

Hello. It's real important to know about all of the states. But books can make it seem complicated, too. We think they can be packed full of facts no one will remember, which is why we simplified everything and created our 'snapshot' books.

But we can go a step farther. We can take you through the basics before you even read a word. And that is what we are going to do here. So listen on – and why not make some notes, too? At the end you will have your own state book written in your own words. How great is that!

OK, let's get started!

1. Texas is home to about 32 million people. Yet it is so vast, you can drive across it and hardly see a soul.

Texas is on the south coast – the Gulf Coast. But that's a bit unfair because Texas is such a large state that it reaches nearly halfway to the Canadian border and almost to the edge of the Rocky Mountains too. So expect lots of different landscape and lots of different climate.

1. But let's start with the land. Texas is so large it has many types of landscape. But it's easiest if you think of the land rising in a series of great steps, like a staircase, lowest in the southeast and highest in the west.

The Gulf Coast in the southeast, makes up about a fifth of the state. North west of this are the North Central Plains, covering most of central Texas and making a landscape of rolling hills. This stretches into the panhandle and the Great Plains. Finally, in the west are the great near-desert basins, separated by ranges of hills. Basin and Range country it's called, all made by geologic faults millions of years ago,

Rivers are precious to Texas because much of the land is naturally dry. The Rio Grande is the most important of these rivers, but rivers alone don't provide for the water needs of Texas folk. Much of the water used comes from nearly two hundred major reservoirs. Yet farmers need more water than can be provided by reservoirs. They

use the vast natural water-bearing rocks - called aquifers - deep underground.

2. Weather. Texas lies to the east of the Rocky Mountains, so that rain-bearing air coming from the west is often blocked. That is why the west is dry rangeland, and some Basin and Range valleys are deserts. The wide range of heights also means that while basins might be hot, mountain ranges will be cold and have snow.

Rain in Texas mostly comes up from the Gulf Coast to the south, or down from the Great Plains to the north. In general, it is warm and humid in the coastal lowlands, with rain falling in every month. As you go north, and away from the moderating effects of the Gulf, it gets hotter in summer and colder in winter.

In winter, conditions can change very quickly. As a depression passes through the state, warm, muggy air is drawn up from the Gulf. Then, as the weather system moves away, cold, dry air is pulled down from Canada. As a result, the temperature may fall by thirty degrees within hours. This is known as a 'Norther', making it necessary for many Texans to have both heating and air conditioning.

Thunderstorms and tornados are a common hazard, and hurricanes are a real threat near the Gulf Coast. But excess water is not the only hazard. The northwest, in particular, suffers from unpredictable drought. Folks in this area were part of the infamous Dust Bowl disaster of the 1930s.

3. Plants. Most of Texas is too dry for trees to grow except by rivers. Grasses cover the plains, while piñon pines and others adapted to dry climates are found where it is higher and cooler

4. History Texas has been home to native Americans for many thousands of years. Many in the west lived in adobe hut villages called pueblos on the top of high land, often mesas. In the plains buffalo hunting was still very important, and many people were nomadic hunters and gatherers.

However, the Native American tribes that we usually think of as Texan - the Comanches and Apache - actually did not arrive in

Texas until after 1500, about the same time as Europeans.

The first Europeans were Spanish explorers. Some claimed they had seen cities so rich that even the poorest people ate off plates made of gold. Of course, they were retelling tall tales they had heard along the way. But they excited the Spanish conquistador Francisco de Coronado, who passed through Texas in 1541. Coronado did not find any gold, and Spain soon lost interest in Texas. Nevertheless, in about 1580, Spaniards built a small mission church near present-day El Paso. Although Spain claimed all of Texas, this small church was the only Spanish settlement in Texas for the next 100 years.

Then in 1718, the San Antonio de Bexar mission was founded along the San Antonio River. The first building built on the site was a thick-walled stone church which would later be called the Alamo. All the same, by 1800 there were still only about 3,000 Spanish settlers and 1,000 soldiers in Texas.

Even though there were very few Spanish settlers in Texas, they had a large impact. The Spanish brought cows with them. When they abandoned a settlement, they left the cattle to roam free. On the grasslands of Texas, these lean, rangy longhorns from Mexico did very well, and by the early 1700s large numbers of wild cattle roamed the Texas plains.

The Spanish also brought horses to North America. The Plains Indians soon became excellent horse riders, and fierce mounted warriors.

In 1821, Texas became part of Mexico. Mexico offered U.S. settlers cheap land. However, before long, immigrants were arriving from nearly every state as well as Europe. By 1834, the Anglo population in Texas outnumbered Mexicans by around five to one. They knew themselves not as Mexicans, but as Texans.

Many Texans now began to ignore Mexican laws, arguing for a greater voice in the way Texas was governed. At the same time, the United States government had begun making offers to buy Texas from Mexico.

In 1832, the Mexican army general Santa Anna seized power in

Mexico. He was determined to bring Texas back within Mexican control.

On October 9, 1835, a group of Texans declared independence. In February 1836, Santa Anna surrounded the fortified walled mission of the Alamo containing 189 Texan defenders. They included men who were already folk heroes in the U.S. such as Davy Crockett and James Bowie. After the Alamo fell, it angered the Americans so much, they planned revenge, calling “Remember the Alamo!” as they attacked the Mexican army. The battle lasted only eighteen minutes. Santa Anna soon admitted defeat and Texas quickly became a republic. The flag of the republic was a lone star. Later, it became a part of the United States.

After independence people flooded into the country to take up the offer of land. But it was not all plain sailing because Texas was a southern state, and as the civil war grew ever closer, Texas joined the Confederacy.

After the Civil War, Texas grew rapidly, selling its cattle reared on the rangelands. At first, cattle were herded along trails to railhead cities. That was the time of the famous Chisholm Trail, and when Jessie Chisholm became an American legend.

The state’s first oil field was discovered at Spindletop, in 1901. This caused an oil industry to grow quickly, and many modern industries soon followed, laying the foundations of the modern state.

7. So let’s wrap this up. We have taken you on a journey through landscape and climate to history and independence. That will give you a framework to keep in your head. Now read our books, and watch the videos. Learning can be real easy.