

# You Be The Curator

An exercise to bring to life the histories of *Cabeza de Vaca* and *Estevanico*

**Q** What is a curator?

Pronunciation: kyur-A-ter

Function: *noun*

Etymology: Latin, from *curatus*, past participle of *curare*: to care

**Curator:** One who manages or oversees, as the administrative director of a museum collection or a library.

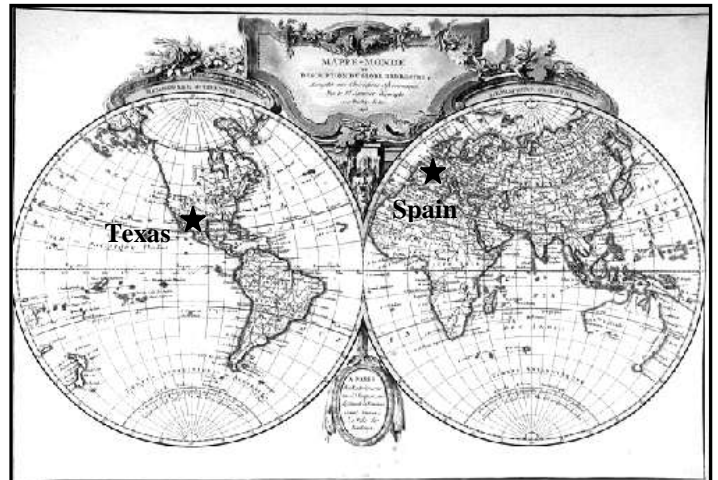
You have been asked to assist the curators at the Dallas Historical Society in order to put together an exhibit for the Many Faces of Texas.



The historical records, images, diaries, and artifacts you have before you date back to the sixteenth century. At that time, settlers had not yet arrived to build towns and cities in the New World. Only tribes of Native Americans inhabited the area known today as Texas.

The first European explorers to arrive in Texas came from Spain. They sailed to the coast of Florida hoping to find gold and silver and claim the land for their king. Instead they found hostile tribes of natives who forced them to flee to the Spanish territories in Mexico.

Their journey was long and very dangerous, and only a few men survived. Among these were Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, a nobleman, and Estevanico, the African-born slave of one of the Spanish survivors. These men and a few companions were shipwrecked on the Texas coast



at Galveston, where they were separated. Here we begin the story of their adventures and the history of the people and places they found, which you will help reconstruct.

## Biographical Sketches



*Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca*

Cabeza de Vaca was born into the Spanish nobility in 1490. Little of his early life is known, except that he made his career in the military. He trained with the Spanish army of King Charles V in Italy. For his service, he was rewarded with the position of treasurer in a royal expedition to North America, known then as the New World. They set sail in early 1527.

### *Estevanico*

Also known as Estevan, Esteban, and Stephen the Moor, Estevanico was born in Azamor, Morocco on the northern coast of Africa. In Spain some time before 1527 he became the personal slave of Andrés Dorantes de Carranza. Although he was a slave, Estevanico was somewhat educated and had a talent for learning languages. Estevanico accompanied his master as a member of the same expedition as Cabeza de Vaca, which landed in mid-April 1528.



As you consider the objects collected from their journey across Texas, ask yourself the following questions to help you figure out what happened to our explorer heroes.

What do you know of these men's backgrounds?

How would the decisions they made have been affected by their previous experiences and education?

What was the original mission of the expedition?

Do you think the survivors of the shipwreck were pursuing the same goals or different ones?

What sort of people would our explorers have met in Texas?

## Regarding the collection...

Look carefully at the items below and answer the questions that follow.



Artifact Group #1:

*Beaded leather bag  
containing these flint arrowheads and pottery remains*



1. Who might have made this sort of item?

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2. What might its contents have been used for?

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3. Using evidence supported by these artifacts, suggest a possible situation that the explorers might have found themselves in following their shipwreck.

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Artifact Group #2

*Decorative shells  
Gourd rattle with owl feathers  
Assorted turquoise beads*



4. How might these objects be related to the previous items? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How are they different? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Imagine what life was like in the early history of Texas before people printed money or had credit cards. How might objects such as these function in society?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Artifact #3:**  
*Map of Texas and Mexico, prepared for Viceroy of Mexico City in 1536  
in Cabeza de Vaca's own hand*



7. What evidence does this item provide? How does this artifact help us understand what happened to Cabeza de Vaca and Estevanico following the shipwreck?

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The Proprietor of Negro Maman Dacey  
 1824  
 Do John Cullen Esq.

Sept. 25	To visit to Dacey	\$2.00
	" " Blood & salt	1.00
26	" " Visits during day and night attendance	3.50
27	" " " "	1.00
28	" " " "	1.00
29	" " " "	1.00
30	" " " "	1.00
		<u>\$12.50</u>

Richmond

Artifact #4:  
 Bill of Sale

This document gives the following information:

Andrés Dorantes de Carranza delivers the title of ownership of one Moroccan-born slave to Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza who delivers the title to the Franciscan friar Marcos de Niza in the amount of twelve silver pesos.

8. A receipt is a written record of money or goods exchanged from one person to another. What does this receipt seem to record the sale of?

9. What can we infer about the fate of one of our explorers based on this document?

Artifact #5:

*La Relacion*, Cabeza de Vaca's firsthand account of his travels

Published 1542 in Zamora, Spain

This final item should help fill the gaps in our knowledge of Cabeza de Vaca's journey. It is his personal diary, which he published as a book for the King of Spain in 1537. Use the excerpts provided to compare what you thought happened to Cabeza de Vaca and Esteban to what he actually recorded.




## I. How the expedition is shipwrecked and its men are taken captive by Indians

*After four days a storm came up and caused the other boat to be lost. We did not sink because of God's great mercy. The weather was rough, very cold and wintery. We had been suffering from hunger for many days and had been pounded so much by the sea that the following day many men began to faint. Near land a great wave took us and cast the boat out of the water as far as a horseshoe can be tossed. We arrived at this place on the sixth of November.*

...

*Half an hour later another one hundred Indian bowmen appeared. We were so scared that they seemed to us to be giants, whether they were or not. We could not even think of defending ourselves, since there were scarcely six men who could even get up from the ground. As best we could we tried to reassure them and ourselves, and gave them beads and little bells. Each of them gave me an arrow, which is a sign of friendship. In sign language they told us that they would return in the morning and bring us food.*

## II. How the explorers become healers

*We named this island the Isle of Misfortune. ... On that island I have spoken of, they wanted to make us physicians, without testing us or asking for any degrees, because they cure illnesses by blowing on the sick person and cast out the illness with their breath and their hands. So they told us to be useful and do the same. We did our healing by making the sign of the cross on the sick persons, breathing on them, saying the Lord's Prayer. Once we made the sign of the cross on them, they told the others that they were well and healthy. For this reason they treated us well.*

...

*I had to stay with these same Indians from the island for over a year. Because they worked me so hard and treated me so poorly, I decided to flee from them and go to those that live in the forests and mainland, a people called the Charruco. I could not bear the kind of life I had with them. I tried to escape from my masters three times, but each time they went after me intending to kill me. God our Lord through his great mercy protected and sheltered me from them.*

## III. How they escape, reunite, and travel Texas as healers and traders

*Finally, I escaped. With my trading and wares I went as far inland as I wanted and I would travel the coast for a distance of forty or fifty leagues. The main items of my trade were pieces of sea snails and their insides, and seashells, used by them for medicinal purposes and for dances and festivals, sea beads and other things.*

...

*Eventually we were reunited, and traveled together as medicine men curing the sick. They brought their children for us to touch their hands. We left those Indians and went to others who received us very well. They brought their sick people to us, who said they were well after we made the sign of the cross on them.*

...

*The following morning I caught up with four Christians on horseback who were quite perturbed to see me so strangely dressed and in the company of Indians. We traveled with them for twenty-five leagues and arrived at a town called Culiacán.*

## IV. How they rejoin their Spanish countrymen

*After we clearly saw traces of Christians and realized that we were so near them, we gave great thanks to God our Lord for willing that we should be brought out of our sad and wretched captivity. ... The following morning I caught up with four Christians on horseback who were quite perturbed to see me so strangely dressed and in the company of Indians. We traveled with them for twenty-five leagues and arrived at a town called Culiacán, where Melchor Díaz, the Mayor and Captain of that province, lived. He conversed with us and treated us very well, and on his own behalf and that of Governor Nuño de Guzmán he offered us everything he had.*

...

*After we rested in Mexico City for two months, I wanted to return to these kingdoms of Spain.*



## Teacher's Guide

Step 1 - Explore the lives of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and Estevanico.  
Students read the biographical information to establish the context of their explorations.

### Step 2 - Thinking Questions

Students consider the answers to these questions to get into the frame of mind of a museum historian. Add to the list any questions you think are important for understanding the lives of Cabeza de Vaca and Estevanico.

### Step 3 - Analyzing Primary Documents

Together with the biographical information they have studied, students use these items to build a more complete picture of what happened to our explorer friends. Use them to infer the sequence of events that befell Cabeza de Vaca and Estevanico when they arrived in Texas.

### Step 4 - Putting It All Together

Students relate the firsthand account of Cabeza de Vaca to their understanding of the artifacts. They will reconstruct the story against the following timeline:

- CDV & E      leave from Spain in 1528 and land at western Florida  
                  are driven out by hostile natives; they build rafts and set off for Mexico  
                  shipwreck at Galveston, but are saved by friendly Native Americans  
                  and the remaining survivors are sold to other tribes
- Cabeza de Vaca is held captive on Galveston Island by Karankawas; becomes ill  
                  faces difficult times; food is scarce and mosquitoes swarm (interesting  
                  note: Natives ward off mosquitoes by covering bodies with alligator  
                  grease)  
                  flees to mainland; meets Charruco tribe; becomes famed trader  
                  is believed to be a faith healer, his services sought by many natives  
1532 - travels westward; reunites with other Spaniards 6 years after  
                  separation
- Estevanico - with Dorantes his master, they travel along Texas coast, practicing faith  
                  healing  
                  together, they taken inland by captor natives; reunites with CDV 1532 (see  
                  above)
- CDV & E      October 1534 - escape to the northwest along the course of the Colorado  
                  meet Avavares tribe, travel further west; still plagued by food shortages  
                  are famed among natives as healers, called "Children on the Sun"  
                  Cabeza successfully operates on an Indian with an arrow wound;  
                  Spaniards showered with gifts (*shells, hides, turquoise, gourd rattle*)  
                  move southwest, eventually to Mexico; meet up with fellow Spaniards at  
                  Culiacan; Estevanico sold to a friar (*Estevanico's sale records*)  
                  Spaniards received as heroes in Mexico City; mapped their route for the  
                  viceroys (*map of route prepared for viceroy*)  
                  Cabeza returned to Spain; wrote *La Relacion* in 1542 -



text available at:

[http://ojinaga.com/cabeza/Forward\\_to\\_the\\_Narracion/forward\\_to\\_the\\_narracion.html](http://ojinaga.com/cabeza/Forward_to_the_Narracion/forward_to_the_narracion.html)

Estevanico used as scout; killed by natives suspicious of his claims to heal  
and demands for gifts near Zuni, New Mexico

Skills students should use/develop:

map reading; interpreting pictorial representations; using primary source material;  
making inferences