We’ll Take Some of That Land, Thanks

James Polk was an American president on a mission. His goal? Expand United States territory. Many Americans agreed with him. They believed in the concept of “manifest destiny”—that America was destined to grow and spread its ideals of democracy and freedom. Many also just wanted to be able to settle in areas that belonged to Mexico, not the United States. President Polk was determined that the U.S. should have some of Mexico’s land.

An Angry Neighbor

Mexico got its start a lot like the United States: It fought a war for independence against Spain, which had controlled Mexico for centuries. Mexico won its independence in 1821. Like any nation, Mexico did not want to lose any of its territory. So when its northern territory of Texas fought and won its own independence in 1836, Mexico wasn’t happy. And when the U.S. annexed Texas as a state in 1845, it was the last straw. In Mexico’s view, the U.S. had violated a treaty that defined the boundary between the two nations, so Mexico broke off relations with the U.S. Even so, President Polk thought Mexico might be interested in selling the U.S. some additional land. He was wrong.

Where There’s a Will...

If Mexico wasn’t interested in selling land, President Polk decided to try another approach: War. In early 1846, Polk sent American troops into an area both Mexico and the U.S. claimed to own, all the way to the very edge of Mexico’s border. Mexico did as he expected and sent troops to defend the area—and when Polk learned Mexican troops fired on U.S. soldiers, he convinced Congress to declare war on Mexico. By September 1847, American troops had captured Mexico City. All that was left to do was negotiate what each side would get in exchange for ending the war.

A ‘Wicked War’

What America got was land that would eventually become 13 different states—a million square miles, for the rock bottom price of $15 million plus a little more. To some Americans who wanted to annex all of Mexico, this wasn’t enough. But to many, this was a shameful land grab that went completely against America’s ideals. The State of Massachusetts passed a resolution calling the war “a gigantic crime.” Ulysses S. Grant, who became a famous general during the Civil War, called the war against Mexico “a wicked war.”

Mexicans living in the transferred region faced new American laws that made them prove they owned their land. This was a long and expensive process, and many lost their homes. In addition, the rush of logging and mining destroyed the areas where Native Americans lived. Between 1848 and 1860, the Native American population in California fell from 150,000 to just 30,000.
C. **Land Transfer.** After the war, Mexico ceded (gave up) nearly a million acres of land to the U.S. The new border between Mexico and the U.S. was described in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. **Follow the description in the treaty to draw the border on the map.**

Start where the Rio Grande meets the Gulf of Mexico. Then draw a line...

D. **Gadsden Purchase (1853).** A few years later, the U.S. realized it wanted a little more land to build a southern cross-country route to California. Santa Anna was dealing with rebellions inside Mexico, and he needed money to pay his army to stop them. He agreed to sell some land to the United States. James Gadsden was sent to negotiate the deal for the U.S. **Follow the description to draw the new border. In the space between the new and original borders, write the words “Gadsden Purchase.”**

Again, start where the Rio Grande meets the Gulf of Mexico. But this time, draw a line...

E. **Mexican Losses.** From Mexico’s perspective, which Mexican states and territories did it lose all or part of after these two agreements?
Mexican Cession (1848)

Name:

- - - - - - - - = Mexican state and territorial boundaries

- - - - - - - - - - - - = boundary claimed by Texas when it declared independence from Mexico
**Mexican Cession (1848)**

**A. Disputed Area.** The U.S. claimed the southern border of Texas was the Rio Grande. Mexico said it was the Nueces River.

Draw lines in the space between the rivers, like this:

**B. Purposeful Move.** In early 1846, U.S. troops built a fort on the Rio Grande about 20 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. This move provoked Mexico to attack U.S. troops.

1. Draw a dot where the fort was.
2. Label it Fort Texas.

**C. Land Transfer.** After the war, Mexico ceded (gave up) nearly a million acres of land to the U.S. The new border between Mexico and the U.S. was described in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Follow the description in the treaty to draw the border on the map.

Start where the Rio Grande meets the Gulf of Mexico. Then draw a line...

up the middle of that river... to the point where it strikes the southern boundary of New Mexico; thence, westwardly, along the whole southern boundary of New Mexico ... to its western termination; thence, northward, along the western line of New Mexico, until it intersects the first branch of the river Gila ...; thence down the middle of the said branch and of the said river, until it empties into the Rio Colorado; thence across the Rio Colorado, following the division line between Upper and Lower California, to the Pacific Ocean.

**D. Gadsden Purchase (1853).** A few years later, the U.S. realized it wanted a little more land to build a southern cross-country route to California. Santa Anna was dealing with rebellions inside Mexico, and he needed money to pay his army to stop them. He agreed to sell some land to the United States. James Gadsden was sent to negotiate the deal for the U.S. Follow the description to draw the new border. In the space between the new and earlier borders, write the words “Gadsden Purchase.”

Again, start where the Rio Grande meets the Gulf of Mexico. But this time, draw a line...

up the middle of that river to the point where the parallel of 31° 47' north latitude crosses the same; thence due west one hundred miles; thence south to the parallel of 31° 20' north latitude; thence along the said parallel of 31° 20' to the 111th meridian of longitude west of Greenwich; thence in a straight line to a point on the Colorado River twenty ... miles below the junction of the Gila and Colorado rivers; thence up the middle of the said river Colorado until it intersects the [earlier] line between the United States and Mexico.

**E. Mexican Losses.** From Mexico’s perspective, which Mexican states and territories did it lose all or part of after these two agreements?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alta California</th>
<th>Nuevo Mexico</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sonora</td>
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<td>Tamaulipas</td>
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