Exploring Texas

Design Intent

Exploring Texas is a journey through a land so big, bold, and beautifully diverse, it can hardly be contained in four walls. From sunbaked deserts to piney woods, wide beaches to rolling hills, Texas tells a thousand stories through its landscapes alone. Step into a space where cowboys and astronauts share the stage, oil rigs hum beside wind turbines, and BBQ sizzles just down the street from tamales, kolaches, and pho. Here, cultures collide and blend creating a rich tapestry that stretches from the Panhandle to the Gulf. Children can explore industries, taste traditions, and celebrate the voices that make Texas not just a place on the map, but a world all its own. *Exploring Texas* is all big skies, big ideas, and even bigger hearts.

Technology Components

Train Magic Window - Collection of video clips

Mural Features

- Dallas, Texas - Dallas is the ninth most populous city in the United States and the third most populous in Texas, with a population of about 1.3 million residents. It serves as a major economic hub, known for its role in business, technology, transportation, and finance. The city is located along the Trinity River and was founded in 1841 by John Neely Bryan. Today, Dallas is known for its diverse culture, growing skyline, and important role in both regional and national commerce.
- Gull - A gull is a medium-sized seabird known for its white and gray feathers, sharp beak, and loud calls. Gulls are often found near coastlines, lakes, and urban areas. They are opportunistic feeders that scavenge for food both on land and in water. Gulls usually nest in colonies, laying 2 to 3 eggs in shallow nests composed of stones, seaweed, mosses, and feathers.

Mural Features

- Lighthouse - A lighthouse is a tall structure with a light at the top, built to guide ships safely along coastlines and warn them of dangerous rocks or shallow waters. Lighthouses have been used for thousands of years, with early versions using fires or candles, and later evolving to bright electric lights and rotating lenses. In the past, lighthouse keepers lived and worked there to maintain the light and ensure it stayed on each night. Today, many lighthouses are automated, but they are still used for navigation and often serve as historic landmarks or museums.
- Trinity River - The Trinity River is a 710 mile river that rises in northern Texas. It is the longest river entirely within the state of Texas and flows through major cities like Dallas and Fort Worth before emptying into Trinity Bay. Historically, it was an important route for transportation and trade, though it was difficult to navigate due to changing water levels. Today, the river is used for flood control, recreation, and wildlife habitats, with ongoing projects to restore and protect its natural areas.
- Cattle Drive - Cattle drives were important economic operations in the 19th-century American West, moving large herds from grazing areas to markets or railheads. Between 1866 and 1895, cowboys moved roughly 10 million cattle from Texas to Kansas, covering 15–25 miles a day over 3-5 months. Today, smaller, shorter drives are used to move cattle between grazing areas on ranches, particularly during spring and fall.
- Cactus - A cactus is a type of plant that grows mainly in hot, dry places like deserts in North and South America. It needs very little water because it stores moisture in its thick, fleshy stems and has spines instead of leaves to reduce water loss. Cacti are specially adapted to survive extreme heat and can go long periods without rain. Some cacti even produce beautiful, colorful flowers that bloom for a short time, often after rainfall.
- Fort Worth Stockyards - The Fort Worth Union Stockyards opened for business in 1890, covering 206 acres. The stockyards were an organized center where cattle, sheep, and hogs were bought, sold, and processed until the 1950's. In 1976, the Fort Worth Stockyards were listed on the National Register of Historical Places as a historic district, including 46 buildings. Today, visitors can experience “Where the West Begins” through entertainment, shopping, and cultural attractions.
- Barn - A barn is a farm building used for storing grain, hay, or straw or for housing livestock. Early farmers had to be resourceful in finding or making a paint that would protect and seal the wood on their barns. Many farmers would seal their barns with linseed oil, an orange-colored oil. They would add a variety of things to the oil, including ferrous oxide (rust), which killed fungi and mosses and turned the mixture red. When paint became available, many people chose red paint for their barns in honor of tradition.
- Flag of Texas - The Lone Star Flag is the official flag of Texas and one of only two state flags, alongside Hawaii’s, that previously served as a national flag of an independent country. Originally adopted as the national flag of the Republic of Texas in 1839, it became the state flag in 1845 when Texas joined the United States.
- Chisos Mountains - The Chisos Mountains are a mountain range located in Big Bend National Park in southwest Texas. They rise from the surrounding desert, creating cooler temperatures and unique habitats for plants and animals not found in the lowlands. The range includes impressive peaks like Casa Grande and Emory Peak, the highest point in the park. The Chisos Mountains are known for their scenic hiking trails, views, and notable contrast between mountains and desert.

Themes to Explore

- Texas History
- Land and Natural Resources
- Culture and Traditions
- Animals and Ranching
- Landmarks
- Maps
- Urban, Suburban, and Rural
- Transportation
- Conservation

Mounted Artifacts

- Train - Trains have been used for more than 200 years and have played an important role in building cities and connecting communities. In the early 1800s, the invention of steam-powered locomotives made it faster and easier to move people, food, and materials across long distances. In the United States, the Transcontinental Railroad, completed in 1869, stretched nearly 1,900 miles and connected the East and West, transforming travel and trade. Over time, trains evolved from steam to diesel and electric power, and today some high-speed trains can travel at speeds of over 200 miles per hour.
- Train Depot - A train depot is a building where passengers board and exit trains, and where goods were once loaded and unloaded for transport. In the 1800s and early 1900s, depots were busy hubs that helped towns grow by connecting them to trade routes and new people. Today, many depots are still used for passenger travel, while others have been restored as museums, shops, or community spaces.
- Alamo - The Alamo is a UNESCO World Heritage site and museum in San Antonio, Texas. It once served as a Spanish mission and later became a historic battlefield. In 1836, Texan defenders fought for independence from Mexico during a 13-day siege, earning the site the nickname the “Cradle of Texas Liberty.”
- Hereford Bull - A Hereford bull is a large, muscular breed of cattle known for its reddish-brown body and white face. These bulls are herbivores and primarily eat grasses, hay, and other plant-based feeds. Adult Hereford bulls can weigh over 2,000 pounds and are important for their strength and beef production. They are commonly found on farms and ranches around the world, especially in places like the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom.
- Armadillo - An armadillo is a small mammal covered in a hard, armor-like shell made of bony plates. Most armadillos are about the size of a house cat, and they eat insects, ants, termites, worms, and small plants by digging with their claws. They live in warm habitats such as grasslands, forests, and deserts across parts of North, Central, and South America, including the southern United States. Some species can roll into a ball for protection, and the nine-banded armadillo is known for jumping straight up when scared.
- Pumpjack - A pumpjack is a machine used to life crude oil from underground wells. They are used on onshore wells to extract oil when bottom pressure is too low for natural flow. Large machines are capable of lifting up to 5 barrels per minute depending on stroke speed, pump size, and fluid levels. They are designed for durability and can last for decades.

Mounted Artifacts

- Pecan Tree - A pecan tree is a deciduous tree native to the southern United States and northern Mexico. It commonly grows in warm regions like Texas, Georgia, and Oklahoma, especially near rivers. Pecan trees can reach heights of 70–100 feet and spread wide, providing lots of shade. They produce edible pecan nuts, which are not only a popular food but also an important crop, and the trees can live and produce for over 100 years.
- Bald Eagle (Ceiling Graphic) - Bald eagles are large birds of prey with broad wings that can stretch over 7 feet wide, and they are known for their white heads and dark brown bodies. They live near rivers, lakes, and coastlines across North America, building huge nests high in tall trees or on cliffs. Bald eagles mainly eat fish, but they also hunt small animals and birds. The bald eagle is the national bird and national symbol of the United States.

To Find Out More

- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Texas State Historical Association
- UTSA Institute of Texan Cultures