

Journey to the Alamo

Melodie A. Cuate

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"You're here to learn about Texas history, a subject that can be fascinating and compelling," states Mr. Barrington, Hannah's seventh-grade teacher. "By the end of the first semester, you'll be experts on all the events leading up to the 1900s ... Everyone will choose an event in Texas history, research it, and become a part of it." Despite Mr. Barrington's enthusiasm, Hannah and her best friend, Jackie, are not excited. That is, until they rummage through the teacher's archaic trunk.

Hannah's brother, Nick, helps them open the trunk, but the books and magazines that were inside when Mr. Barrington opened it days earlier have been replaced by artifacts: a spyglass, a map of Mexican-owned Texas, a buckskin jacket, and a miniature replica of the Alamo. Unaware of the consequences, Nick opens the doors of the Alamo, and suddenly they all find themselves in Texas of 1836. As they desperately search for the trunk that will help them return home, they meet celebrated historical figures: Colonel James Bowie of the Texas Army; David Crockett, a frontiersman and former U.S. congressman; Susannah Dickinson, one of the few survivors of the Battle of the Alamo; and William Barret Travis, commander of the Alamo.

Some of the dialogue in this first book is stilted, and it's often difficult to determine whether the protagonist is Nick or Hannah. Hannah rarely gets to say or do the things that really matter. It is Nick who opens the doors of the Alamo figurine, causing the three teenagers to travel through time, and it is Nick who tells Colonel James Bowie what the Battle of the Alamo will mean to future generations.

The author's use of Spanish interspersed throughout the historical scenes lends authenticity. A useful description of historical characters prefaces the novel; an English translation of Spanish words and expressions concludes it. Throughout, Cuate focuses on sibling rivalry, gender issues, loyalty, and patriotism. Her enthusiasm and love for Texas history is evident and contagious. Students will certainly want to know more about this period in history and how it impacted the United States. *Journey to the Alamo* offers an opportunity for youth to experience history vicariously with the help of several characters with interests and problems typical of adolescents, such as forming friendships and wavering interest in school.

A teacher for sixteen years with a bachelor's of fine arts from Pan American University, the author currently teaches fourth-grade gifted-and-talented students in Texas. She recently published a short story titled *Mañana* in *Out of the Valley*, a book edited by Joyce Armstrong Carroll. At work on a second novel tentatively titled *Journey to San Jacinto*, Cuate is rapidly adding to the *Mr. Barrington's Mysterious Trunk* series. Readers should prepare for the next educational adventure!

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