

U.S. History

The student understands westward expansion and its effects on the political, economic, and social development of the nation.

TX: 113.24.8.6
CA: 8.8.2

The Lewis & Clark Expedition

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United States President Thomas Jefferson, in 1803, commissioned an expedition to explore the western regions of North America. The purpose of the expedition was to find a water route to the Pacific Ocean and to establish an American presence in the sparsely populated American West. The expedition, led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, covered 8,000 miles of territory over a period of 2 years, 4 months, and 9 days. The Corps of Discovery, as the members of the expedition were known, mapped thousands of miles of previously unexplored territory, documented hundreds of species of plant and animal life, and interacted with the native peoples inhabiting the American West.

The expedition was historically important because the data collected by the Corps of Discovery laid the foundation for westward expansion throughout the American West. Viewed from the perspective of its participants, however, the Lewis and Clark expedition was an exciting and often harrowing adventure.

The Expedition

As you begin the unit, Lewis-Clark.org is an excellent, comprehensive resource for information about the Lewis and Clark expedition. The highlight of the site is an interactive essay that includes pictures, maps, and audio. The essay is divided into nineteen parts.

Take your students to the site beginning at part one, which they can reach by clicking **Preparation**. Next, click the white bar entitled **1. Presidential Mission**. Allow students to read Thomas Jefferson's mission statement, and then go to Section Two. Students should navigate the remainder of the essay using the buttons at the bottom of the screen. Within the text of each section, students



will encounter links and clickable icons that provide audio readings of Lewis' journal entries, maps, and additional textual information about the expedition. Encourage students to explore these links as they read.

After navigating this interactive essay, students should have an understanding of the major events of the expedition. Ask them to discuss the accomplishments of the expedition, the hardships faced by the Corps of Discovery, and how the Lewis and Clark expedition contributed to westward expansion. The expedition failed to meet at least one of Jefferson's goals: Lewis and Clark did not find a passable water connection between the Missouri and Colombia river systems. So, was the expedition a success or a failure? Divide students into two groups and have them debate this question.

Another good resource for starting out is the PBS [Lewis and Clark](#) site, a web companion to the Ken Burns film. What supplies would be needed to equip such an expedition? To find out, ask students to click [Inside the Corps](#) on the middle-right of the screen, and then [To Equip An Expedition](#) at the bottom of the next screen. Before students view this list, ask them to write down the kinds of items they would expect to take on such a trip. Then have students compare their lists with the actual list on the site. Ask the students if they were surprised by some of the items on the actual list. What about the library and the gifts for Native Americans? Ask students to discuss how these items, and the library in particular, contributed to the success of the expedition.

Instruct students to return to the main page and click [Into the Unknown](#), which leads to an interactive story/game in which students are asked to lead the Lewis and Clark expedition themselves. In this game, the success or failure of the expedition depends on the decisions made by the player. After all students have successfully completed the game, ask them to discuss some of the difficult decisions faced by Lewis and Clark. Did luck play a part in the success of the expedition?



Lewis' Journal Entries and Trivia

Both Meriwether Lewis and William Clark kept a journal during their two-and-a-half-year expedition. These journal entries are perhaps the most fascinating and colorful aspect of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Before we get to the journal entries, divide the students into twelve groups. Ask each group to put itself in the shoes of Lewis and Clark and to make a list of the dangers and hardships they would expect to encounter on the 8,000 mile trip. Go to [Lewis and Clark's Historic Trail](http://LewisandClark.com) to access the journal entries.



Ask each of the twelve groups to read one section of journal entries as they are divided on the site. Have each group write down something frightening or surprising encountered by the Corps of Discovery in their portion of journal entries, or just something interesting they learned about the expedition from this reading. Ask each group to share what they wrote with the class.

The Sacagawea Coin and the Impact of Lewis and Clark

As a concluding exercise, go to the United States Mint's [Golden Dollar Coin](http://www.usmint.gov) page. As this page explains, Sacagawea has replaced Susan B. Anthony on the new U.S. one dollar gold coin. Sacagawea was a Shoshone Native American woman who served as a guide and interpreter on the Lewis and Clark expedition. Assign students to read the biography of Sacagawea and discuss why they think Sacagawea was chosen to grace the new coin. What were her contributions to the expedition? Should Sacagawea replace Susan B. Anthony, who was an instrumental member of the women's suffrage movement? In what respect is Sacagawea worthy of her own coin?



The Sacagawea coin may also be a good lead in to a discussion of the lasting impact of the Lewis and Clark expedition on United States history. Ask students to discuss how the Lewis and Clark expedition contributed to the growth of the United States. How, if at all, did this expedition alter the history of the nation? Is the Lewis and Clark expedition as deserving of high school classroom time as, say, the woman's suffrage movement? Students should be expected to explain their answers.

Reference:

Lewis-Clark.org
<http://www.lewis-clark.org/index.htm>

PBS Lewis and Clark site
<http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/>

Lewis and Clark's Historic Trail
<http://www.lewisclark.net/>

United States Mint – Sacagawea Golden Dollar Coin
http://www.usmint.gov/Mint_Programs/Golden_Dollar_coin/index.cfm?action=about_sacagawea