the Pro-war and Anti-war factions. This sequence is followed for the remaining issues. After the Congressional debate has concluded, a vote is taken. An overnight assignment is provided.

### Day 4

The class is again divided in the final hour for debriefing/testing. Emphasis is placed on a contemporary case study paralleling issues raised during the Mexican War debate.

# SETUP DIRECTIONS



**Note:** You will not need to duplicate the bulleted items the first time you use this re-creation, for *Interact* has provided different colored handouts for students playing roles. If you choose to give the *PRE-TEST* and *POST-TEST*, you will have to duplicate them. All other necessary items are in the *Student Guide*.



You will likely wish to divide the students so that each of the three groups has an equal number of capable students—particularly in their ability to speak.

- 1. Decision about time** This re-creation is tightly formulated to function within three class periods, but you may wish to expand the second hour an extra class period if the intensity of the Congressional debate requires additional time for all points of view to be heard and understood. You may also wish to add a motivation background day prior to beginning the re-creation.
- 2. Handouts** See note at left the first time you use this re-creation. For subsequent classes, duplicate the number in parentheses, using the masters in this Teacher Guide.
  - PRO-WAR LEADER (one: one page)
  - PRO-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 1 (one: one page)
  - PRO-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 2 (one: one page)
  - PRO-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 3 (one: one page)
  - PRO-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 4 (one: one page)
  - PRO-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 5 (one: one page)
  - ANTI-WAR LEADER (one: one page)
  - ANTI-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 1 (one: one page)
  - ANTI-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 2 (one: one page)
  - ANTI-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 3 (one: one page)
  - ANTI-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 4 (one: one page)
  - ANTI-WAR ARGUMENT: Issue 5 (one: one page)
  - UNDECIDED LEADER (one: one page)
  - UNDECIDED QUESTIONS (one: two-and-a-half pages, cut apart for five questioners)

**Optional:**

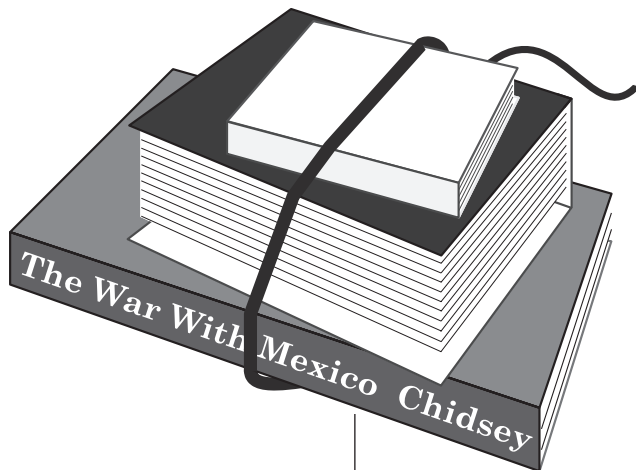
  - \* PRE-TEST (class set: one page)
  - \* POST-TEST (class set: one page)
- 3. Grouping** Decide if you wish to assign students to groups or allow students to group themselves. Divide the class into one-third Pro-war, one-third Anti-war, and one-third Undecided.
- 4. Chairperson** As teacher you may wish to assume the role of chairperson of the debate to keep the debate organized and the ideas flowing. You may wish, however, to give a capable, experienced student this role.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY



Consider speaking to your friendly librarian. Ask him/her to set up a special **TEXAS AND THE MEXICAN WAR RESERVE** bookshelf so that your students can check out books early in order to “flesh out” their positions.

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# DAILY TEACHING DIRECTIONS - 1



*Also assign your students to read the chapter(s) in their textbook covering this controversial issue in the 1840s ...*

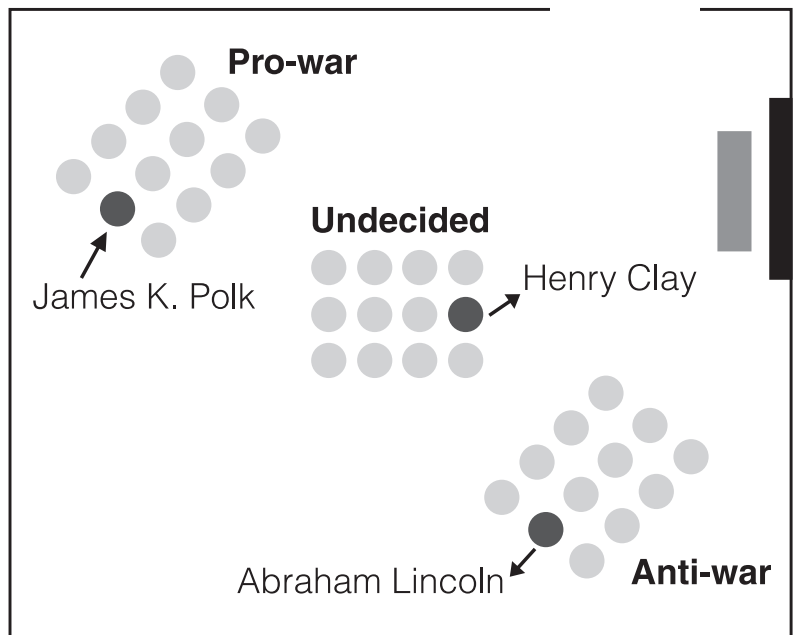
## Before Day 1

Be sure you have thoroughly examined the Teacher Guide, the Student Guide, and the various handouts.

## Day 1

1. Pass out the Student Guides. Read aloud to your students the section marked Purpose. It is vital for you to establish interest in this period of history and the re-creation students are about to enter. You can do this in one of several ways: a) a lecture, reinforced by the reading of the Background Essay in the Student Guide; b) an audio-visual presentation of an available filmstrip, movie, or videotape; c) completion of the PRE-TEST given in this Teacher Guide on page 24; or d) any combination of the above. (If you use the PRE-TEST, here are the answers: 1. +, 2. 0, 3. 0, 4. +, 5. +, 6. 0, 7. 0, 8. +, 9. +, 10. 0, 11. +, 12. +, 13. +, 14. 0, 15. 0.)
2. Have the students read the Background Essay in the Student Guide. This will give each student the same basic background information to begin the re-creation. As an overnight assignment, have students answer the questions provided in the Student Guide concerning the information presented in the Background Essay. Refer them to the Procedure section on page 5 of the Student Guide, under Day 1, Assignment.
3. Divide the class into three factions. Pro-war, Anti-war, and Undecided. Divide students yourself or allow them to divide themselves.

*You will want to give all factions special places in the classroom where they regularly meet.*



## DAILY TEACHING DIRECTIONS - 2



*Encourage your students to practice giving their speeches and asking their questions—aloud! Above all, insure that they do not simply read their material from the handouts you have given them.*

4. Give each group of students the handouts for their faction. Each faction's handouts contains arguments, specific details, quotes, and questions. Be certain that each faction receives only the materials written for its point of view. Students may refer to the Arguments Outline: Pro-war/Anti-war in their Student Guides for an overview of the opposing sides. Encourage this.
5. Allow students to meet in their faction groups to assign specific arguments or questions to present during the second hour. (Each student will present an argument, a specific detail, or a question.) Have each group elect a faction leader to keep all the members on task. Each faction leader will role-play a powerful person of his/her faction. Have other students role-play other members of their factions. Students have the names of famous persons from all three factions and such persons specific arguments in their own words in the handouts. Role-playing such persons—if they were in Congress—or quoting them even if they weren't in Congress can add a genuine historical atmosphere and spirit of authenticity to the congressional debate.

### Days 2-3

1. You should likely assume the role of chairperson of the debate. This will put you in the role of controlling the flow of arguments on all sides. You can fulfill the same role that the faction leader does in the three factions.
2. Arrange students by factions facing the chairperson. Place the Pro-war faction on one side, the Anti-war faction on one side, and the Undecided faction in the center.
3. On the first issue have the Pro-war speaker(s) speak first, the Anti-war speaker(s) second, the Undecided question(s) third. It is important to keep things moving. Tell speakers to use about one minute for the argument, about one minute for the quotation. In the latter case he/she becomes the historical identity if the person is in the Congress or quotes the person if he is not a member of Congress.

*Example:* The first Pro-war speaker stands and speaks to the first issue, summarizing the argument provided in the faction's handout. This summary should be about one minute. Next, this same student (or a second Pro-war speaker) reads aloud Andy Jackson's own words and reaction to the ideas in Issue 1. This should take about another minute. The Pro-war speaker then may make a brief closing remark and invite an Anti-war response. The

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## DAILY TEACHING DIRECTIONS - 3

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total time the first speaker(s) speaks should be kept to about two minutes. Then the first Anti-war speaker, Joshua Giddings, stands. This speaker(s) speaks for about two minutes, using the arguments and quote found in the faction's handout. Lastly, the Undecided questioner, John C. Calhoun, questions both Jackson and Giddings on Issue 1. This question/answer process should take about two minutes for each faction. Move on to the next issue, following the suggested sequence.

4. At the end of each debate, allow the opposing faction leaders time to make statements summarizing their factions' key points.
5. As chairperson, say that you are going to call the role of the voting delegates to vote for or against annexation and war. Remind students that they are not committed to vote with their faction. They may vote for or against depending on their free choice based on the arguments presented. As chairperson, you may also be a voting member of Congress.
6. After the vote, give students an overnight assignment such as the Debriefing activity on page 8 in their Student Guides. If you use this activity, divide the class into five or six groups in advance of the overnight reading. They will then read the detailed case study about Cuba and search for arguments (pro, con) or write questions to ask the two factions the next day. *Note:* If you plan to give the POST-TEST, refer students to the Testing section on page 8 in their Student Guides.

### Final day

1. **Optional:** Pass out POST-TEST. Key to True-False: 1. 0, 2. 0, 3. +, 4. +, 5. 0, 6. +, 7. 0, 8. 0, 9. +, 10. +.)
2. **Optional:** If you plan to do the Debriefing activity, have students turn to the Debriefing section in their Student Guides. The situation and instructions are clearly provided. Have students follow the directions found in the Student Guide. Depending upon the amount of time you wish to make available for this activity, choose one of these options:
  - a. a legislative debate in which you follow the format of the re-creation
  - b. a listing of the arguments and questions on the chalkboard followed by a general class discussion
  - c. a listing of the arguments and questions on a class handout followed by a general class discussion



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# PRO-WAR LEADER

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## Introduction

As **James K. Polk**, the leader of the Pro-war faction, you are committed to absorbing Texas into the union and fulfilling the American dream of continental expansion. You believe Mexico is a weak country standing in the way of America's Manifest Destiny. Texas is essential to the U.S. both geographically and economically. In the past Mexico has provided more than ample justification for war. Since all democratic and peaceful means to acquire Texas have been unsuccessful, war with Mexico is inevitable.



*Thank your group's members for choosing you to be their leader.*

*And now, having been chosen leader, lead!*

*Look everyone right in the eye and speak slowly as you present 2a through 2g.*

*To check for understanding, ask questions about 2a through 2g so that your members demonstrate that they understand specific responsibilities.*

## Instructions

1. Your faction has met and has selected you as the person most qualified to lead your faction.
2. Carefully explain the following responsibilities to your faction members. Lead your group so that all members live up to their responsibilities.
  - a. You must convince the Undecided faction of Congress that annexation of Texas and war with Mexico are unavoidable and necessary.
  - b. Present the best arguments you can to advance our point of view.
  - c. While preparing to speak, consider the argument, concerns, and the reinforcing quote.
  - d. You will have approximately two minutes to speak. Use your first minute to present your argument and concerns, your second minute to reinforce the concerns by reading the quote provided.
  - e. **Note well:** When you read the quote, you are not role-playing the individual whom you are quoting—unless he was a member of Congress at that time. If he was not in Congress, explain that you are quoting this person to reinforce your argument. In either case, whether you are the person being quoted or are only quoting him, point out the person's name/background before presenting the quote.
  - f. You will be questioned by a member of the Undecided faction. Answer this individual as clearly and forcefully as you can, for members of this faction represent the swing vote. We must win them over to our position in order to win this crucial debate.
  - g. **Note well:** This issue we will be debating was one that disturbed thinking Americans during the 1840s. Therefore, as you present your arguments or answer questions, don't speak blandly. Instead speak passionately!