

Name _____

Class · period _____

Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Erastus “Deaf” Smith (1787–1837) was a scout, hunting guide, and land surveyor who became Sam Houston’s personal spy during the Texas Revolution. He said his deafness was an advantage in the field, and a Texas county still carries his name.

EARLY LIFE

A New York childhood, a lung ailment, and a farm he never took to

01 CHILDHOOD AND DEAFNESS

- 01 Smith was born in New York, and suffered a chronic lung ailment as an infant, possibly being the cause of him going Deaf.

However, his deafness may have just been a progressive condition.

- 02 He was labeled Erastus “Deaf” Smith by some, and was not completely Deaf and could follow one-on-one conversations, but he did struggle with group discussions.

02 THE MOVE TO THE MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY

- 01 When he was a teen, Erastus’ family moved to the Mississippi Territory to start a farm.

Although he didn’t enjoy farming, he did enjoy hunting and fishing, and his childhood on the farm helped him work as a scout, hunting guide and land surveyor in the future.

TEXAS AND THE REVOLUTION

A new home, a Mexican citizenship, and a war that broke out in 1835

03 MOVING TO TEXAS AND STARTING A FAMILY

- 01 In 1817, Erastus visited Texas for the first time. After loving the territory, he returned four years later, staying for good.

Mexico had just gained its independence from Spain at this point, putting the Texas Territory under the control of the Mexican Government.

- 02 Erastus married Guadeloupe, a Spanish widow, within a year, making him a Mexican citizen.

The couple had four children together, and Smith happily embraced the Mexican language and customs.

04 TENSIONS ON THE RISE

- 01 Tension between Texas and Mexico ran high, eventually causing a war to break out in 1835.

- 02 After the Mexican Army became suspicious of Erastus, they surrounded him while he was traveling to visit his family. Because of this, Smith fled to a Texas revolution camp and enlisted as a volunteer in Stephen Austin's Army.

- 03 He then led many missions behind enemy lines, and became a prominent figure in the Texas Revolution.

- 04 Due to Smith's keen eye, deep knowledge of the land, ability to find trails and his overall bravery, he caught the attention of Sam Houston, the commander of the Texas Regular Army. Smith was made Houston's personal spy.

05 RISING IN THE RANKS

- 01 Smith eventually led his own company and volunteers, becoming involved in many significant events, including leading the charge to destroy an important bridge.

- 02 Erastus was asked if he thought his deafness was a hindrance in his military work, and he was said to have replied:

No, I sometimes think it is an advantage – I have learned to keep a sharp outlook and I am never disturbed by the whistling of a ball – I don't hear the bark till I feel the bite.

ERASTUS SMITH

AFTER THE WAR

A short retirement, an early death, and a name still on the map

06 RETIREMENT AND DEATH

- 01 When he retired from the military, Erastus moved to Richmond, Texas and began a new land transactions business with John Borden of Borden Dairy farm.

However, this venture was cut short when Smith died of consumption at the age of 50, thought to be brought on by the wet, cold Gulf coast weather.

07 HOW HE IS REMEMBERED

WHAT WAS MADE	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Deaf Smith County	One of the largest counties in Texas now bears his name.
His portrait	Sam Houston commissioned Thomas Jefferson Wright to paint it.
A Texas State Capitol painting	A large painting there depicts one of his many military actions.
The Republic of Texas \$5 bill	His image appeared on it, circa 1840.
Books, a film, and a peanut butter	A <i>Deaf Smith Country Cookbook</i> , a film called <i>Deaf Smith and Johnny</i> , a biography entitled <i>Deaf Smith: Incredible Texas Spy</i> that has become a collector's item, and a peanut butter brand named after him.

08 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Texas Revolution	The war that broke out in 1835 between Texas and Mexico, in which Smith became a prominent figure.
Stephen Austin	The commander whose army Smith joined as a volunteer after fleeing the Mexican Army.
Sam Houston	The commander of the Texas Regular Army, who made Smith his personal spy.
Scout	The work Smith's farm childhood prepared him for, along with hunting guide and land surveyor.
Consumption	The illness Smith died of at age 50, thought to have been brought on by the Gulf coast weather.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

09 WRITTEN RESPONSE

01 What two possible explanations does the reading give for Smith's deafness?

02 Smith could follow one-on-one conversations but struggled in groups. Why would that detail matter to someone working as a spy?

03 How did Smith's childhood on the farm prepare him for his later work?

04 Why did Smith leave to join the Texas side of the war, and what did he do once he got there?

05 What qualities caught Sam Houston's attention, and what job did Houston give Smith?

06 Smith said his deafness was sometimes an advantage. Explain what he meant, and whether you agree.

10 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

Gallaudet University

gallaudet.edu

Great Deaf Americans (2nd ed.)

Matthew Scott Moore & Robert F. Panara

True West Magazine

The History of the American Frontier blog ·
truewestmagazine.com