

The Story of Alamo

A play for third grades by Gail Kameron

Cast of characters:

Bill
Sally
Peter
Mrs. Smith
Mr. Johnson
Mr. Jones
Saber toothed cat
Giant sloth
Mastodon
Camel
Indian woman 1
Indian woman 2
Indian man 1
Indian man 2
Mariano Castro
Bartolo Pacheco
David Glass
Mary Jones
Silas and Susanna Stone
August Hemme
Student 1
Student 2
Student 3
Student 4
Student 5
Student 6
Student 7
Student 8

SETTING: A park in Alamo. Several citizens of Alamo are having a picnic when all of a sudden three young people come running toward them.

Bill: Hello. My name is Bill and I am afraid my friends and I are lost. We just got off the freeway, but we haven't got the slightest idea where we are. Could you please help us?

Mr. Johnson: Why we would be happy to help you. You are in Alamo and my name is Mr. Johnson and this is Mrs. Smith and Mr. Jones. Where is it that you want to go?

Sally: I am happy to meet all of you. My name is Sally and this is Peter. We are from New York and we are touring the country. We are trying to learn about each place that we visit. Would you have the time to tell us a little about Alamo?

Mrs. Smith: We would be happy to tell you about Alamo. You came at just the right time because we were just reading this book on Alamo. We should be able to answer most of your questions.

Peter: Oh thank you. We have a list of questions that we are trying to answer for each place that we are visiting. Here is my first question. Could you tell us a little about our location?

Mr. Jones: You are in Alamo which is located in the East Bay. Danville and San Ramon are south of Alamo. Mt. Diablo is to the east of Alamo. North of Alamo is Walnut Creek.

Mrs. Smith: Mr. Jones, I just happen to have a map of the area. (Mrs. Smith uses a pointer to show the students the location of Alamo and its surrounding cities.)

Bill: I like history. Can you tell us about the history of this area?

Mrs. Smith: Yes, I can. Now shut your eyes and I am going to take you back millions of years ago. Are your eyes closed and are your imaginations working?

ENTER FOUR PREHISTORIC ANIMALS. (Students walk out with posters of prehistoric animals in front of them. Their heads are sticking out of the posters.)

Saber toothed cat: I am the saber toothed cat. I am smaller than the lions you see in the zoo, but I am powerfully built. Look at my long fangs. Aren't they wonderful? I use them for stabbing and slashing all of the animals that I just love to eat.

Mastodon: I am a mastodon. Look at my four beautiful tusks that are nine feet long. I am not as big as elephants that you see in the zoo, but I am still plenty big. How do you think that I got so big? I got so big by eating plenty of grass. I just love grass.

Camel: Hello. Have you ever seen an animal as big as I am? I am a camel and I am eighteen feet tall. That's right you heard me. I am eighteen feet tall in my stocking feet. I am the tallest camel ever found. It is great that I am so tall because I can reach the leaves at the very tops of trees, and of course those are the very best leaves.

Giant Sloth: Hello, I am the giant sloth. I eat leaves. I mean I eat a lot of leaves every day. A lot of animals would like to eat me, but you know what? They are afraid of my giant claws, and also I am hard to eat because my coat contains heavy bony plates.

Peter: If these animals are extinct how do you know that they actually lived here?

Mrs. Smith: Good question. We know that they lived here because we have found their bones. Well, actually I haven't found their bones, but scientists have. On the south slope

of Mr. Diablo there is a place called the Blackhawk Ranch Quarry. This was once a watering hole where animals came to drink. Many of these animals got stuck in the mud and died. Scientists took their bones and put them together like a puzzle. This is how we know that they lived here.

EXIT ANIMALS

Sally: Wow. With my eyes closed I could actually see these animals. What about Indians? Did any Indians live in Alamo?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, there were. The Tatcan tribe lived on the valley floor where Danville and Alamo are today. Their name was given to them by the Spanish. They lived in groups of 50 to 250 people. They depended on the plants and trees that grew here and the animals that roamed our hills and valleys.

ENTER FOUR INDIANS

Indian woman 1: I understand that you would like to know about my people. I am going to tell you about the food that we eat. Much of my time is spent gathering and preparing food for my family. The women and children of my tribe spend many hours a day in food preparation. Acorns are one of our most important foods. We spend many hours gathering acorns, then we dry them, leach out the sour taste with water, and grind them into flour. Sometimes I make acorn pancakes and sometimes I make acorn mush. We have acorns at every meal and sometimes if we are lucky we have meat from animals hunted by the men of our tribe. We also gather berries, seeds and nuts.

Indian man 1: I would like to tell you about our homes. To make our homes we make frames by bending willow branches. We tie grass to the frames to keep out the cold and the wind. There is a hole in the center to let out the smoke from our fires. Sometimes more than one family will occupy one of these houses. These homes are warm and snug on winter nights.

Indian woman 2: As you can see I am weaving a basket. This is a cooking basket, and I will weave it so tightly that I will be able to carry water in it. We use baskets for everything, even cooking. We don't actually put baskets on the fire. We heat stones on the fire and then we put them in a basket filled with water and acorn flour to make acorn mush. I just love acorn mush especially if I have some fresh berries.

Indian man 2: My people have lived in this valley for 5,000 years. To the south of us live the Seunen tribes and sometimes we get together to trade things. We enjoy these times because we see old friends, share food and dance. We lived in peace and harmony with nature for many years until the Spanish came.

I remember so well the day they came into this valley. We were terrified. We had never seen horses before and it almost seemed to us that the man and horse were joined to form a single beast. When the men got down from their horses we realized that the men and horses were separate. We had also never seen guns before, so we were amazed when one of the Spanish men took what looked like a stick and killed a rabbit by just pointing at it.

These men came from Spain which is a country that is far away from our village. Pedro Fages, one of their leaders, came to explore and look for routes through our land. Father Juan Crespi came to baptize us and Gabriel Moraga also came to explore. While he was here he named our beautiful mountain, Mt. Diablo. We were very curious about these men and their ideas. We traded some of our foods for some knives and other goods.

EXIT INDIANS

Peter: Fascinating. What happened to the Indians after the Spanish came?

Mrs. Smith: A few years after the first explorers came the Spanish started a mission where Fremont is today. The mission was called Mission San Jose, after St. Joseph. The Spanish convinced many Indians from this area to go to the mission to live. It seemed like a good idea at the time because the Indians were curious about all of the wonderful things that the Spanish seemed to have, but soon many of the Indians wanted to leave. The Spanish would not let them leave and sometimes they would go after Indians who had escaped. They were brought back to the mission and punished. Sadly many of the Indians died from diseases that the Spanish brought with them.

Bill: How sad. What happened to the Indians?

Mr. Johnson: It is sad what happened to the Indians. Mexico and Spain had a war and Mexico won. Mexico divided up the mission lands and gave them to people who had helped Mexico in the war. These large tracks of land were called Ranchos. Many of the Indians went to work on the ranchos, but some went into the hills often stealing cattle and sheep. The land that had once belonged to the Indians now belonged to the ranchos.

Sally: What was it like to live on a rancho?

Mrs. Smith: Let's visit one and see.

ENTER TWO RANCHO OWNERS

Mariano Castro: I was a soldier and a descendant of first generation Spanish settlers. For my work as a soldier I was given a land grant that included land in what is now Danville and Alamo. My rancho which I shared with my uncle Bartolo Pacheco was close to the Mt. Diablo foothills so we suffered from attacks from Indians. We decided not to live on our land full time, but we built temporary houses that we used for our cowboys, called vaqueros.

Bartolo Pacheco: On our rancho we have hundreds of cattle and many horses. These animals can run free because there are no fences. We butcher our cattle for meat and we sell tallow and hides. We use the money from the sale of tallow and hides to buy things that we need. My wife likes to buy silk for her dresses, but I like to buy things for my rancho. Every year we have a round-up and usually we invite our friends over for a fiesta. We have great food and sometimes we dance. Why don't you come to our fiesta?

ENTER PEOPLE FROM BACKSTAGE wearing cowboy hats and kerchiefs. The women wear long skirts. (The citizens of Alamo and the students join in.)

Mariano Castro: Let's do the Mexican Hat Dance. (Music plays and people dance. At the end people throw their hats in the air with a shout)

EXIT GROUP

Peter: What fun. I wish I had lived during that time. So what happened next?

Mr. Jones: In 1848 gold was discovered in California and thousands of people came pouring in from all over the world. Some people got rich, but most people didn't find gold. Instead they found rich land to farm. Much of the land was on the ranchos. The ranchos were so large that often no one even knew that the squatters were there and, by the time that they found out, it was just too difficult to get them off. Mexico and the United States had a war and in 1848 the United States won. California became a state in 1850.

Bill: What happened after California became a state?

Mrs. Smith: Many people came to Alamo to farm. Alamo is Spanish for poplar tree. Alamo had a fine climate and a good location so it grew quickly. A road ran through Alamo all the way from Mission San Jose to Martinez: Alamo had the first permanent post office in the valley beginning in 1852. Here come some early settlers. Let's let them tell their stories.

ENTER EARLY PIONEERS.

David Glass: I opened a general store on the road from Alamo to Walnut Creek. Early pioneers came into my store to buy everything that they needed. If I didn't have it then they didn't need it!

Mary Ann Jones: When families started to move in, I realized that we needed a school, so I worked very hard to get a school and start a church. I also gave a room to the first school teacher in Alamo. His name was Richard Webster and he was a fine young man. He sure did like my apple pie.

Silas and Susanna Stone: We built a house in Alamo in 1853 and grazed cattle on 1,000 acres. We have a road named after us called Stone Valley Road.

August Hemme: I was a farmer and rancher who grew wonderful sweet pears. I also worked hard to bring the railroad to Alamo. The San Ramon Branch Line came to the valley in 1891. A street is named after my family.

EXIT PIONEERS

Peter: Pretty interesting. It sounds like the pioneers of Alamo were farmers and ranchers.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, orchards and vineyards spread across the land. Almonds, grapes, walnuts, and many kinds of fruits were grown in Alamo.

Sally: Wow, what an interesting history. Tell me about Alamo now.

Mrs. Smith: I am so glad that you asked because we are so proud of Alamo. I would like to invite some of our local students to tell you about our wonderful town.

ENTER STUDENTS

Student 1: My parents decided to move to Alamo to be closer to my dad's job. He works at Bishop Ranch Business Park in San Ramon. All he has to do is get on the 680 freeway and he is there in 15 minutes. This is great because now he can coach all of my soccer games.

Student 2: My parents moved to Alamo because Alamo has such good schools. My school is in the San Ramon Valley School District and their schools rank in the top 10% of all California school districts. I love my school because_____.

Student 3: My mom wanted to move to Alamo because of its proximity to great shopping. All she has to do is get in the car and in 10 minutes she is in Walnut Creek where there are so many stores. She also loves to go to Danville to visit all of their little specialty shops.

Student 4: My dad wanted us to live in Alamo because there is so much to do here. We all ride bikes, so every Saturday you can find our whole family on the Iron Horse Trail. My dad and I like to hike Mt. Diablo, and we are always looking for new trails.

Student 5: Our whole family likes Alamo because of the nice people that live here. There are approximately 15,625 people living in Alamo and my dad thinks my sister knows most of them because she is on the phone all of the time.

Student 6: There are many nice parks in Alamo and there is even a park for dogs. My dog, Henry, likes to go to Hap Magee Park because there is a dog park there where dogs can run without their leashes. He has met some friends there and, they just run and run.

Student 7: My parents just like the atmosphere in Alamo. Alamo would be called a bedroom community which means that most people leave Alamo for their jobs. There is basic shopping in Alamo, but most of all it is a residential community. My mom likes that because she says there is not so much traffic and so many trees.

Student 8: My parents wanted to live in Alamo because of the climate. My mom grew up in Michigan and she said that she was tired of the snow. There are from 290 to 300 days of sun in Alamo which means that on most days I can walk or ride my bike to school. Also we don't have any snow and only about 23 inches of rain.

Student 9: I love Alamo because I like some of the special events that we can attend. Every September we go to Alamo Plaza for the Art and Music Festival. We always go because this event raises money for our school music program and next year I want to join the band. At Christmas we always bring our grandma to the tree lighting ceremony at Andrew Young Park. On the 4th of July we always go to Danville for the parade and then on to San Ramon for fireworks. There are always fun things to do in and around Alamo.

Sally: Wow. I think I want to move to Alamo. You certainly have given me a lot of good reasons why this is such a good place to live. Thank you so much for sharing your beautiful town with me. I will have a lot to tell my friends when I get back to New York.

Bill: Yes, thank you. This has been a wonderful afternoon. This is a beautiful community and you have every right to be so glad that you live here.

Peter: I can't wait to tell all of my friends in New York about Alamo. Thank you for being such good hosts and hostesses. Perhaps you will come and visit us some time.

ALL STUDENTS ENTER THE STAGE (They shake hands with the departing students. All people should face forward and sing a song of your choice.)

Dear Teachers,

Every year after Kathie Petrie's class has finished their study of Danville they put on a play which reflects what they have learned. The children in her class each take several parts, they write songs for different parts of the play, and they dress in appropriate costumes. The play is put on for parents and all of the students at Greenbrook. We all look forward every year to this play. This play is a wonderful review for students, and for students who didn't pay attention during the previous lessons it could also be a wonderful learning tool.

I have taken ideas from Kathie's play, but have written a play for Alamo. There are lots of parts in this play, so students could take more than one part. I also might suggest that this play could be done with more than one class, in which case more parts could be added. Instead of using the script as is you could have students write what they think some of these characters would say based of their study of Alamo. This play is just an idea which I hope you will add to as you find the need. Props and sets could be used from year to year.

Using a map: You could make a large political map of our local area, or you could make a political map that would also show Alamo in relation to San Francisco. This map could be used from year to year.

Prehistoric animals: You could create prehistoric animals in different ways. You could make puppets, or you could take two pieces of poster paper and stuff with newspaper to make a three-D effect. You could also just make a large animal on poster board and the student could have a cut-out for his face so you could hear him/her speaking. Animals could be used year after year. You could make up a song to go with the animals and they could also do a dance. Be creative.

Sets: Sets are not essential, but if you have time you could make a background of hills and Mt. Diablo. When the Indians come out, you could add to the background some Indian houses and, when the mission is discussed, you could add a mission and, for the rancho period, you could add an adobe house and so on. These could be added and taken off as needed.

Script: To eliminate memorizing so much the citizens could have their scripts in front of them with their Alamo books and the students could have their scripts with them in the form of the questions they want to ask. I must say that I have done plays for years and I am have been amazed at what students can memorize. If you plan the play early I don't think this should be a problem.

Have fun and good luck,

Gail Kamerer