

Texas Historical Markers

Purpose

How and why do we remember famous people, places and events? How could you or your home be remembered someday? This lesson introduces students to the importance of understanding and preserving local history. Using Texas Historical Markers in your community, the students will write creatively about a significant person, place or event.

Approximate Time Frame

Flexible—from one class session to several sessions

TEKS

Fourth Grade Social Studies

- 4.5(A) identify the impact of various issues and events on life in Texas such as urbanization, increased use of oil and gas, the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, and World War II
- 4.5(C) identify the accomplishments of notable individuals such as John Tower, Scott Joplin, Audie Murphy, Cleto Rodriguez, Stanley Marcus, Bessie Coleman, Raul A. Gonzalez Jr., and other local notable individuals
- 4.17(A) identify important individuals who have participated voluntarily in civic affairs at state and local levels such as Adina de Zavala and Clara Driscoll
- 4.17(D) identify the importance of historical figures and important individuals who modeled active participation in the democratic process such as Sam Houston, Barbara Jordan, Lorenzo de Zavala, Ann Richards, Sam Rayburn, Henry B. Gonzalez, James A. Baker III, Wallace Jefferson, and other local individuals
- 4.18(A) identify leaders in state, local, and national governments, including the governor, local members of the Texas Legislature, the local mayor, U.S. senators, local U.S. representatives, and Texans who have been president of the United States.
- 4.19(B) identify customs, celebrations, and traditions of various cultural, regional, and local groups in Texas such as Cinco de Mayo, Oktoberfest, the Strawberry Festival, and Fiesta San Antonio
- 4.19(C) summarize the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups in the development of Texas such as Lydia Mendoza, Chelo Silva, and Julius Lorenzo Cobb Bledsoe
- 4.20(A) identify famous inventors and scientists such as Gail Borden, Joseph Glidden, Michael DeBakey, and Millie Hughes-Fulford and their contributions
- 4.21(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; documents; and artifacts to acquire information about the United States and Texas

Texas Historical Commission
 P.O. Box 12276
 Austin, TX 78711-2276
 512.463.6100
history@thc.state.tx.us
www.thc.state.tx.us



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- 4.21(A) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions
- 4.22(B) incorporate main and supporting ideas in verbal and written communication
- 4.22(D) create written and visual material such as journal entries, reports, graphic organizers, outlines and bibliographies

Fourth Grade English Language Arts and Reading

- 4.10 Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author’s purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to explain the difference between a stated and an implied purpose for an expository text.
- 4.15 Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text.
- 4.18 Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts. Students write expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes.
- 4.24 Research/Gathering Sources. Students determine, locate, and explore the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather.

Seventh Grade Social Studies (standards aligned with STAAR Assessed Curriculum)

- 7.4(B) identify individuals, events, and issues during early Texas statehood, including the U.S.-Mexican War, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, population growth, and the Compromise of 1850
- 7.5© identify significant individuals and events concerning Texas and the Civil War such as John Bell Hood, John Reagan, Francis Lubbock, Thomas Green, John Magruder and the Battle of Galveston, the Battle of Sabine Pass, and the Battle of Palmito Ranch
- 7.6(A) identify significant individuals, events, and issues from Reconstruction through the beginning of the 20th century, including the factors leading to the expansion of the Texas frontier, the effects of westward expansion on the American Indians, the buffalo soldiers, and Quanah Parker
- 7.6© identify significant individuals, events, and issues from Reconstruction through the beginning of the 20th century, including the effects of the growth of the railroad and the contributions of James Hogg
- 7.21(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas

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- 7.21(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions
- 7.22(A) create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information

Seventh Grade English Language Arts and Reading

- 7.9 Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author’s purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to explain the difference between the theme of a literary work and the author’s purpose in an expository text.
- 7.14 Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text.
- 7.17 Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts. Students write expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes.
- 7.23 Research/Gathering Sources. Students determine, locate, and explore the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather.

Student Objectives

- Identify a historical marker near their school and summarize the information
- Describe in their own words how buildings/place can be “containers of memory”
- Understand why people, places and events are commemorated

Guiding Questions for Objectives

- Why should we remember people, buildings/places and events?
- What did the person contribute to society? What made them significant?
- Why was an event significant locally, statewide and/or nationally?
- What can buildings/places tell us about history?
- How were the people, buildings/places and events chosen to have markers?

Vocabulary

- *Tribute*: public praise or honor
- *Distinction*: excellence that sets a person, building, place or event apart from others
- *Historical marker*: a public display that tells about a person, building, place or event
- *Significant*: worthy of attention; noteworthy
- *Commemorate*: to show respect for or serve as a memorial to something



- *Historic*: famous or important in history, or potentially so
- *Historical*: of or concerning history; concerning past events; belonging to the past, not the present

Activities

- Write creatively about a locally famous person, building or event
- Conduct independent research about the life of a famous person, building or event in your community
- Optional: conduct a visual survey of a local historic building
- Optional: refinish a local historical marker

Type

- Indoor, desktop activities
- Opportunities for field studies/site visits

Materials

- Handout A: Conducting a Visual Survey of a Building
- Research materials: library books, encyclopedias, etc.
- Internet access for Texas Historic Sites Atlas: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/texas-historic-sites-atlas>
 - Helpful, but not required: Portal to Texas History: <http://texashistory.unt.edu/>
- Handout B: Write your own historical marker
- Handout C: Refinish a local historical marker

Teacher Preparation

- Search the Texas Historic Sites Atlas online, locate a few historical markers close to your school or students' neighborhood(s)
 - <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/texas-historic-sites-atlas>
- Use **Handout A** either for your own reference or to distribute to students
 - Handouts B and C are for additional projects
- Note the precautions and alternatives listed in the background information for teachers

Background Information for Teachers

As one of the most visible programs of the Texas Historical Commission (THC), historical markers commemorate diverse topics, including the history and architecture of houses, commercial and public buildings, religious congregations, and military sites; events that changed the course of local and state history; and individuals who have made lasting contributions to our state, community organizations, and businesses.

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Historical markers can be found in all 254 Texas counties. The addresses of some of the state's historical markers can be found in the Spreadsheet, as well as online in the Texas Historic Sites Atlas, which also will show the text for many of the markers.

This historical markers lesson encourages students to look carefully at local history: who lived here, what type of buildings are present, what events shaped our history, and what conclusions can be drawn from such information. (See questions on Handout A.)

Activity Procedures

1. Show students a list of historical markers in your community, county, or region. Encourage the students to spend some time looking at the places, people and events noted. Talk about the people who lived and/or events that took place in or near your neighborhood.
 - Create a Google Map or have the students create a Google map of local, county or regional markers to share making note of distances between your community and events, places, and people that are significant in Texas history.
2. Choose (either you choose or the students choose) a person, place, or event from the list of local historical markers.
3. Read about the accomplishments or history of the person, place, or event online from the Texas Historic Sites Atlas or from the Spreadsheet.
4. Have the students make a list of what else they would like to know about the person, place, or event. Use library books, encyclopedias, the internet, etc. to find out more.
5. If at all possible, visit the historical marker sites with your class and/or conduct a visual survey by using the questions provided in the Handout. Alternatively, conduct a visual survey from photographs you have made of site(s).
6. Use one or more of the English Language Arts and Reading activity suggestions below.





Figure 1. Historical marker commemorating a person.



Figure 2. Historical marker commemorating a building.

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Figure 3. Historical marker commemorating a community.

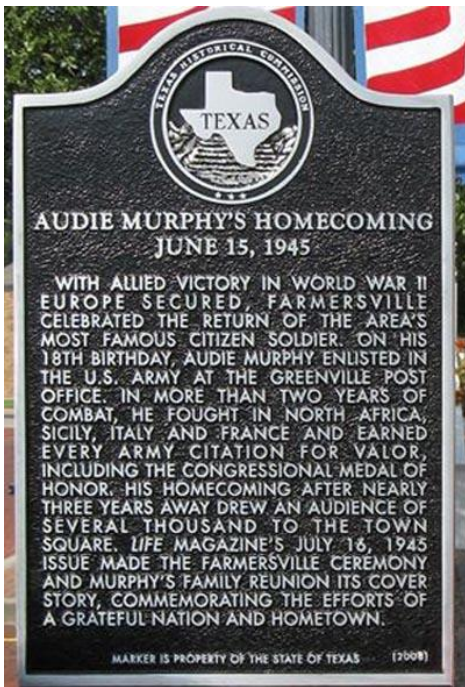


Figure 4. Historical marker commemorating an event.

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Suggestions for English Language Arts and Reading activities in reading, writing, researching, and presenting

- Ask the students to imagine that in 100 years, a historical marker will be placed in front of their home. Have them write the text that would answer questions such as those below. Using Handout B, have them print and write the text to fit in the space provided.
 - When were they born?
 - When did they move into the home?
 - What are the special characteristics of this home?
 - What are the most important achievements in their lives?
 - Why are they being remembered?
 - In what ways have they helped their neighborhood or community?

- Have the students write a newspaper headline and article announcing that a famous person from their community or region has chosen to move to the area. Design and illustrate the front page of the newspaper. Answer questions such as:
 - Why did they choose to move here?
 - What talents did they bring to the community?
 - Where did they move from?

- Have students imagine a famous local home or place of business and the stories they could tell. What would the building say? What memories would it have of the people who lived or worked there? (Example: Does the old corner store remember the day that Mr. Smith drove up and parked in front of the building in the first car in town?) Have the students write a descriptive essay or write an interview with the building about one of these memories.

- Have students imagine that their own home could talk. What would it say? What memories would it have of the student and the family living there? Have them write about this.

- Have students read through several real estate ads in local/regional newspapers, and then write an ad either for their home or another building. What are the special features about the building? Why would someone want to buy and/or live there?

Extensions

- Draw the outline of a home or building on a large sheet of paper. Fill the inside with one-sentence memories that it has about a local person, business or event that happened there.

- Have the students imagine that they are making (or actually make) a time capsule to place inside the walls, foundation, or attic of their home to be opened in 50 years when another child is



living there. Students can collect newspaper articles, write about their favorite things, and include pictures and memories of their home.

- Are there historical markers in your community that need some maintenance? Take a field trip to refinish one marker or more. Refinishing faded historical markers is a great way to get out into the community and help preserve the history of your area. See Handout C for instructions.
- Is there an important building, event, or person that needs to be commemorated in your community? Find out more about the process your students can use to write and apply for a Texas State Historical Marker: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers>.

Additional Resources

- To find out more about what the Texas Historical Commission does. <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/>
- Learn more about the Texas State Historical Markers program. <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers>
- Use the Portal to Texas History to research topics in U.S. and Texas history. <http://texashistory.unt.edu/>
- There are almost 16,000 historical markers in the state of Texas. Find out more facts about historical markers in Texas. http://www.thc.state.tx.us/about/fast-facts#cat_302
- Interested in attending a marker dedication ceremony? Visit our Calendar of Events page. <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/news-events/calendar>

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Handout: Conducting a visual survey of a building

Observation

- How many windows are on the front of the building? Draw an example of one.
- Is the main entrance to the building marked in a special way? How? Draw it.
- How many stories tall is the building?
- What kind of materials is the building made from? (wood, brick, concrete, steel)
- What is located on either side of the building?
- Are any other structures attached to the building or does it stand by itself?
- Does the building sit close to the street or is it set back?
- Is the street busy and noisy or is it a quiet town?
- Does the building have special ornamentation—none, some, a lot? Draw one example.
- Does it have any unique details? If so, draw one example.
- Draw a sketch of the entire front side of the building.
- What are some clues (such as sign or cornerstone) to tell you what year it was built? When was it built?

Interpretation


- What do you think was (or is) the function of the building?
- Does this building look very similar or very different from those around it? How?
- Do you think many people lived or worked in this building or just one?
- Is there a stoop or porch? How do you think people who lived here might have used it?
- Are there any clues (besides the marker) to let you know who lived or worked here?

Analysis

- Why do you think people chose to live or work here?
- What would happen if the building could talk? What would it say?
- What special memories do you think this building contains?
- If you could ask this building one question what would you like to know?
- What other information would you like to know about the building or the people who lived or worked here?
- Where could you find information about this person or building?
- Who could you talk with to find out more information?
- How could you let other people in the neighborhood know about this building or a person who lived or worked here?



Handout B: Write your own historical marker



A large rectangular area with a decorative border, containing 15 horizontal lines for writing. The border is a thick, dark, textured line. The top of the border is arched, and the Texas Historical Commission logo is centered at the top of this arch.

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Handout C: Repairing your local historical marker

When the details on historical markers fade or are damaged, it's time to clean up! With a few supplies and a bit of effort, you can renew your local markers. You can also use similar techniques to remove graffiti.

In the examples below, the finish on the historical markers had been damaged by the hot Texas sun and a harsh climate making them difficult to read.

Materials needed

- Painter's mask
- Stiff wire brush (stainless steel works best)
- Soft bristle scrub brush
- Spray bottle or bucket of water
- Soap
- Towel
- Can(s) of black lacquer spray paint
- Can(s) of clear lacquer spray paint
- Cotton rags
- Lacquer thinner
- 80 grit and 120 grit sandpaper
- Power sander or hand sanding block
- Roll of two-inch painter's masking tape
- NOTE: if refinishing a marker attached to a building or surface, cover the surrounding surface with poster board, paper or tarp to prevent over spraying of the paint.

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Repairing the marker



Step 1: Use a stiff wire brush to remove flaking or other debris; always use a side-to-side or left-to-right motion while cleaning the surface. Debris may also stick inside the raised lettering. If this happens, carefully use a sharp tool or knife to remove debris.



Step 2: Use a soft bristle brush to remove dust and other debris around letters. If available, use a portable air blower to remove fine particles.



Step 3: Thoroughly clean the marker surface with soap and water. Towel dry and allow time for the marker surface to dry completely.

Step 4: Apply two inch painter's tape to the border and the base of the marker.





Step 5: Apply two even coats of an automotive black lacquer (spray) to the entire surface of the marker. Allow the lacquer to dry completely. Use a painter's mask to avoid inhalation of spray paint.



Step 6: Remove dried lacquer from the medallion and title letters with a soft cotton cloth and lacquer thinner. Use care not to remove the black lacquer on the flat surface portions of the medallion and areas surrounding title letters. Allow marker to dry completely.



Step 7: After removing masking tape from the marker border and base, use a battery-operated or electric sander and 80 grit sandpaper or a hand sanding block to remove black lacquer from raised text. Use care not to remove black lacquer from flat surface areas. Lightly use the sander to clean marker border and base. Use 120 grit sandpaper to manually polish border and raised medallion.



Step 8: Remove fine debris with paint or bristle scrub brush. If available, use an electric or battery-operated power blower to remove fine debris.





Step 9: Apply two even coats of clear lacquer spray paint to the entire surface of the historical maker.

Step 10: Step back and admire your work. You now have a historical marker that has been renewed to its original splendor.



For more information about marker repair, contact the THC’s history programs division at history@thc.state.tx.us.

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