

## Teaching Guide

### SEGMENT 8, WEBISODE 3

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



#### Segment Overview

James Polk ran for president on the manifest destiny issue; he believed the United States had the right and duty to spread democracy across the continent. Polk wanted Oregon and California—even if California belonged to the Mexicans, and the British laid claim to the northwest. In 1844, most Americans agreed with his expansionist mindset; Polk ran on the Democratic ticket and won. He managed to compromise with England, securing a northern boundary for Oregon that left him free to concentrate on southern and western expansion.

After Mexico rebuffed his offer to purchase California and New Mexico, Polk sent troops into the disputed area. The Mexicans attacked, and thus began a bloody, two-year war. The 1848 treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo compensated Mexico fifteen million dollars and set the United States border at the Rio Grande River. The United States gained Texas, New Mexico, and California—just days before the discovery of gold in California. The Mexican War, which General Ulysses S. Grant later called “one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation,” yielded a bitter fruit, however: it further inflamed the conflict over the expansion of slavery.

#### Teacher Directions

1. Ask the students.

- Why did Polk and many other Americans believe the nation should include lands to the west?
- How did America gain the Oregon territory?
- How did the United States gain present-day California, New Mexico, and Texas?
- What happened on Sutter’s land?

2. Make sure students understand the following points in discussing the questions.

President Polk and many other Americans believed it was our manifest destiny that America include the lands to the west. They believed it was the nation’s right and duty to spread democracy across the continent. America gained present-day Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and parts of Montana by signing a treaty with Great Britain that established the boundaries between the United States and Canada at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. The United States fought a war with Mexico from 1846-1848 over disputed lands in the southwest.



#### Let's Discuss



### History Sleuth

The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo established the border between Texas and Mexico at the Rio Grande River, compensated Mexico fifteen million dollars, and gave the United States present-day Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico. In 1848, gold was discovered on Sutter's property in California, spawning a westward rush of gold-hungry prospectors and settlers.

#### Teacher Directions

1. Make sure students understand the historical background of the Mexican War. Students should understand why the United States entered the war and why some people opposed it. On a classroom map, help students locate the Neuces River and the Rio Grande. Explain that the Mexican War ignited on this disputed territory.
2. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Manifest Destiny, Mexico, and a Messy War*. With teammates, students read the sheet to gain an understanding of the issues surrounding the Mexican War of 1846-1848.
3. Students discuss the following questions with teammates to prepare for a whole-class simulation activity.
  - Why did Polk ask Congress to declare war on Mexico?
  - What role did the disputed territory north of the Rio Grande play?
  - Why did Lincoln oppose the war?
  - Who else opposed the war? Why?
  - How might an American and a Mexican view this war differently?
4. After students read and discuss the Student Sheet, the teacher assigns each team either a pro- or anti-war stance. Working with teammates, students prepare to argue their case. Each team selects one member to serve on a debate panel to discuss whether the United States was justified in fighting the Mexican War.
5. The two debate panels present their arguments to the class. Students vote to decide which side presented the most compelling arguments.

#### Teacher Directions

1. Students respond to the following writing prompt.
 

If you had read Polk's Message on War with Mexico, what might you have thought? What if you had heard Lincoln present his "Spot Resolutions"? Write your response.
2. Students also consider the role of media in shaping public opinion. In the 1840s, the newspapers informed citizens of events. How might the following newspapers have reported these events: a northern newspaper,



### What do you Think?

What Do You Think,  
Continued.



a Texas newspaper, a southern newspaper, a Mexican newspaper? Students write a headline or article from one of these papers and assign a fictitious name to their paper, i.e., The Pennsylvania Times, The Texas Tribune, etc.

**Note to the Teacher:** To extend this activity or link it to current events, the teacher may want students to consider how newspapers today exhibit bias in reporting. Students could find articles from different newspapers that provide a different slant on a contemporary issue.

### Teacher Directions

1. Share the following information with students.

General Ulysses S. Grant, who later commanded the Union forces during the Civil War, called the Mexican War “one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation.” He viewed the annexation of Texas as “a conspiracy to acquire territory out of which slave states might be formed for the American Union.” He also believed the Mexican War contributed to the Civil War. In his memoirs, he wrote, “The Southern rebellion was largely the outgrowth of the Mexican War. Nations, like individuals, are punished for their transgressions. We got our punishment in the most sanguinary and expensive war of modern times.”

**Note to the Teacher:** Explain to students that “sanguinary” means “bloody.”

2. Students consider the quotes from Grant and discuss the following questions.
  - Did the Mexican War move America toward freedom? Why or why not?
  - Do you agree with General Grant? Why or why not?

### Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

**Geography** — Students examine historical maps to trace the history of Texas. How have its borders changed during its period as a part of Mexico, an independent republic, and as a state of the Union?

**Language Arts** — Students read works by or about Mexican Americans, including *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto; *Valley of the Moon: The Diary of Maria Rosalia De Milagros, Sonoma Valley, Alta California, 1846 (Dear America Series)* by Sherry Garland; or *Barrio: El Barrio De Jose* by George Ancona.



Connections, Cont.

**Language Arts** — Students read the following books by or about Hispanic Americans: *Baseball in April and Other Stories* by Gary Soto; *An Island Like You: Stories of the Barrio* by Judith Ortiz Cofer; *Felita* and *Going Home* by Nicholosa Mohr; *Fitting In* and *Jumping Off to Freedom* by Anilú Bernardo; *Trino's Choice* by Diane Gonzales Bertrand; and *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. Partner Discussion Guides for these books are available from the Johns Hopkins University Talent Development Middle School Program.

**Library/Media Center** — Students visit the James K. Polk Ancestral Home @ <http://www.jameskpolk.com/>.

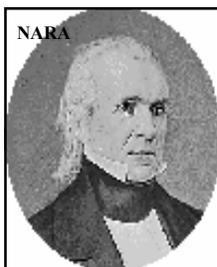
**Research/Nutrition** — Students research southwestern cuisine, which is heavily influenced by Mexican/Spanish heritage. Students find recipes and prepare a Mexican American feast.

**Math** — Students research how much land the United States gained in the 1846 treaty with Great Britain and after the Mexican War. How many square miles in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana did the United States gain? How many square miles in Texas, New Mexico, California? How many total square miles were gained?

## *Manifest Destiny, Mexico, and a Messy War*

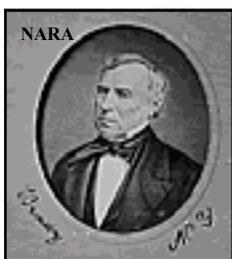
Why did the United States fight a war with Mexico? Land. Before Texas declared its independence from Mexico, the Neuces River was recognized by the United States, Spain, and Mexico as the northern boundary of Mexico. When Texas declared its independence in 1836, it claimed an additional 150 miles of land, to the Rio Grande River.

While Texans voted for annexation in 1836, abolitionists delayed its entrance into the Union because it would tip the scale in favor of slave states. Finally, in 1845, the United States annexed Texas, including the disputed territory up to the Rio Grande.



Polk

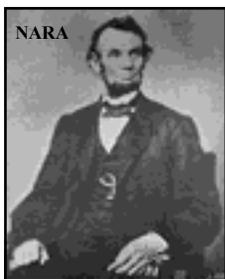
Mexico refused to recognize the Texas annexation or the Rio Grande border. In fact, Mexico broke off diplomatic relations with the United States, claiming that the annexation of Texas was an act of aggression.



Taylor

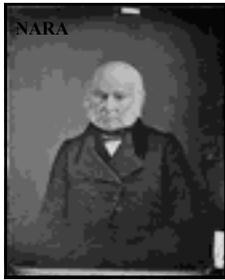
In 1845, President Polk sent an envoy, John Slidell, to Mexico to offer approximately \$30 million for California and New Mexico. Mexico refused his offer and refused to recognize Texas' independence.

Polk sent troops under General Zachary Taylor to the banks of the Rio Grande. For a month, the two sides camped on opposite sides of the Rio Grande, eyeing each other. Finally, Mexican cavalry crossed the Rio Grande and attacked American troops, killing five.



Lincoln

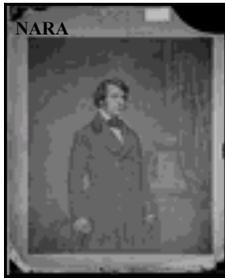
Polk, who was already preparing to ask Congress to declare war on Mexico, sent a message to Congress claiming, "Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil. She has



Adams

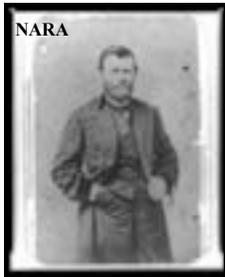
proclaimed that hostilities have commenced and that the two nations are now at war.”

Some opposed this move. Abraham Lincoln, a freshman Congressman from Illinois, poked holes in President Polk’s war message. In what became known as the “Spot Resolutions” he argued before Congress against the war. He questioned whether the spot where blood had been shed was really United States soil.



Sumner

Some citizens objected to the war because they believed it would extend slavery. Writer Henry David Thoreau refused to pay his state poll tax because he believed the war was immoral and would extend slavery. He was put in jail, and later published an essay on the need to stand against unjust government. Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” is a classic political document that has influenced every political reformer since, including Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.



Grant

John Quincy Adams, the former president, claimed the war was a southern plot to find “bigger pens to cram with slaves.”

Charles Sumner, an important abolitionist, also condemned the war.

General Ulysses S. Grant, who later commanded the Union forces during the Civil War, served as an army officer during the Mexican War. He called it “one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation.” He viewed the annexation of Texas as “a conspiracy to acquire territory out of which slave states might be formed for the American Union.”