

Houston, We Have a Story

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Introduction

Everyone has a story. Every city has a story. Therein lies the central theme of this curriculum unit, a combination of personal and civic history. We will look at the inception, growth, and development of the city of Houston, while each student explores his own family's background of coming to this place and what has happened since. We will draw parallels between the two stories, looking at general trends affecting Houston's growth. We will plot sites on maps, graph data in a variety of formats using computer capabilities, interview family members, and portray personal anecdotes visually or orally.

We can start with my story. When I moved to Houston, my husband and I had been married less than one year and we were mid-way through college. Both of us planned to get Bachelor's degrees, and my husband was contemplating law school. At the time, he worked for the U.S. Post Office in our small hometown, and I was a full-time student. We first aimed for a Post Office job in or near Austin, where we could go to the University of Texas. However, we found that the area was tightly closed, and the neighboring small communities wanted someone with a German surname, not an Irish one. So, we looked to Houston and its universities and law school. The Post Office in Houston is a very large one, and my husband accepted a position there, and the University of Houston accepted both of us. We then alternated working full time with part time college or full time college and part time work until we both had our degrees and he had completed law school. During those first five years we moved five times, always to another apartment and dependent on proximity to work/school. It was when we were renting our first apartment that I first heard of distance being measured in time: we lived "20 minutes from downtown." When our first child was one year old and my spouse had been working for a law firm for 18 months, we bought our house, which remained home for many years for us and our three children.

This unit of study is made of several components, each of which can be expanded for more in-depth analysis or longer research, or can be shrunk for younger students or to fit a narrower time frame or smaller community. My scope is on the 9th and 10th grade levels in a study skills class; however, many of the "mix-and-match" components can fit well in other disciplines such as English/language arts, social studies, economics, art, world culture/ humanities, and mathematics.

The curriculum unit centers on a student's personal history research as to why his/her family came here, where they lived, when they moved to another home--a family narrative. I will encourage searching family trees, interviewing and recording elderly family members, writing down special family stories, whether they are humorous or tragic. This heritage is important, and we want to preserve it.

All class members will study a map of the city, available at most gasoline stations, and large city maps are available from the school district. First each of us will plot our home locations on the map, using special pins or adhesive dots. Then we will begin working on big picture/little picture activities. I will provide students with general data about origins and growth of Houston and some other cities, then we will compare that information to Houston's experience. At the same time, each student will be researching her family's story. These twin threads, general and individual, will run throughout the unit. There are many opportunities for further study at any point, particularly if someone discovers an unusual story or the research uncovers a surprise. We also will link to published books, some of them fiction but most of them non-fiction. We will use Internet sources, films and videos, TV documentaries, and presentations of visual and performing arts as they come along and fit with our plans.

As we hear the various student stories, we can identify patterns. The students will see that their individual histories merge to make up the demographics of the city. One culminating activity will be to total up the data and summarize the trends. With that information, each one would devise a graphic which demonstrates the findings. They will be able to draw such a chart by hand or by using computer software.

Numerous learning skills will be developed and enhanced through this unit. They include techniques of personal interview, note-taking, reading and summarizing, map marking, charting and graphing, computer usage, bibliographic documentation, statistics, and specialized vocabulary. I hope to tap each pupil's curiosity and pride in locating information about his family. I encourage personal photographs, audio tapes of family members and stories, and originality in constructing a visual graphing of one's information in correlation to the city's data. One student found, originally through the Internet, about street names and how they were derived in various cities. She was able then to trace her own surname, and discovered a city street named for her family ancestor. As part of her project in a history class, she included a photograph of herself in front of the street sign. With Houston's far-ranging ethnic variety, we are sure to hear some poignant and interesting stories about living in Houston!

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: REASONS FOR GROWTH

A city, in order to grow, must experience certain events or benefit from certain natural conditions as an impetus to growth. Houston originally did not appear to have the necessary qualifications to become the fourth largest city in the United States. Rather, the climate was unpleasant, there were no transportation systems in place, and no natural waterways existed. What Houston did have was a pair of founders who were capitalists and real estate men from the very beginning--men who sold land in Texas to Yankees in the populated areas of the Northeast. Those new owners came to Texas and put everything together to create the right atmosphere for growth.

This entrepreneurial attitude is a basic component of Houston's accomplishments--the idea that growth is good, that a better way can be found for anything, that any problem

can be solved. Thus, Houston developed a good clean water system for its population. Since the heat during summer was so unbearable, Houston became the most air conditioned city in the world by the 1950's. Houston had no natural port, so they dug one, extending Galveston Bay 45 miles inland.

At the same time, Houston experienced no natural disasters, as Galveston did with the great hurricane of 1900. New Orleans was unable to convert the swamp water around it into a potable supply, and its conservative mind-set prevented new ideas from reaching potential. Therefore, Houston was able to receive business and people that might have gone to those other cities.

What brought more and more people to Houston? Clearly, the answer is \$\$\$\$ and jobs. The discovery of oil in the area, combined with the extension of railways and the port, led to major oil companies investing in the area. That brought jobs, and the labor supply was beneficial. The support industries followed, still with the practical and enthusiastic attitude for making things better leading to places such as the Texas Medical Center and the Astrodome, the first covered sports arena. Oil was "a good horse to ride" for many years, until the low years of the 1980's. At that time, 88% of jobs in Houston were connected to the oil industry, after being 50% in 1949. By the late 1990's, the number of oil-dependent jobs was back to 50 - 51%.

The positive business community and lure of jobs still is the main reason for influx into Houston. A survey of two high school 9th grade classrooms showed that job opportunity was the dominant reason for someone to move to Houston. That reason was cited twice as often as the second reason, educational opportunities. Other reasons were family presence, marriage, and influence of friends. With today's high school students more aware of world citizenship and experiencing boom years in Houston economically, we will research the trends in reasons for the city's growth.

Teachers should consult the bibliography at the end of this unit for ideas and guidance in assigning students to a specific topic.

Objectives of the Curriculum Unit "Houston, We Have a Story"

The student shall be provided an opportunity to:

- 1) Recognize and use correctly terms related to urban growth and development
- 2) Practice skills in notetaking and research, both traditional and original
- 3) Research family's history in the setting of Houston, Texas
- 4) Identify motivations or personal factors in their family's move to Houston
- 5) Compare Houston's growth and development to that of other cities
- 6) Compare personal purposes and history to those of the city in general
- 7) Devise graphs or visual tables showing city growth, reasons, and history
- 8) Trace development of certain areas of the city
- 9) Identify own address(es) on a city map

- 10) Develop a written or an oral report which relates family's history to city's development
- 11) Locate city-related information on the Internet

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Map Marking - On a large map of the city, mark your present home's location. Use special pins or stickers or markers as your teacher directs.

Research Your History - Ask your parents, grandparents, other relatives, or family friends about the family's history. Determine when and why members of your family came to live in the Houston area. Use the fact sheet form provided you. Record people as they tell the story, and take careful notes. Take pictures, still or video. Locate any photographs or portraits or other memorabilia that has special interest to your history and Houston's history. Look on the Internet for pertinent information, keeping a list of URL's. You will be giving a presentation of this material. Some data from the fact sheet will be used in a graphing activity.

Vocabulary - Define the listed words. Be able to use them correctly.

Note-taking - Take notes from your teacher's lectures and from any guest speaker's information. Take notes from any videos that you are assigned to watch, or any plays that you are assigned to attend.

Discussion - Participate in discussing what data you have received in lectures or performances, and relate what you are learning from your research. Be able to compare your family experience with that of other families.

Group Work - Choose from the media list one title to read or view. Share the work equally with your group of 2 - 4 students. Select either a non-fiction work or a fiction work.

For non-fiction: Identify 4 cause-and-effect occurrences from the source which are part of Houston's history. Then, identify your own family's role in those events, or how they are affected by those occurrences.

For fiction: Write a brief summary of what the story is about. Identify and list 5 details which exhibit the Houston environment in the written material or performance. You may quote directly or you may paraphrase. Cite page numbers of specific information.

Graphing - Study a variety of charts, graphs, and tables or other visual representations of data. Your teacher will show you several samples. Research the capabilities of your computer for graphing; check with your mathematics teacher for help, also.

Data Interpretation - Your teacher will gather the information from all the fact sheets and combine the results. Using that data, show the information in a visual form. You may use a computer, or set it up by hand. It can be a chart, a graph, a table, a pictograph, or another format that you find or create. Be able to identify your family's position on that graphic.

Oral Presentation - Tell the class your family history. Include information from the fact sheet, adding any findings that you consider interesting. Use at least one visual or audio device as part of the presentation. It can be photographs, video or audio recordings, maps, or historical documents such as marriage licenses or birth certificates. You may use computer generated material both in the content and in the presentation of your material.

Optional Activities or Extra Credit Opportunities - Work individually or in a group, with teacher approval, on original research. The final product will be a written report or an oral presentation. Suggested topics include the following:

- Racial/ethnic neighborhoods in the city
- History of the Texas Medical Center
- Houston's supply of drinking water
- History of the Astrodome
- Why Houston does not have zoning ordinances
- Role of national sports teams in the city
- History of the Alley Theater
- Higher education in Houston
- Hurricanes in the Houston area
- Growth of Hispanic population
- Native American tribes in the area
- The birth of the Port of Houston
- Freed slaves in Houston
- Why is it called "The Bayou City"? - bayous and their roles in history

Here is a sample of the fact sheet worksheet:

FACT SHEET - - MY PLACE IN HOUSTON 'S HISTORY

Circle one: information about maternal or paternal family

Date of arrival in Houston area _____

(use earliest known date)

Reason(s) that person or group came here _____

Locations within city - - any moves _____

Use addresses or geographic descriptions, such as "Galleria area" or "Fifth Ward."

Reasons for the address changes, such as "family growing-needed bigger house" or "so Mom could be closer to work".

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Interesting information found in this family research

World Wide Web addresses or computer software located in researching this material:

My plans to preserve my family's history in Houston:

Here is a sample vocabulary list work sheet:

Vocabulary List - "Houston, We Have a Story"

Define the following words, and be able to use them correctly in discussions, research, and reports.

1. demographics
2. diversity
3. economics
4. entrepreneur
5. immigrant/immigration
6. infrastructure
7. metropolitan
8. socioeconomics
9. suburban
10. urban

MEDIA LIST for Group Work

Non-fiction

Blood and Money, by Thomas Thompson

Brother, Can You Spare a Million? The Story of Jesse H. Jones (video recording),
produced by Eric Stanger, KUHT

The Cop Who Wouldn't Quit, by Rick Nelson

Hearts, by Thomas Thompson

The Hospital, by Jan de Hartog

Spindletop, by James Clark and Michel T. Halbouty

The Spindletop Gusher, by Carmen Bredeson (for elementary age readers)

The Trust (drama), by Doug Kilgore - unpublished, to be seen in production

Wildcatter, the Story of Michel T. Halbouty & the Search for Oil, by Jack Donahue

Fiction

An Absence of Light, by David Lindsey

Body of Truth, by David Lindsey

A Cold Mind, by David Lindsey

Galveston, by Suzanne Morris

Heat From Another Sun, by David Lindsey

Other titles and performances may be added; check with teacher

Bibliography

Clark, James and Michel T. Halbouty. *Spindletop*. Houston: Gulf Publishing Co., 1952.

This interesting book tells the story of the birth of America's great oil companies. It is easily divided into chapters about each new business. For example, the chapter entitled "A Star Is Born" is about the beginnings of Texaco, Inc.

Durant, Will and Ariel. *The Story of Civilization*. 11 vols. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.

A basic classic, this series is loaded with information. Check topics for specific information about the development of cities throughout history.

English, Paul W. *Geography - People and Places in a Changing World*. 2nd Ed. St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1997.

This is a high school geography textbook. It is helpful in showing the relationship of city development and geography, such as near rivers or ports.

Feagin, J. R. *Free Enterprise City: Houston in Political-Economic Perspective*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988.

For those who want to approach the city's development through its economic thrust, this book is for an advanced student.

Garvin, Alexander. *The American City: What Works and Doesn't*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995.

Very readable case studies and comparisons make up this book's contents. It compares theory with reality.

The Houston Metropolitan Study, An Entrepreneurial Community Looks Ahead.

Houston: University of Houston Center for Public Policy, Rice University/Baker Institute for Public Policy, 1998.

Full of specific information about various influences and data about Houston, it is a must for this unit.

Johnson, Marguerite. *Houston, The Unknown City, 1836-1946*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1992.

A very interesting account, this tells some of the not-so-obvious history of the city.

Kilgore, Doug. *The Trust*. {unpublished drama} Presented at Main Street Theater, Houston, TX, May 7, 1999.

This play is unpublished, so arrange to see it presented, as it is often done in Houston in such venues as Rice University and Main Street Theater. It is the true story of William Marsh Rice's endowment that set up Rice University.

Mazour, Anatole G. and John M. Peoples. *World History - People and Nations*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Jovanovich, 1990.

A general textbook to demonstrate city development throughout the history of the world, only certain sections would be used in this unit. Terminology is helpful.

Miller, Ray. *Ray Miller's Houston*. Houston: Active Record Cordovan Trade Paper, 1991.

A popular television figure tells in a friendly way about interesting places and events of the Houston scene.

Pool, William C. and maps by Edward Triggs and Lance Wren. *A Historical Atlas of Texas*. Austin, TX: The Encino Press, 1975.

Use this unusual book to approach the study of history through geography. The oilfield history emerges from this book of maps.

Stanger, Eric. Producer, *Brother, Can You Spare a Million?* (Video Recording) *The Story of Jesse H. Jones*. Houston: KUHT, Houston Public Television, 1998.

An account of the life of the megamillionaire philanthropist Jesse Jones, this video can be used either generally or as the beginning point of more research.

Sutton, Walter A. *Spindletop/Gladys City Boomtown Museum*. Beaumont, TX: Lamar University Press, 1992.

This little printed guidebook was written by a "local" in the area where the great Spindletop oil well came in. If possible, a field trip to the Lucas monument would be very helpful.

Schwartz, John. Producer, *This Home Is Not For Sale* (Video Recording). Houston: KUHT, Houston Public Television, 1994.

Copies of this video are difficult to find, but the program is Excellent! It shows the change of the affluent Jewish/Anglo neighborhood to a prominent Black neighborhood along MacGregor Blvd.

Thomas, Robert D. and Richard W. Murray. *Progrowth Politics: Change and Governance in Houston*. Berkeley: IGS Press, 1991.

Another book that is full of facts on a variety of Houston issues, this volume will present specific data.

Thompson, Thomas. *Blood and Money*. New York: Dell Publishing Co, 1986.

This popular writer has made a story of the true-life events concerning the death of Joan Robinson Hill and of the subsequent murder of her husband at their River Oaks home.

Thompson, Thomas. *Hearts*. New York: Fawcett and Co., 1973.

Again, Tommy Thompson uses facts to weave an interesting portrayal of the personalities and events of the famous heart surgeons at the Texas Medical Center and their effects on medical history.