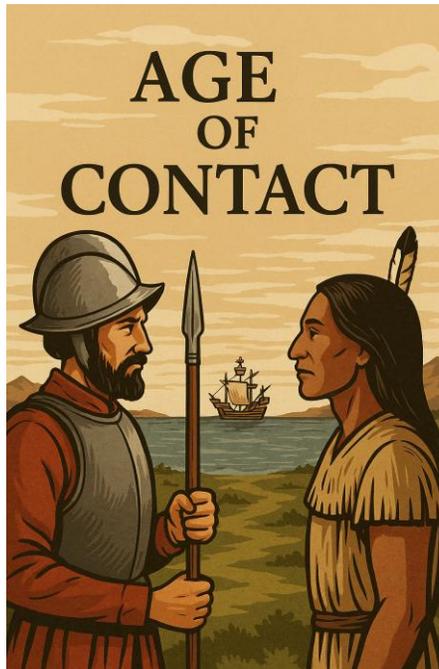
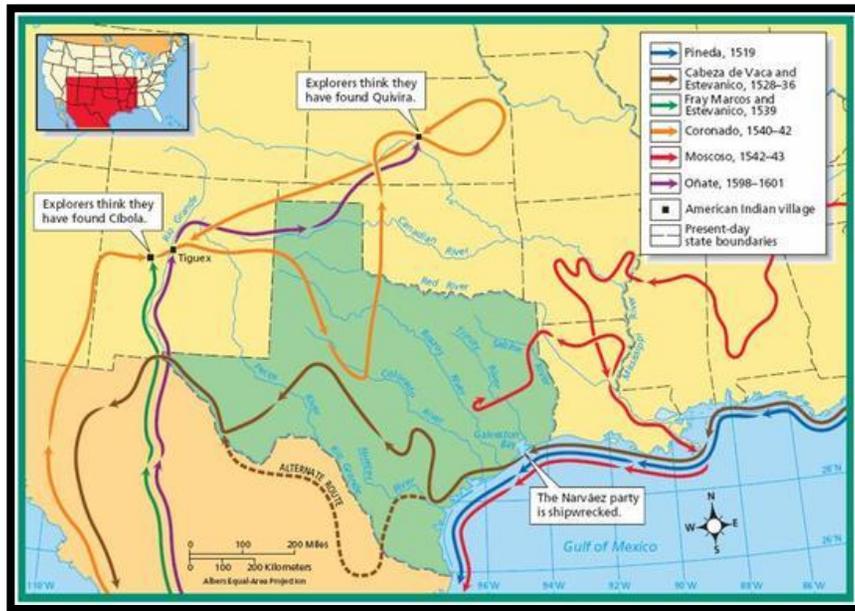


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UNIT NARRATIVE



The Age of Contact (1528-1690) was the era when Spaniards – and later the French – arrived in Texas searching for wealth and hoping to find native empires (like the Aztecs or the Incans) to conquer. What followed was a series of European explorations of Texas that failed to find gold or silver, but nonetheless wrought lasting effects on American Indians in Texas. European diseases brought by these explorers, such as smallpox, ravaged indigenous populations in Texas. Spanish explorers also introduced horses (which were not native to North America) to Texas and thereby began a process of transforming groups like the Apache, which soon adapted themselves into a powerful horse culture that could more effectively raid their neighbors and defend against enemies.

By the 1540s, Spain had determined that Texas contained no gold or silver, and therefore its only real value to the Spanish was in serving as a buffer that could prevent other European powers from

coming too close to the silver mines in central Mexico that brought great wealth into the Spanish Empire. When the French explorer Robert La Salle landed on the coast of Texas in February 1685, Spain launched a series of expeditions into Texas with the sole intent of finding and stamping out La Salle's forces. Although La Salle's settlement failed by the late 1680s, Spain decided to set up permanent settlements in Texas to prevent France – or any other European power – from establishing a foothold in Texas. To that end, Spaniards set up their first missions in 1690 near the Caddo Indians in east Texas, although these missions soon failed and were abandoned by the Spanish in 1693.

CONTENT STANDARDS

Below are the standards taught and assessed in this unit.

Exploration and Early Colonization		Connected Knowledge and Skills 7.1
7.2 History. The student understands how individuals, events, and issues through the Mexican National Era shaped the history of Texas.		
Readiness Standards	Supporting Standards	
7.1(A)^ identify the major eras in Texas history, describe their defining characteristics, and explain the purpose of dividing the past into eras, including ... Age of Contact; Spanish Colonial ...	7.1(B)^ explain the significance of the following dates: 1519, mapping of the Texas coast and first mainland Spanish settlement; 1718, founding of San Antonio ...	
7.8(C)^ analyze the effects of physical and human factors such as climate, weather, landforms, irrigation, transportation, and communication on major events in Texas	7.2(B) identify important individuals, events, and issues related to European exploration of Texas such as Alonso Álvarez de Pineda, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, the search for gold, and the conflicting territorial claims between France and Spain	
7.9(A)^ identify ways in which Texans have adapted to and modified the environment and explain the positive and negative consequences of the modifications	7.2(C) identify important individuals, events, and issues related to European colonization of Texas, including the establishment of Catholic missions, towns, and ranches, and the contributions of individuals such as Fray Damián Massanet, Antonio Margil de Jesús, and Francisco Hidalgo	
	7.18(C)^ identify examples of Spanish influence and the influence of other cultures on Texas such as place names, vocabulary, religion, architecture, food, and the arts	

UNDERSTANDINGS AND QUESTIONS

Key Understandings
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. European exploration of the Americas was driven by competition, curiosity, and the desire for wealth. Spanish and French explorers traveled to Texas in search of new lands, riches, and power, often with limited understanding of the territory or its peoples.2. Contact between Europeans and American Indians created both cooperation and conflict. Encounters between explorers and Indigenous groups sometimes led to trade or alliances, but often resulted in violence, misunderstanding, and disruption of Native ways of life.3. Exploration shaped how Europeans understood and claimed Texas. Early maps, journals, and reports from explorers influenced how Spain and France viewed Texas and contributed to their efforts to control the region.4. Narratives of exploration reflect the perspectives and goals of the explorers. The writings of explorers such as Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle provide insight into their experiences—but also reveal their cultural biases and motivations.5. The Age of Contact set the stage for colonization. Although no permanent European settlements were established in Texas during this period, the encounters and claims made during the Age of Contact laid the foundation for later colonization and conflict over land.

Key Questions

- ◆ **Why did European explorers come to Texas?**
 - ↳ Encourages students to investigate motives such as wealth, empire-building, and curiosity during the Age of Exploration.
- ◆ **What happened when Europeans and American Indians first met?**
 - ↳ Promotes analysis of cooperation, conflict, cultural misunderstanding, and the consequences of early contact.
- ◆ **How do explorers' journals and maps shape what we know about Texas history?**
 - ↳ Supports development of source analysis and historical interpretation using primary documents.
- ◆ **Whose stories are told—and whose are missing—in accounts of early exploration?**
 - ↳ Guides students to examine bias and perspective in historical narratives and to consider Indigenous viewpoints.
- ◆ **How did the Age of Contact lay the groundwork for future colonization?**
 - ↳ Helps students trace continuity between early exploration and later political, cultural, and territorial developments in Texas.