

Texas Historical Commission

Star of the Republic Museum

Childhood in the Republic

Grade 4

WASHINGTON -ON-THE- BRAZOS

STATE HISTORIC SITE

Washington, Texas



Virtual Field Trip

TEXAS
HISTORICAL
COMMISSION



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Image courtesy of Star of the Republic Museum

Childhood in the Republic

Overview: Building a New Nation

Life in the Republic of Texas (1836-1846) would have been very different from life in the state today, especially for children. In this lesson, learners examine readings and photos to learn about the daily chores children performed during this time. Additional activities include comparing and contrasting daily life in the Republic with life today, analyzing items used during this time period to determine what modern versions might still be used today, and writing a first-person narrative describing a Texas Republic childhood.

Objectives

- Understand the rigors of daily life for children in the Republic of Texas
- Compare and contrast life in the Republic of Texas period and today
- Analyze common household tools of the Republic period
- Extend content learning through extension language arts and math activities

Social Studies TEKS

4.2, 4.3, 4.9B, 4.10, 4.10C, 4.11, 4.11A, 4.17, 4.18, 4.19, 4.19B, 4.19C, 4.21B, 4.21D, 4.22

Additional Discipline TEKS

4.4, 4.6E, 4.7B, 4.7E, - 4.7F, 4.11, 4.12A, 4.13H

Resources

- Activity 1: Daily Life in the Republic of Texas text and graphic organizer resources
- Activity 2: Texas Then and Now activity resource
- Math/Language Arts Extension Activity: Working for a Living activity resource
- Resource images: plow, mano and metate, cotton carder, spinning wheel

Vocabulary

carding (KAR ding) verb: to comb and clean raw cotton with a sharp-toothed instrument to untangle the fibers before spinning the cotton

chamber pot (CHAYM bur pot) noun: a bowl kept in a bedroom to use as a toilet at night

chronological (kron uh LAH jih kuhl) adjective: describes a record of events that are arranged in the order they occurred, starting with the earliest and following in order, like diary entries or a timeline

churn (chern) noun: a container for holding milk or cream as it's made into butter by stirring a dasher

dasher (DAH shur) noun: a tool made of two small pieces of wood put in an "x" shape that is used for stirring cream into butter

lye (lie) noun: a strong salt-based solution used for making soap

spinning wheel (SPIH ning wheel) noun: a household tool used to twist yarn or thread; usually powered by the hands or feet

tallow (TAH loh) noun: melted animal fat used for making candles

yoke (yohk) noun: a frame that fits over a person's neck and shoulders; used for carrying pails or baskets

Historical Context

Life in the Texas Republic was very hard. Settlers had to make or grow nearly everything they needed to survive. Children were expected to help their parents with all types of chores as soon as they were old enough, often by the age of four or five. They were treated as "miniature adults" and expected to help support the family. Their workdays began well before sunrise and often continued until bedtime.

Many of the chores the children did taught them skills they would need as adults. The kinds of chores a child, though, depended more on whether they were a girl or a boy. Girls helped their mothers with chores around the house and learned how to be a wife and mother. Boys who lived in the country helped their fathers with the farm work. City boys would often work in their fathers' shop or office, learning to be a blacksmith, storekeeper, baker, or even a lawyer.

Methods for using electricity for work hadn't been discovered yet, so most chores took a lot of time and energy to complete, sometimes over five hours! Texas children spent so much time just trying to survive in the challenging Texas frontier, and completing all their chores, that they didn't have much time or energy to just enjoy being kids, like many modern children do today.

Activity 1: Daily Life

30 minutes

To introduce the concept of daily life was like for Texas children during the Republic, have learners read (or read aloud) the **Daily Life text** and list the chores that boys and girls did on the **Daily Life in the Republic of Texas graphic organizer**. Have learners make a chronological list of their own daily chores and compare them to those of the children of the Republic of Texas. Answers will vary. Share responses when completed.

Activity 2: What Makes a Good Empresario?

20 minutes

In this activity, learners analyze items commonly used in the Republic of Texas and then determine what a modern-day counterpart might be. Distribute the Texas Then and Now worksheet and preview the images and text. Have learners complete the activity and share responses when completed. Answers may vary.

Answer Key:

- water yoke → water faucet
- butter churn → butter from grocery store
- slate and pencil → paper and pencil, computer, personal devices
- chamber pot → toilet
- candle molds light bulb wash tub and scrub board → washing machine

Language Arts Extension Activity: When I Was a Kid

20 minutes

In this journal activity, learners assume the persona of an older adult who grew up in the Republic of Texas who is writing a letter to a grandchild or other modern audience. The letter should be written in first-person and include as many descriptive words and associated vocabulary words as possible when describing their life and chores.

Math/Language Arts Extension Activity: Working for a Living

20 minutes

In the Republic of Texas, many families had “more children than money” and would often “rent” their children to other families or farms in order to earn extra money. In this activity using the **Working for a Living activity resource**, learners read three primary source excerpts from working children and solve associated math problems.

Answer Key:

1. 900 pounds (the same weight as an adult polar bear!)
2. 3 cents a day
3. It would take 8 weeks to earn enough to buy the jackknife.
You have sent 24 cents to your family.

Additional Resources

Johnny Texas by Carol Hoff
Letters to Oma by Marj Gurasich

Activity 1 Resource: A Child's Daily Life in the Republic of Texas

Children living in Texas during the 1830s were considered “little adults.” Parents were often very strict because they wanted their children to behave and be obedient. Making a living on the Texas frontier was hard. Many children did not get to go to school. Families needed their children to work hard to help them survive. It was normal for children as young as six years old to work from sunrise to sunset. Society had very clear ideas about what chores boys and girls were supposed to do.

A Boy's Life



Image of Native American hunting bison. Painting by John Stanley. Courtesy of PickPik.

Native American boys were more valued than Native American girls. This was because the boys would grow up to be the hunters and warriors who would feed and protect the tribe. They were not required to do chores or work around the camp. They spent their time learning the horse riding and hunting skills they would need as warriors. A Native American boy was given a bow and arrows at age five or six and learned how to shoot. He also learned how to make traps to catch smaller animals for food when buffalo were not available. He was able to add to his family's food supply by learning these skills. Young Native American boys learned that it was important to kill an animal only for food, not for sport.

An **Anglo boy** spent most of his time helping his father. He would chop firewood, feed the livestock, and then put it out to pasture before eating breakfast. After breakfast, he would help his father in the fields if it was growing season. His chores there included planting, weeding, or harvesting the crops. In other seasons, the boy would help repair and make farm tools, build fences, or help clear more land for planting crops. A Texas frontier boy often went hunting to provide food for his family. Sometimes, he was sent on an errand that took so long that he would have to stay somewhere else overnight. Boys who were not the sons of farmers began to learn their fathers' trades by working in their mills, shops, or offices. By the age of 14 or 15, the boys were expected to do the same amount of work as grown men.



Image courtesy of earlytexashistory.com.

Activity 1 Resource: A Boy's Daily Life in the Republic of Texas



Image courtesy of National Archives.

Life for **enslaved boys** was the same and different as life for other boys. The boys worked in the fields helping to plant and harvest crops if it was growing season. In other seasons, they helped clear land, repair buildings, and did other work. Chores sometimes included looking after animals such as chickens, turkeys, hogs, and sheep. Responsibilities included feeding the animals and making sure they did not run away. Unfortunately, an enslaved young man could be beaten for any reason if he did not do his work.

Tejano boys living on ranchos or farms had many of the same chores and responsibilities as other boys. However, they spent a lot of time learning to be vaqueros, or cowboys. This meant learning how to ride a horse, make a rope from braided horsehair, and repair their riding gear and saddles. Their responsibilities included learning about sheep and cattle as well. The young vaqueros had to know how to take care of the animals and how to move herds to pastures.



Image courtesy of Portal to Texas History.

Activity 1 Resource: A Child's Daily Life in the Republic of Texas

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A Girl's Life



Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Native American girls were expected to do work that prepared them to be the wives of warriors. Women and girls did most of the work in many tribes. Young girls learned skills by helping their mothers with chores such as carrying water and gathering firewood. They also learned to collect roots, nuts, and fruit. As a girl got older, she learned to care for her younger brothers and sisters. She also learned to cook and to make and set up the tipis where they lived. Native American men hunted and killed

buffalo. Once the buffalo was brought back to camp, the women were responsible for dealing with the meat. They butchered the meat and dried it for storage. Girls learned to use every part of the buffalo and not let any go to waste. They helped tan the hides of the buffalo with a mix of brains and water. This dried the hide so it could be used for robes and for the outside coverings of the tipis.

An **Anglo** girl helped her mother with all the household chores. Before breakfast, she milked cows, fed chickens and collected their eggs. After breakfast, she churned the milk to make butter. Then she might help make bread, weave or dye cloth, make candles or soap, and wash clothes and scrub the floor. She also might look after her younger brothers and sisters and help make lunch and dinner. There were jobs to do outside, too, like planting, weeding, or picking crops in the fields. Frontier girls worked hard from early in the morning to late at night. There was a lot to learn to become the wife of a settler. Some girls were married and responsible for a home and family as young as age fifteen or sixteen!



Image courtesy of the Star of the Republic Museum

Activity 1 Resource: A Girl's Daily Life in the Republic of Texas



Image courtesy J. N. Caradine, Sherman, Texas.

Life for **enslaved girls** was the same and different as life for other girls. Like other farm girls, enslaved girls often had to look after small children. Older enslaved girls took care of the children who weren't old enough to work. They might also be required to look after the plantation owner's children as well. Sometimes there were as many as six children to take care of. Some enslaved girls were taught to spin, weave, and sew. They used their skills to make clothes for the plantation owner's family, not for themselves. Girls were also sometimes required to cook for the owner's family. They would serve the meals and then clean up afterward as well.

Like girls from other cultures, a **Tejano girl** focused on learning how to care for a household. If she lived on a rancho or a farm, she would be responsible for taking care of the animals and small gardens. Many girls also learned the arts of quilt-making, tating (lace making), embroidery, tin-punching, and drawing. This allowed them to work as artisans in their communities.



Image of lace tating. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Activity 1 Graphic Organizer: A Child's Daily Life in the Republic of Texas

As you read the texts about boys' and girls' lives in the Republic of Texas, fill in this organizer.

How did a **boy** in the
Texas Republic
spend his day?

How did a **girl** in the
Texas Republic
spend her day?

How do **you** spend
your day? List your activities in
chronological order

How are your activities
similar to those of a child in
the Republic of Texas? How are they
different?



Activity 2 Resource: Texas Then and Now

Look at the pictures and read the descriptions of items that were commonly used in the Republic of Texas. In the **NOW** column, list or draw a picture of an item that is used for a similar purpose today. Add a caption to your drawing.

THEN	DESCRIPTION	NOW
	<p>water yoke Hung over the shoulders. Used to carry water from a well or nearby water source. In some cases, water could be as far as 1.5 miles from the house.</p>	
	<p>butter churn Used to turn cream (which had been separated from milk) into butter. This process could take between 60-90 minutes of non-stop churning.</p>	
	<p>slate and pencil Used in school to practice handwriting and to do math problems. A piece of material was used for an eraser.</p>	
	<p>chamber pot Used as a toilet inside the house at night instead of going out to the outhouse in the dark. It had to be dumped in the morning.</p>	
	<p>candle molds After a cotton wick was inserted in each hollow slot, melted tallow was poured in and allowed to cool. This was a faster way to make candles than hand dipping.</p>	
	<p>wash tub and scrub board Hot water was poured into the tub and lye soap was dragged over the scrub board in order to wash clothes. Doing laundry was usually an all-day event.</p>	



Math/Language Arts Extension Activity: Working for a Living

Life in the Republic of Texas was very difficult. Often, it was a struggle just to survive. Many poor families hired out (or “bound out”) their children to other farms and households. The children worked as field hands or house maids to earn money. Some boys and girls were as young as eight years old when they were sent to other towns to work! Children regularly sent all or part of their wages back to their families. **Read these stories about real Republic of Texas working children and then solve the math problems.**

Exley, Jo Ella Powell, Texas Tears & Texas Sunshine Larkin, Jack. The Reshaping of Everyday Life 1790-1840

Mathilda Wagner: Sent to live with the Longraper family in San Antonio when she was eight years old.

“I had to go to New Braunsfels each summer to pick cotton. I had to bring every nickel I made back to Mrs. Longraper. The people for whom we were picking cotton fed us at noon, one thick piece of corn bread and glass of buttermilk. We got twenty-five cents for one hundred pounds of cotton...I don’t know how many miles I had to walk to the fields each morning and back each night.”

1. If you were sent to pick cotton and you were paid 25 cents for every 100 pounds you picked, how much cotton would you have to pick to earn \$2.25?

Susan Blunt: Hired to “keep house” for a week, taking care of twin girls and an older grandfather. She was paid 15 cents for the whole week.

Susan got up at “five o’clock to begin her day’s work, going to a well quite a distance from the house to get water...boiled potatoes, fried pork and make the coffee for breakfast, got the girls ready for school, tend to the elderly invalid, then cleared [sic] away...put on some bean to stew for dinner...made some biscuits and them in a tin baker before the fire”.

2. If you earned 15 cents for working 5 days, how much did you earn each day?

Daniel Drake began as a hired field hand when he was 8 years old and was responsible for *“riding the horse to keep it steady while plowing, spent endless hours weeding, returning from the fields at night, black with needles...felled trees, split rails, built fences, chopped firewood, plowed the fields.”*

3. You want to buy a jackknife that costs 16 cents. You earn 5 cents a week. You must send 3 cents of that back to your family every week. How long will it take you to save up enough money to buy the jackknife for 16 cents? How much money will you have you sent back to your family during this time?



Resource Image: plow

This is a wooden plow with iron parts and a blade at the bottom. A person would stand behind the handles and put the blade into the ground. The plow could either be pushed from behind or pulled forward to cut rows into dirt fields for planting.



Image from the collection of the Star of the Republic Museum.



Resource Image: mano and metate

This slab and cylindrical stone are used for grinding corn to make tortillas. The stone is rolled across the corn to crush it. In Spanish, the slab is called a mano (MAH no). The stone is called a metate (meh TAH tay).



Image from the collection of the Star of the Republic Museum.



Resource Image: cotton carder

Cotton carders were used to “comb” cotton fibers in order to straighten them. This made the fibers easier to spin into thread and weave into fabric.



Image from the collection of the Star of the Republic Museum.



Resource Image: spinning wheel

The great spinning wheel stands over five feet tall. It is used for spinning cotton fibers into yarn.



Image from the collection of the Star of the Republic Museum.

