

A History Minute with David Rubenstein

How Did the United States Buy Alaska?



About this video



A HISTORY MINUTE WITH DAVID RUBENSTEIN

How Did the United States Buy Alaska?

David Rubenstein provides a history minute explaining how the US acquired Alaska, which was once owned by Russia, in the 1800s.

Essential question:

How has the acquisition of new land contributed to the rise in economic and political power of the United States?

Before watching

Discussion sparks: Did you know?

- Alaska is the largest state in the U.S., nearly 2 ½ times the size of Texas.
- Alaska's name comes from the native Aleut word Alyeska, or Aláxsxaq, which roughly means "great land."

Activating prior knowledge: Map of the United States

Distribute a blank sheet of paper to each student and ask them to draw the United States of America without using any resources, in under two minutes.

- Once done, ask the class how many included Alaska and Hawaii on their maps. If Alaska was missed, instruct those students to add it in.
- Then, have each student hold up their map for the class to examine. Share that Alaska is approximately 20% the size of the lower 48 states and ask how many students accurately depicted this on their map.
- Before commencing the video, check that students have a basic understanding of Alaska's size.

After watching

Below are two activities to extend students' learning and check for understanding.

Activity 1: Class discussion

Use the following question prompts with your class:

- How did the discovery of gold in Alaska change the perception of the purchase of Alaska in the United States?
- How did the purchase of Alaska impact the territorial expansion and geographic boundaries of the United States?
- How might the perspectives of the United States, Russia, and the indigenous peoples of Alaska differ regarding the purchase of Alaska?
- Do you believe the purchase of Alaska by the United States was a fair and ethical transaction? Why or why not?
- What were the primary motivations behind the decision of the United States to purchase Alaska, and how did this acquisition contribute to the country's political, economic, and strategic interests?

Activity 2: Global town hall

Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a specific perspective related to the acquisition of Alaska.

- U.S. Government Officials
- Alaskan Natives
- Russian Government
- Average American Citizens
- Business Leaders

Have each group conduct additional research about the sale of Alaska using online material. Instruct students to create a 1-2 minute speech from the perspective they were assigned on the Alaska acquisition. The goal of the speech is to convince the world community that their perspective is the most valid and accurate one regarding the sale.

- They should select images, headlines, and quotes that reflect the viewpoints and beliefs of their assigned group.
- Encourage students to think critically about the motivations, concerns, and interests of the perspective they are representing. Once the speeches are complete, have each group present theirs to the class.

After each presentation, facilitate a class discussion using the following prompts:

- How did each group's speech represent a different perspective on the Alaska acquisition?
- What were some common themes or differences among the perspectives presented?

- How do these different perspectives help us understand the complexities of the Alaska acquisition?
- Encourage students to reflect on the diversity of viewpoints and the impact they have on historical interpretations.
- How can understanding different perspectives enhance our understanding of historical events?



Support:

Provide a set of guiding research questions for each perspective to help students focus their research and gather relevant information. For example, "What were the main arguments in favor of the Alaska Purchase from the American perspective?" or "What were the concerns raised by the Russian perspective regarding the sale of Alaska?"



Extension:

Ask students to create 1-2 minute presentation for or against American expansion. They can make a video, write a speech/song/poem, or build a pitch deck. The presentation should include:

- A clear stance for or against expansion
- 3-4 reasons supporting the stance
- 1-2 historical references (U.S. or global) of other examples of expansion

Conclusion

Ask students to respond to the essential question posed at the beginning of the lesson.

Ask if they still have any questions about the content presented in the video. Discuss and answer these questions as a class.