

# THE LEWIS & CLARK EXPEDITION:

**A Celebration  
of American  
Teamwork**

**THE LEWIS & CLARK EXPEDITION:  
A CELEBRATION OF AMERICAN TEAMWORK  
CURRICULUM GUIDE**

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***Applause! Series***  
**CIVIC CENTER OF GREATER DES MOINES**  
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## **PRESIDENT THOMAS JEFFERSON & THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE**

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was the third President of the United States. Jefferson's long political career was marked by such distinctions as:

- Main author of the Declaration of Independence
- Governor of Virginia
- Ambassador to France
- George Washington's Secretary of State
- John Adam's Vice-President
- Founder of the University of Virginia



Painting of Thomas Jefferson by Gilbert Stuart.  
Image courtesy of Monticello.org

Jefferson also distinguished himself as a scholar and scientist. He designed his famous home, Monticello, near Charlottesville, Virginia. Jefferson's interest in botany led to farming innovations, landscape design, and the discovery of new plants. As an inventor, Jefferson developed the serpentine wall and a pedometer for carriages.

After becoming President in 1801, Jefferson sought to expand the country's borders. France owned vast areas of the land west of the Mississippi River but was unable to station enough troops in the West to maintain a strong French presence. Struggling to fund his war efforts in Europe, Napoleon agreed to sell the Louisiana territory to the United States in 1803. Jefferson acquired 827,000 square miles of land in the deal, paying just \$15 million (or 3 cents per acre). The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the United States.



Image courtesy of Monticello.org.

## ORIGINS & SUMMARY OF THE JOURNEY

For years Jefferson had been encouraging exploration of the lands beyond the Mississippi River. Immediately following the Louisiana Purchase Jefferson asked his personal secretary, Meriwether Lewis, to gather and outfit a group to explore the United States' new lands. The group, later called the Corps of Discovery, had four main goals:

1. Explore the Missouri River to its source, cross the Rocky Mountains, and seek a westward-flowing river to the Pacific Ocean—the fabled Northwest Passage.
2. Report on new animals, plants, minerals, etc. in the newly-acquired regions.
3. Establish trade with the Native American tribes they encountered.
4. Assure the Native Americans of the peaceful intentions of the United States government.

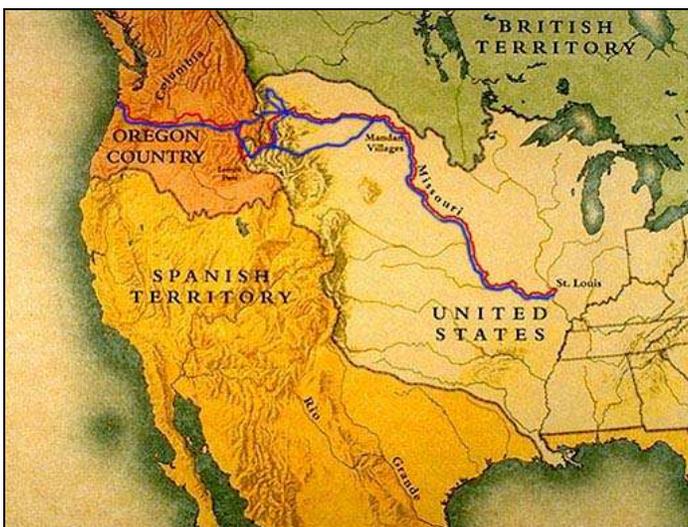
Meriwether Lewis asked his friend William Clark to share leadership of the mission. While Clark headed to St. Louis to begin recruiting volunteers, Lewis began a crash course in various types of science, including botany, zoology, cartography, and medicine. Lewis then traveled to the arsenal at Harper's Ferry for supplies and equipment and to Pittsburgh to build the keelboat that would transport the group on the first leg of their journey. Finally, Lewis joined Clark in St. Louis, and the Corps of Discovery departed from St. Louis in May 1804.



Captain Meriwether Lewis.  
Image courtesy of PBS.org/lewisandclark.



Captain William Clark.  
Image courtesy of PBS.org/lewisandclark.



Map of Lewis & Clark's journey.  
Image courtesy of PBS.org/lewisandclark.

The Corps spent the first winter with the Mandan Indian Nation in North Dakota. In the spring some members returned to St. Louis with collected specimens, while the majority continued by canoe toward the Rocky Mountains. By the following winter, the Corps had traced the Missouri River to its source, crossed the Rocky Mountains, and followed the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. In the spring they began retracing their path and returned to St. Louis on August 17, 1806. In total the Corps traveled for two years, four months, and nine days, covering a distance of over 8,000 miles.

## **THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY**

Thirty-three individuals comprised the permanent group of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery. Each member of the group was chosen to participate based on his or her unique set of skills. The Corps included many men who were professional soldiers, but there were also non-military members of the group. To be successful, the Corps had to function as a team. After a year of traveling together, the group began to consider each member's opinion before making important decisions, and a vote half way through the journey included both a woman and a slave. Below are brief descriptions of some of the group's most notable members:

**Meriwether Lewis**—A quiet, studious man from a wealthy family in Virginia. Friend and personal secretary to President Thomas Jefferson who shared his interest in science and botany. Very organized and private and tended to be moody and distant. Had served under William Clark in the Army. Later served as governor of the Louisiana Territory. Died at the age of 35 from self-inflicted gunshot wounds.

**William Clark**—Grew up in rural Kentucky, becoming skilled woodsman. Enlisted in the Army where he showed a talent for commanding men, drawing maps, and building forts. Spent many years negotiating with Native Americans before joining the Corps of Discovery. Outgoing and friendly, respected by the group. Later served as Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

**Sacagawea**—Shoshone child kidnapped by the Hidatsu Tribe when she was about 10-years-old. Joined Corps of Discovery when she was 16 with her husband, Toussaint Charboneau, and her son, Jean Baptiste, nicknamed "Pomp." Had knowledge of local terrain and edible plants. Spoke Shoshone. Well-liked by the Corps and honored for her resourcefulness.

**Toussaint Charboneau**—French fur trapper who lived with the Hidatsu Tribe for several years. Married to Sacagawea. Hired by Lewis and Clark as an interpreter. Not well-liked by the Corps; rather cowardly. Greatest talent was cooking.

**York**—William Clark's personal slave. Large and very strong man whose appearance made a strong impression on the Native Americans, many of whom had not seen Africans or African-Americans before. Proved his courage several times during the expedition. Highly respected by both the Corps and the Native Americans he encountered. Enjoyed full rights as a member of the Corps but was not granted his freedom by Clark until 1811.

**Pierre Cruzatte**—Expert boatman despite having only one eye. Excellent fiddler. Mistakenly shot Meriwether Lewis near the end of the journey.

**Sergeant Floyd**—The only Corps member who died on the journey. Apparently died of appendicitis, which was inoperable at the time, on August 20, 1804. Gravesite and monument in Sioux City, Iowa.

**ACTIVITY: MEET THE CORPS**

Listed below on the left are members of the Corps of Discovery. On the right are the roles that various members played in the Corps. Match each member with his/her appropriate role.

<b>LEWIS:</b> <i>Quiet, studious scientist</i>	<b>Cook meals far from danger</b>
<b>CLARK:</b> <i>Former Army commander</i>	<b>Retrieve hunted game from river</b>
<b>CHARBONNEAU:</b> <i>Cowardly fur trapper, good cook</i>	<b>Soldier</b>
<b>YORK:</b> <i>Large, strong African-American slave</i>	<b>Examine new plants, keep journal</b>
<b>CRUZATTE:</b> <i>One-eyed expert boatman, fiddler</i>	<b>Direct members of the Corps</b>
<b>SEAMAN:</b> <i>Lewis' black Newfoundland dog</i>	<b>Serve as interpreter and guide</b>
<b>FLOYD:</b> <i>Sergeant and only person to die</i>	<b>Impress Native Americans with appearance</b>
<b>SACAGAWEA:</b> <i>Shoshone woman with knowledge of some western territories</i>	<b>Captain a canoe</b>



## COMMUNICATING WITH NATIVE AMERICANS

During the journey Lewis & Clark hired several frontiersmen as interpreters to help them make a favorable impression on Native American tribes. Many of these men were part Native American and spoke English, French, and one or two Native American languages. What made these men most valuable was their proficiency in a language shared by most of the Native American tribes living in the West—Native American Sign Language. Through the use of this combination of sign, pantomime, and storytelling, the interpreters could express complex thoughts and ideas.

### ACTIVITY: SIGN LANGUAGE CONVERSATIONS

Have your students create their own signs for words like “buffalo,” “friend,” “baby,” “rain,” etc. Then have the students convey a sentence in the signs they created or from a Native American sign language resource. Sample sentences include “We are friends from far away” and “Is there food nearby?” Remind the students that Native Americans often did not know English, so interpreters had to be sure that their signs were understood. Conversations were often a two-side game of charades between Native Americans and the interpreters.

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## PEACE MEDALS

Before the American Revolution, the leaders of Britain, France, and Spain created coin-like medals to distribute to the native tribes they encountered in their exploration of North America. These “peace medals” bore an image of the European country’s ruler and signified the country’s wealth and power and apparently peaceful intentions. While the distribution of peace medals did establish friendship between these countries and some native tribes, the violence that occurred between these groups over several centuries shows that the gifts were certainly no guarantee of peace.

The tradition of peace medals was continued by Thomas Jefferson when he became President of the United States. Jefferson commissioned his own peace medal in several sizes. A portrait of the President appeared on the front of the medal, along with the words “Th. Jefferson President of the U.S. A.D. 1801.” The reverse side of the medal contained images of a handshake and a crossed peace pipe and tomahawk, as well as the words “Peace and Friendship.” Lewis gave the larger medals to Native American leaders deemed more important and smaller medals to less significant leaders. In exchange for one of Jefferson’s peace medals, the Native Americans were often asked to return the medals they had received from Britain, France, and Spain.



Front of Jefferson peace medal.  
Image courtesy of Monticello.org.



Back of Jefferson peace medal.  
Image courtesy of Monticello.org.

In 2004 the U.S. Mint changed the design of our nickel to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Lewis & Clark Expedition and resemble Jefferson's peace medal. The Corps of Discovery is also featured on the U.S. one-dollar gold coin, which bears the image of Sacagawea and her child.



Front of 2004 "Louisiana Purchase/Peace Medal" nickel.  
Image courtesy of usmint.org.



Back of 2004 "Louisiana Purchase/Peace Medal" nickel.  
Image courtesy of usmint.org.



Front of 2000 "Sacagawea Golden Dollar."  
Image courtesy of usmint.org.

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## **DISCOVERIES OF THEIR JOURNEY**

Throughout the journey Lewis kept very careful records of the new plants and animals he encountered. By the journey's end the Corps had discovered 122 new species of animals, including prairie dogs, antelope, pelicans, jackrabbits, and coyotes. Lewis even managed to send back a live prairie dog to Jefferson via the men who returned to St. Louis after the first winter. Lewis also discovered 178 new plants (many of which were shipped back to Jefferson and planted at Monticello). The Corps also encountered over 40 different Native American tribes and attempted to establish friendly relations.



Prairie dog.  
Image courtesy of Cooperativeconversationamerica.org

Lewis and Clark investigated several long-held legends about the land west of the Mississippi. A mastodon skeleton had recently been discovered in the Midwest. Jefferson and others speculated as to whether this great beast may still inhabit the unknown Louisiana Territory. Another story told of how a group of Welshmen has been welcomed by Native Americans and absorbed into their tribes. As a result, pale natives with red hair were rumored to live in the Dakotas. A native legend held that a peculiar cone-shaped hill was inhabited by a strange race of men only four feet tall with large heads; these little men supposedly attacked strangers with poisonous arrows. Alas, the Corps of Discovery proved all these legends to be myths.

## **VOCABULARY**

**botany**—the study of plants

**cartography**—the science of making maps

**Corps of Discovery**—the group of men and women who journeyed with Meriwether Lewis & William Clark to explore the Louisiana Purchase

**frontiersman**—a person who lives or works beyond settled or developed territory

**interpreter**—a translator for people conversing in different languages

**keelboat**—a shallow, covered riverboat used to transport goods

**Louisiana Purchase**—large area of land west of the Mississippi River purchased by President Thomas Jefferson from France in 1803; doubled the size of the United States

**Monticello**—home of President Thomas Jefferson near Charlottesville, Virginia; Jefferson helped design many elements of the building and used it to exhibit his scientific collections

**peace medal**—a coin-like object given by Europeans and later Americans to Native American tribes; meant to communicate both power and friendship

**zoology**—the study of animals

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## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The Corps of Discovery had to work together as a team in order to survive their long journey of discovery. If you had to go on an expedition with many other people you did not know, what challenges might you face? How would you get to know each other? How would you make important decisions? What unique skills would you bring to the group?
2. Sacagawea was the only woman in the Corps of Discovery, and she made the journey with her young son, Pomp. What skills made her a valuable member of the group? What did her presence indicate to the various tribes the Corps met during their journey?
3. The Corps of Discovery encountered many Native American tribes during their travels across the Louisiana territory. Apart from sign language, how do you think the Corps attempted to communicate with the Native Americans? What kind of body language might they have used when approaching an unfamiliar tribe? Why did the Corps choose to bring items like beads, ribbons, scissors, and mirrors to trade with Native Americans?

## CLASSROOM RESOURCES

### Websites

<http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/index.html>. Interactive trail maps, description of Corps members, classroom resources, and historian perspectives.

<http://www.monticello.org>. Information about the life of Thomas Jefferson, his remarkable home, and his involvement with the Lewis and Clark expedition. Includes classroom resources.

<http://lewisclark.net/maps/index.html>. Maps, timeline, and information about the trail.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/lewisandclark>. Interactive journey program, timeline, information about Sacagawea and the Corps' discoveries, games, and much more.

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/jeff/LewisClark2/HomePage/HomePage.htm>. Information for teachers about Thomas Jefferson and the Corps of Discovery. Includes games and activities for students.

### Books

***How We Crossed the West: The Adventures of Lewis and Clark*** by Rosalyn Schanzer.

***Lewis and Clark for Kids: Their Journey of Discovery with 21 Activities*** by Janis Herbert.

***Seaman's Journal: On the Trail with Lewis and Clark*** by Patti Reeder Eubank.

***York's Adventures with Lewis and Clark*** by Rhoda Blumberg.

***Sacagawea*** by Stacey DeKeyser.

***The Journey Home*** by John Hamilton.

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## STUDY GUIDE RESOURCES

<http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/index.html>

<http://www.monticello.org>.

<http://www.webster.com>

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