On March 9, 1731, sixteen families from the Spanish Canary Islands arrived at San Antonio de Béxar, a small village on the banks of the San Antonio River. The village consisted of the Presidio San Antonio de Béxar and the Mission San Antonio de Valero (now called The Alamo) across the river. The Presidio was the Spanish fort that housed soldiers, their families, and other settler families. The mission was occupied by American Indians and the Franciscan friars charged by the King of Spain to convert them to Christianity.

After their long journey to San Antonio, the Isleños (as the Canary Island families were called) were greeted by the Presidio commander, Captain Don Juan de Almazán. He gave them fresh supplies and places to stay until they could build their own houses and plant their own crops.

Upon their arrival, the Isleños established La Villa de San Fernando adjacent to the Presidio. San Fernando was not a religious mission or military outpost, it was a civilian town set up to be the capital of Spanish Texas, and was the first municipal government established in Texas.

On orders from Spain, Captain Almazán appointed seven Isleño men to form a village council, or a cabildo. These men then elected two alcaldes, Juan Leal Goras and Antonio Santos, who served as mayors, judges, and sheriffs of the new village. Together, these nine men were responsible for administering Spanish law, dividing the village land, and overseeing the economic activity of the village. 
The Isleños had traveled from the Canary Islands with most of the tools and livestock they would need to start farms in New Spain, including axes, hoes, saws, cows, horses, and goats. But because the governors of New Spain knew it would take time for the Isleños to establish farms and grow their own food, they supplied them with four reales (about 50 cents) a day, as well as staples of meat, flour, and corn.

They built temporary jacał houses, and after they divided the land between the families, they set to work creating their farms and permanent homes.

Many of the Isleños who settled in the village of San Fernando had been farmers on the Canary Islands, so they quickly set about establishing new farms along the San Antonio River. Captain Almazán supplied the seed for planting the fields and the oxen to plow them.

Planting as much as they could, the Isleños sowed their fields with corn, beans, barley, cotton, peppers, and a variety of fruit, including grape vines. Once planting was completed, they turned their attention to building the village of San Fernando.

The Spanish government had laws for how new towns should be built. The Isleños laid out the Villa de San Fernando around a large open plaza (now San Antonio’s Main Plaza) directly adjacent to the Presidio (Military Plaza).

Around the plaza they built a small church, which would later become San Fernando Cathedral, and laid out 12 straight streets for the homes of their families. They designated lands for grazing animals, public buildings, fields, roads, and dug additional irrigation channels called acequia to bring water to their crops.

Daily life in San Fernando was difficult. For the first few years, the food they harvested from their fields did not last them long, so the Isleños had to rely on wagon trains of supplies from other Spanish settlements.
Native Americans from the area, especially the Apache, were hostile to the encroaching settlement and were a constant threat to the village. They stole horses and livestock, and occasionally attacked wagon trains, travelers, and soldiers on the road to or from the settlement.

But the Isleño settlers persisted, and permanent homes of adobe and stone slowly replaced the _jacales_ surrounding Main Plaza. Like most frontier settlers, their furnishings were simple - beds made of rawhide on wooden frames, wooden tables and chairs, and handmade clay bowls, plates, and cooking pots were used. Food was cooked in outdoor stone ovens known as _horno_, or over an open fire. Ovens and cooking fires were often outdoors so that in case of fire, the house itself would not burn down.

The Isleños brought their cooking traditions and love of spices (including cumin) with them on their journey to Texas. They made traditional Canary Island dishes like _gofío_ – a mixture of goat’s milk, fine brown meal, and spices – but also local foods like tortillas and tamales. Later, hot chocolate and coffee became popular beverages, and lumps of brown sugar became staples for desserts.

Like their food, the Isleños also brought their clothing styles with them. Most clothing was simple, homespun, and sturdy to handle the rigors of daily work that the settlers faced. Men and boys wore knee-length pants and loose shirts while women and girls wore white blouses tucked into coarsely woven skirts.

The daily work for men mostly included farming and tending the livestock. Women cooked food for their family, helped with the farming, spun wool and cotton to make clothes, and wove baskets of reeds, among many other jobs.
Like in most Spanish settlements, the Catholic Church played a huge role in the daily lives of the Isleños. At first, the colonists celebrated Catholic mass at the Mission Valero chapel. Families would walk along the river together before crossing the bridge to Mission Valero. After they had settled into their new homes, the community built a small church on the west side of Main Plaza. They named their parish *Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria y Guadalupe* after the patron saint of the Canary Islands and Mexico.

And as San Antonio grew in the mid-1800s, this small church eventually became the grand San Fernando Cathedral that we see today. Its famous history continued during the Texas Revolution, when General Santa Anna of the Mexican Army hoisted his flag from the church’s tower, and began the siege of the Alamo. To this day, San Fernando Cathedral continues to have a central role in San Antonio life.

The Canary Islanders, together with the missionaries, soldiers, Bexareños, and American Indian tribes, created an enduring legacy that has added to the rich cultural heritage of San Antonio and Texas.

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**The Sixteen Canary Island Families of San Antonio de Béxar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Juan Leal Goras and his two sons</th>
<th>Juan Leal and Gracia de Acosta and their children</th>
</tr>
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<td>Juan Curbelo and Gracia Perdomo y Umpierres and their children</td>
<td>Antonio Santos and Isabel Rodriguez and their children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph Padron and Maria Francisca Zanaria</td>
<td>Manuel de Niz and Sebastiana de la Peña</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicente Travieso and Maria Ana Curbelo</td>
<td>Salvador Rodriguez and Maria Perez Cabrera and son</td>
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<td>Antonio Rodriguez and Josefa de Niz</td>
<td>Francisco de Arocha and Juana Curbelo</td>
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<td>Joseph Leal and Ana Santos</td>
<td>Juan Delgado and Catarina Leal</td>
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<td>Joseph, Marcos, and Ana Cabrera</td>
<td>Maria Rodriguez-Robaina and her children</td>
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Canary Island Texans

Instructions: Read and answer the corresponding questions

After more than a year of dangerous and deadly travels, sixteen families from the Canary Islands were welcomed on the banks of the San Antonio River by Captain Juan de Almazán and his soldiers. The Isleños brought with them livestock and tools to help them in their new home.

After settling into their new environment, the Isleños constructed *jacals* near fields where they sowed corn, beans, barley, cotton, peppers, melons, and fruits. They combined Canary Island foods with local Texas foods. They used a mano and metate to grind corn for masa and made tortillas on comales, but also made traditional Canary Island food like *gofio*, a stew made of goat’s milk, brown meal, and spices. Coffee and hot chocolate were favored beverages.

Because they were the first civilian settlers in San Antonio de Béxar, the Spanish King gave the Isleños land-holding noble titles. They also formed the first municipal government in Texas in their new village of San Fernando de Béxar.

The Canary Islanders contributed to San Antonio’s cultural heritage and can still be seen today through language, faith, and customs.

When did Canary Islanders first come to Texas?

________________________________________________________

What were the Canary Islander’s goals upon arrival to San Antonio de Béxar?

________________________________________________________

How did Canary Island settlers help shape Texas? What parts of their culture are still important today?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________
The Isleños brought with them many aspects of their culture when they settled Texas. Complete the graphic organizer with details from the reading to describe what the Isleños brought with them to Texas and how it has influenced culture.

**Word Knowledge**

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3. Jacals
4. Mano and metate
5. Horno
6. Cabildo
7. Acequia

*Answer Key: 1-B; 2-A; 3-F; 4-C; 5-E; 6-G; 7-D*
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As a representative of the Spanish Crown, you are trying to attract more people to come to San Antonio de Béxar. You will be creating a travel brochure describing San Antonio and the Canary Islanders’ civil settlement for the newcomers.1

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**The Isleños brought with them many aspects of their culture when they settled Texas. Complete the graphic organizer with details from the reading to describe what the Isleños brought with them to Texas and how it has influenced culture.**

**What did Canary Islanders bring to Texas?**

- **Food & Animals**
- **Technology**
- **Traditions**
- **Beliefs**

---

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