

Sample Annotation for BUILDER Badge

This sample annotates student work based on student proficiency in Common Core Writing Standard 2 (Grades 6-8): Write informative/explanatory texts, the historical thinking skills of Corroboration and Close reading, and historical understandings (content). Students need feedback on all 3 criteria to develop proficiency in history/social studies.

“Expansion and Growth of the United States”

When the 11th president of the United States James Knox Polk was elected, he expressed his commitment to expansion. Many Americans including Polk felt about the country was meant to stretch from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. James Polk then vowed to annex (add to) Texas and take over Oregon, but soon he would realize he would get more than he bargained for.

In 1845 editor John O’ Sullivan wrote about this. He described expansion as a God given right. He named this belief Manifest Destiny which suggested that expanding the territories of the United States wasn’t only good but bound to happen. Some people agreed with this, other did not believe in invading westward territories (viewed by white settlers as unoccupied) which could require driving citizens of their homes. One of these people was abolitionist Frederick Douglas. Still, Polk went along with his promise and the same year as O’ Sullivan’s editorial, Texas was annexed to the U.S. At the same time, Mexico declared that they would fight to defend their claim. To avoid conflict with Mexico, Polk sent John Slidell to offer Mexico \$25 Million for the Rio Grande border in Texas and Mexico’s provinces of Alta California and Santa Fe de Nuevo México. Mexico refused the offer. What would soon become of this conflict would be the reason why the U.S. split the Oregon territory with Great Britain.

On April 26, 1846, U.S. and Mexican troops were on the banks of the Rio Grande (which the U.S. now claimed as its border with Mexico, having annexed the state of Texas), and a patrol of sixty-three U.S. soldiers was attacked by the Mexicans, and eleven Americans were killed. In response, on May 11th, Polk sent a declaration of war to Congress, claiming that Mexico had started the war by “shedding American blood upon American soil.”

Mexico and the U.S. fought for two years, and the war finally ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. This treaty stated that the U.S. would pay \$15 Million in exchange for the Mexican Cession, which included California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Texas, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. New Mexico and Arizona were peacefully purchased under the Gadsden Purchase. Polk nearly doubled the size of the United States in just four years, fulfilling even more than his original promise.

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Comment [1]: Common Core Writing: Student introduces (US expansion) clearly, and describes Polk’s policies as a cause of that expansion. (WH.6–8.2a)

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Comment [2]: Historical Understandings and Common Core Writing: The student contextualizes the term “expansion” as a mid-19th century policy aimed at expanding the US across the continent. The student’s description of “annex,” however, is more ambiguous; while annexing Texas and Oregon did add territory to the US, “annex” means to take control of a region or territory. The student needs to take care to define vocabulary precisely. (WH.6–8.2d)

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Comment [3]: Corroboration and Close Reading: The student analyzes Manifest Destiny as a complex and significant idea, identifying supporters (Polk, O’Sullivan, white settlers) and opponents (Douglass) and their points of disagreement. The student could develop the opposition’s argument by further explaining why an abolitionist (Douglass) specifically opposed western expansion to better evaluate his claim.

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Comment [4]: Common Core Writing: The student effectively develops the topic of US expansion by using a quotation and other details to describe the beginning of the US-Mexican war as a territorial conflict between the nations. (WH.6.8-2b)