

Exploring the Unknown: The Lewis and Clark Expedition

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will step into the boots of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. By analyzing primary source journal entries, mapping the journey, and illustrating the new species discovered, students will understand the significance of Westward Expansion and the scientific impact of the Corps of Discovery.

Materials Needed

- Excerpts from "The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition" (Print or Digital)
- Blank map of the United States (1803 era)
- Coloring pages or drawing paper for significant events (e.g., The Departure, Crossing the Rockies, Reaching the Pacific)
- Botanical/Zoological sketch templates (for labeling plants and animals)
- Colored pencils, markers, or watercolors
- "Field Journal" notebook or binder

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the learner will be able to:

- **Explain** the primary goals of the Lewis and Clark expedition and its role in Westward Expansion.
- **Interpret** primary source documents (journal entries) to identify challenges and discoveries.
- **Identify and describe** at least three plants and three animals documented by the Corps of Discovery.
- **Synthesize** information by creating a visual "Field Journal" entry.

Success Criteria

- The student can explain *why* Thomas Jefferson sent the expedition.
- The student's map correctly traces the route from St. Louis to the Pacific.
- Field sketches include accurate labels and descriptive details based on journal readings.

1. Introduction: The Great Unknown (The Hook)

Scenario: Imagine it is 1804. You are standing on the banks of the Missouri River. Behind you is the settled United States; in front of you is a massive expanse of land that no one in your government has ever mapped. There are no roads, no grocery stores, and no GPS. Your mission is to find a water route to the Pacific Ocean and write down every new thing you see.

Discussion Question: If you were chosen for this mission, what is the one thing you would be most afraid of? What is the one thing you would be most excited to see?

2. Body: The Journey West

Step 1: The "Why" of the Mission (I Do)

The educator explains the concept of **Westward Expansion**. Mention the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and President Jefferson's "Instructions to Lewis":

- Find a direct water communication across the continent (The Northwest Passage).
- Establish trade and friendly relations with Native American tribes.
- Scientific Study: Record the weather, soil, plants, and animals.

Step 2: Diving into the Journals (We Do)

Read a selected excerpt from the journals together (e.g., the first encounter with a "Grizzly Bear" or the discovery of "Great Falls").

- **Activity:** As you read, look for "Sensory Words." What did Lewis smell, hear, or feel?
- **Discussion:** Why did they write in journals every day? (To prove their discoveries to the President and for future settlers).

Step 3: Significant Events Coloring & Mapping (You Do)

The student will select a significant event from their reading to illustrate/color. Examples include:

- **The Council Bluffs:** Meeting with the Oto and Missouri nations.
- **The Bitterroot Mountains:** The hardest part of the trek.
- **The "Ocean in View!":** Reaching the Pacific.

While coloring, the student should mark these milestones on their blank map.

Step 4: The Discovery of Flora and Fauna (Hands-On Practice)

The Corps of Discovery described 178 plants and 122 animals previously unknown to Western science. Using provided templates or a blank notebook:

- **Color and Label:** The student will color and label the following:
 - **Animals:** The Prairie Dog (which they called "Barking Squirrels"), the Grizzly Bear, and the California Condor.
 - **Plants:** The Bitterroot, the Camas Flower, and the Western White Pine.
- **Journaling Task:** Write a 2-sentence "Scientific Description" for one plant and one animal as if you are Lewis or Clark. Describe its color, size, and where you found it.

3. Conclusion: Closing the Journal

Recap: Review the map and the sketches. Ask the student: "Did they find the Northwest Passage?" (Answer: No, it didn't exist as a continuous water route, but they found something better—knowledge of the land).

Reflective Question: How would the United States be different today if this expedition had never happened?

Assessment Methods

- **Formative (During):** Oral Q&A during the journal reading to check for comprehension of primary source language.
- **Summative (End):** Review the "Field Journal" (the coloring pages, map, and labeled sketches) for accuracy and detail. The student will give a 2-minute "Presentation to the President" summarizing their findings.

Differentiation & Adaptability

- **For Younger Learners (Scaffolded):** Use pre-drawn coloring pages where the student only needs to add color and trace the names of the plants/animals.
- **For Advanced Learners (Extension):** Research a specific Native American tribe the expedition met (like the Shoshone or Mandan) and write a journal entry from *their* perspective seeing the expedition arrive.
- **Digital Option:** Instead of physical coloring, use a digital drawing app to create the field journal entries.