



Primary Source Lesson Plan: The Alamo

This lesson is designed as an extension to section 8 of chapter 10 as well as the Reading Further section of chapter 10. The primary sources will give a rich and exciting “face” to the topic of the battle of the Alamo. These sources also demonstrate the chaos that occurs during battle and the difference in perceptions of the events because of the chaos. This extension provides a unique opportunity for the creation of a timeline that focuses on a small amount of time (days) compared to timelines that may chronicle many years or a lifetime.

Name of Primary Source

- Accounts of the battle of the Alamo as recorded by Sam Houston, Benjamin Briggs Goodrich, and Joe, a slave.

How primary source ties into text

- **Qualifies:** The primary sources included (accounts and letters) give the confusion of the battle a face and a “story” that the textbook sets up.
- **Elaborates:** The primary sources included provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the experience and confusion of the battle at the Alamo.
- **Raises questions:** Through these primary sources, the students are able to better answer such questions as:
 - What happened during the battle of the Alamo?
 - Who were the “defenders” of the Alamo?

Colorado Standards

- 1995 History 3: Understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time
- 2010 Social Studies Standard 1: History develops moral understandings, defines identity, and creates an appreciation of how things change while building skills in judgment and decision making. History enhances the ability to read varied sources and develop the skills to analyze, interpret, and communicate.
- Reading and Writing 1: Read and understand a variety of materials
- Reading and Writing 3: Write and speak using conventional grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Big Idea

- Read and respond to [primary sources] as a way to deepen comprehension and explore similarities and differences among stories, authors, and perspectives, (Literacy Planning Guide: Grade 4: Unit 5: Lesson 20.).
- Understand the differences in the perspectives in the accounts of the events of the battle of the Alamo
- 19th century battles involved violent, hand-to-hand combat.

Critical thinking

- What were the actual events of the battle of the Alamo?
- Why do you think 180 Texans decided to defend the Alamo knowing that they faced a Mexican Army of approximately 3,000 or more soldiers?

Mini-Lesson

Teaching

Begin by reading Section 8 of Chapter 10 and Reading Further Chapter 10. You may want to complete a cause and effect activity to deepen the students' understanding of the battle of the Alamo. (**Cause and Effect**)

Active Engagement

Divide the students into three groups, having each group read one account of the battle of the Alamo, completing a timeline/sequence organizer: **Timeline** .

Have each of the three groups present their timeline to the class. You may choose to create a class timeline incorporating the events of the three different accounts.

After all groups have presented, have the three groups once again read their account filling out the **Persuasion Map** . Students can then either orally defend their perspective orally or write a persuasive paper. Students can then vote on the most plausible account of the battle.

“Rumors About the Alamo” by Sam Houston

To Colonel J. W. Fannin, commanding at Goliad
Headquarters, Gonzales, March 11, 1836

Sir:

On my arrival here [Gonzales] this afternoon, the following intelligence was received through a Mexican, supposed to be friendly, though his account has been contradicted in some parts by another, who arrived with him. It is therefore only given to you a rumor, though I fear a melancholy portion of it will be found true.

Anselmo Borgara states that he left the Alamo on Sunday, the 6th inst.; and is three days from Arroche's *rancho*: that the Alamo was attacked on Sunday morning at the dawn of the day, by about two thousand three hundred men, carried a short time before sunrise, with a loss of five hundred and twenty-one Mexicans killed, and as many wounded. Colonel Travis had only one hundred and fifty effective men out of his entire force of one hundred and eighty-seven. After the fort was carried, *seven men* surrendered, and called for Santa Anna and quarter. They were *murdered* by his order. Colonel Bowie was sick in bed, and also murdered. The enemy expected a reinforcement of fifteen hundred men under General Condelle, and a reserve of fifteen hundred to follow them. He also informs us that Ugartachea had arrived with two millions in specie for payment of the troops. The bodies of the Americans were laid together and set on fire. Lieutenant Dickenson, who had a wife and child in the fort, after having fought with desperate courage, tied his child to his back and leaped from the top of a two story building. Both were killed in the fall.

I have little doubt but the Alamo has fallen--whether the above particulars are true may be questionable. You are thereby referred to the enclosed order.

Source: Henderson Yoakum, *History of Texas* (2 vols.; New York: Redfield, 1855), vol. 2., pp. 471-472.

“A Slave’s Account” by Joe

Sunday, March 20, 1836

The servant of the late lamented Travis, Joe, a black boy of about twenty-one or twenty-two years of age is now here. He was in the Alamo when the fatal attack was made. He is the only male, of all who were in the fort, who escaped death, and he, according to his own account, escaped narrowly. I heard him interrogated in the presence of the cabinet and others. He related the affair with much modesty, apparent candor, and remarkable distinctly for one of his class. The following is, as near as I can recollect, the substance of it:

The garrison was much exhausted by incessant watching and hard labor. They had all worked until a late hour on Saturday night, and when the attack was made sentinels and all were asleep, except one man, Capt. -----, who gave the alarm. There were three picket guards without the fort, but they, too, it is supposed, were asleep, and were run upon and bayoneted, for they gave no alarm. Joe was sleeping in the room with his master when the alarm was given. Travis sprang up, seized his rifle and sword, and called to Joe to follow him. Joe took his gun and followed. Travis ran across the Alamo and mounted the wall, and called out to his men, “Come on boys, the Mexicans are upon us, and we’ll give them Hell.” He discharged his gun; so did Joe. In an instant Travis was shot down. He fell within the wall, on the sloping ground, and sat up. The enemy twice applied their scaling ladders to the walls, and were twice beaten back. But this Joe did not well understand, for when his master fell he ran and ensconced himself in a house, from which he says he fired on them several times, after they got in. On the third attempt they succeeded in mounting the walls, and then poured over like sheep. The battle became a melee. Every man fought for his own hand [sic], as best he might, with butts of guns, pistols, knives, etc. As Travis sat wounded on the ground General Mora, who was passing him, made a blow at him with his sword, which Travis struck up [sic], and ran his assailant through the body, and both died on the same spot. This was poor Travis’ last effort. The handful of Americans retreated to such covers as they had, and continued the battle until one [only?] [sic] one was left, a little weakly man named Warner, who asked for quarter. He was spared by the soldiery, but on being conducted to Santa Anna, he ordered him to be shot, and it was done. Bowie is said to have fired through the door of his room, from his sick bed. He was found dead and mutilated where he lay. Crockett and a few of his friends were found together, with twenty-four of the enemy dead around them. The negroes, for there were several negroes and women in the fort, were spared. Only one woman was killed, and Joe supposes she was shot accidentally, while attempting to cross the Alamo. She was found lying between two guns. The officers came out and said, “Yes, here is one.” Immediately two soldiers attempted to kill him, one by discharging his piece at him, the other with a thrust of the bayonet. Only one buckshot took effect in

his side, not dangerously, and the point of the bayonet scratched him on the other. He was saved by Capt. Baragan.

Source: William Fairfax Gray. *The Diary of William Fairfax Gray, from Virginia to Texas, 1835-1837*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1997, pp. 128-129.

“A Letter from Texas” by Benjamin Briggs Goodrich

Washington Texas,
15th March, 1836

Dear Edmund,

Texas is in mourning, and it becomes my painful duty to inform my relations in Tennessee of the massacre of my poor bother John. He was murdered in the Texas fortress of San Antonio de Bexar (known as the Alamo) on the night of the 6th of this month, together with one hundred and eighty of our brave countrymen, gallantly defending that place against an invading army of Mexicans, eight thousand strong; not one escaped to tell the dreadful tale. The Alamo had been surrounded for many days by a besieging army of the Mexicans, variously estimated at from 3 to 8 thousand men, commanded by Genl. Lopez de Santa Anna in person; the fortress, as stated before, was besieged, and it fell and every man was put to the sword. They effected [accomplished] their purpose by a general charge aided by scaling ladders. Upwards of five hundred of the enemy were killed, and as many more mortally or dangerously wounded. Col. Travis, the commander of the fortress, sooner than fall into the hands of the enemy, stabbed himself to the heart and instantly died.

Seven of our brave men, being all that were left alive, called for quarter and to see Santa Anna, but were instantly shot by the order of that fiendish tyrant. Col. Bowie was murdered, sick in bed.

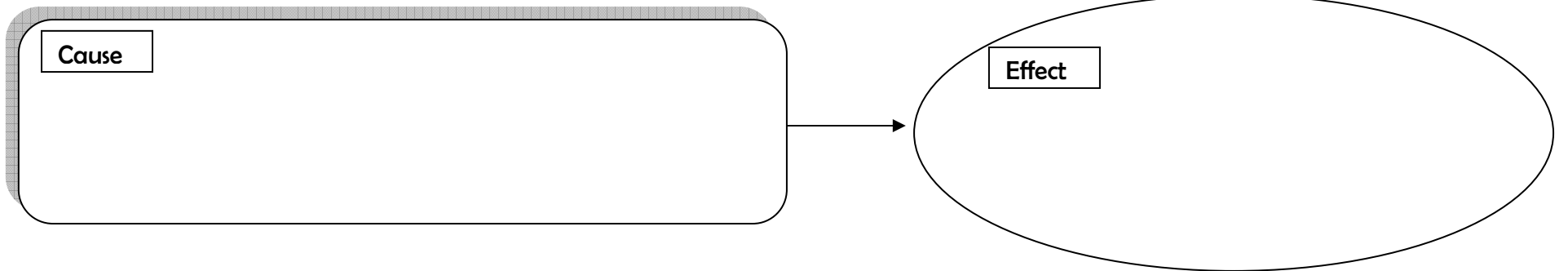
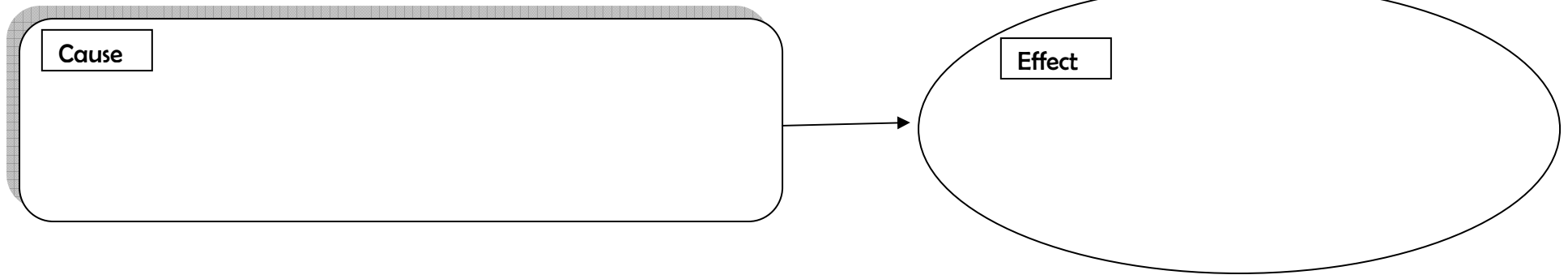
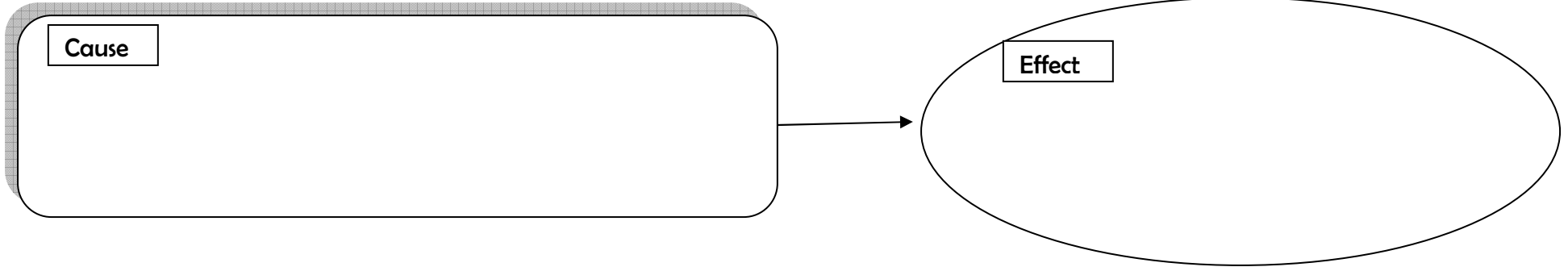
Sincerely your brother
& relative
Goodrich

Source: John H. Jenkins, ed. *Papers of the Texas Revolution* (10 vols.; Austin: Presidial Press, 1973), vol. 5, pp. 81-82

Name: _____

Date: _____

Cause and Effect



Persuasion Map 2

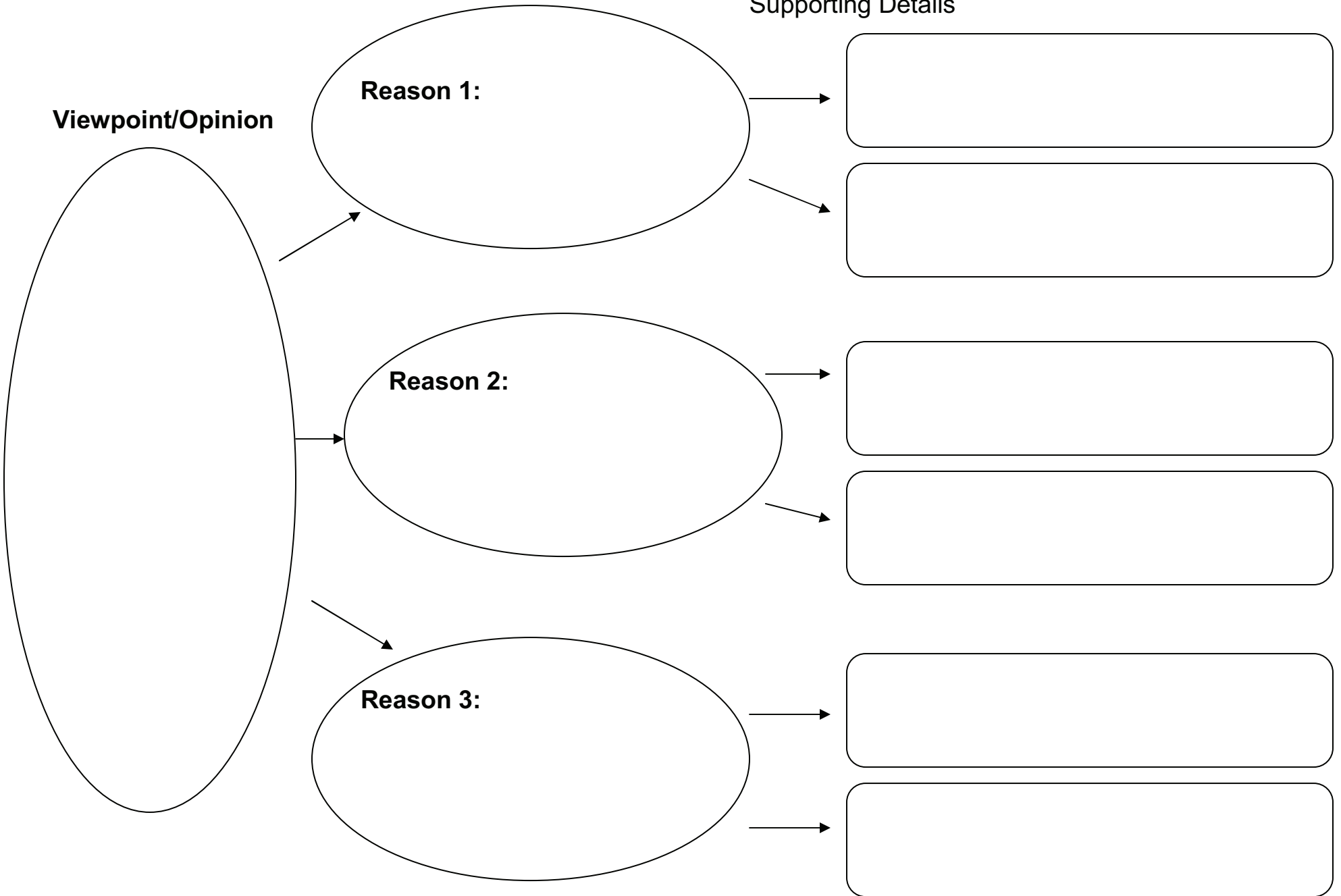
Supporting Details

Viewpoint/Opinion

Reason 1:

Reason 2:

Reason 3:



Timeline

