

How do we know what we know? *Grade Level*

Unit 2: The Age of Contact

Name:

Date:

Period:

Think back . . .

We learn a lot about the people of the past by studying the artifacts and records they left behind. Think back to **Unit 1: Natural Texas and its People**. What do you remember about why it is often difficult for people today to study the lives and stories of the early American Indians of Texas?

Much of what we believe to be true about early American Indians in Texas we have learned from the European explorers who encountered them. These accounts have been useful at providing information we would not have otherwise. It is important to recognize, however, that they provide only one side of the story.

Let's take a look at one account written by the first known explorer to encounter American Indians in Texas – a Spanish man named Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca.

A little background information:

Cabeza de Vaca was a Spanish explorer who traveled with several hundred others to the Americas during the early 1500s. Like many Spanish explorers, their primary goal was to search for gold and riches. They started out in the Caribbean on their way to Mexico but got so lost they ended up in Florida and eventually even Texas! Can you imagine being **that** lost? They experienced disease, starvation, capture by various American Indian tribes, and even hurricanes. Cabeza de Vaca and three other survivors of his expedition lived among several American Indian tribes in Texas for years.

Finally, eight years after they had set out, the few who survived made it to their destination of present-day Mexico City, where they knew they would find many other Spaniards. Cabeza de Vaca wrote a book about his experiences. In English, it is called "*The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*." The excerpts in your activity are from his book.



Primary Source Activity

There are four primary source excerpts about Cabeza de Vaca's time among various American Indian groups in Texas. Follow the instructions to complete the activity.

Part I: Match each Excerpt Card with the Translation card that best restates the excerpt in modern language.

Part II: Complete the chart below based on your excerpt and translation cards.

Excerpt	Translation	Summary Write a brief summary of the main idea of the passage in your own words.
A		
B		
C		
D		

Part III: Answer the following comprehension questions about the primary source excerpts.

- ___ 1) Based on the information provided in Excerpt A, which of the following tribes do you think Cabeza de Vaca was most likely living with at the time?
- The Caddo of the Coastal Plains because of the abundant crops and resources.
 - The Coahuiltecas of the Coastal Plains because of the harsh living conditions, fish, and lizards.
 - The Comanche of the Great Plains because of the harsh living conditions and dependence on bison.
 - The Jumano of the Mountains and Basins because of the high elevation and irrigation-based farming.

- ___ 2) What can we learn from Cabeza de Vaca's account in Excerpt B?
- The mobility of the Indigenous people with whom he was living.
 - The food and natural resources the Indigenous people used.
 - The types of shelter that the particular group of American Indians built.
 - The culture of the family relationships of the group he was living with.
- ___ 3) Which line from Excerpt C means that the tribes Cabeza de Vaca was living with were grouped by family?
- "The people are generous to each other of what they possess."
 - "The women alone have any part of their persons covered."
 - "...those of one are called Capoques, those of the other, Han."
 - "All that are of a lineage keep together."
- ___ 4) How does Excerpt D differ from the other excerpts in this activity?
- The others discuss culture and lifestyle of the tribes, while D discusses how one tribe treated Cabeza de Vaca.
 - The others demonstrate the relationship between the Indigenous people and the Spanish while D depicts the relationship between tribes.
 - The others present a negative view of the tribes Cabeza de Vaca stayed with while D shows a more positive depiction.
 - All answers are correct.
- 5) Do you think Cabeza de Vaca showed any **bias**¹ in his accounts of the American Indians? Explain your answer. Give evidence from the excerpts to support your claim.
- 6) **Make a prediction:** There are a number of other Spanish explorers who wrote accounts about their experiences in the Americas, including their interactions with and thoughts about American Indians. What kind of information, experiences, or opinions do you think we might see in some of these other accounts?

¹ **Bias:** When someone's personal opinion influences how they talk about something, whether negative, positive, or neutral.