

Expedition Encounters

Lewis and Clark



Students:

- In your team, read about this encounter. Then divide your team into two equal groups.
 - Group One: Discuss how expedition members might have perceived the place and the encounter.
 - Group Two: Discuss what a Missouri or Oto Indian might have thought about the place and the encounter.
- After your discussions, write about the encounter from the viewpoint of a Missouri or Oto Indian, or from the viewpoint of a member of the expedition.

Encounter:

The Expedition and the Missouri and Oto

Location

South of the Great Plains; near the Missouri and Platte Rivers • Near the border of present-day Nebraska and Missouri • Number 1 on the map “Lewis and Clark Expedition Westward Route, Native Americans, and Forts”

Lewis & Clark Expedition

The Missouri and Oto Indians were some of the first Native Americans with whom Lewis and Clark met in their new roles as President Jefferson’s ambassadors. Because members of the expedition were soldiers in the U.S. Army, they wore full military dress. Lewis fired a few rounds from his air gun, which astonished the Indians. After that, Lewis and Clark made a point to fire the gun when they met with Indian leaders.

Captain William Clark—August 2, 1804

“ . . . a [party] of [Oto] & Missourie Nation Came to Camp, . . . Sent them Some roasted meat, Pork flour & meal, in return they sent us Water [melons].”

Captain William Clark—August 3, 1804

“ . . . after Brackfast we collected those Indians under an [awning] of our Main Sail, in presence of our Party paraded & Delivered a long Speech to them expressive of our journey the wishes of our Government, Some advice to them and Directions how they were to conduct themselves.”

The Missouri and Oto

The Missouri and Oto Indians in this area lived in towns, in oven-shaped, earth-covered houses. They hunted buffalo, farmed, and traded with French and Spanish traders. Smallpox had depleted the numbers of both tribes, so the surviving members lived together in the Oto village.

The leading chiefs of both tribes met with Lewis and Clark. A Frenchman who had been living with the Indians and had learned their language acted as translator. Lewis gave a long speech, after which the two groups passed the peace pipe. The captains of the expedition gave gifts to the Indians, including peace medals, gunpowder, and a bottle of whiskey.

Educators: This handout accompanies the lesson “Lewis and Clark: Same Place, Different Perspectives,” at www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions. Photocopy this handout for students.

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- Group Two: Discuss what a Teton Sioux Indian might have thought about the place and the encounter.
- After your discussions, write about the encounter from the viewpoint of a Teton Sioux Indian, or from the viewpoint of a member of the expedition.

Encounter:

The Expedition and the Teton Sioux

Location

Great Plains • Near the Missouri and Bad Rivers • Near present-day Pierre, South Dakota • Number 4 on the map “Lewis and Clark Expedition Westward Route, Native Americans, and Forts”

Lewis & Clark Expedition

At the first council with Teton tribal leaders, expedition members wore their uniforms and fired an air gun, and Lewis began his long welcoming speech. But since no one in the expedition spoke the Sioux language, it was hard for the Sioux to understand Lewis—and for the members of expedition to understand the Indians. Lewis and Clark met with the Teton several times over the next few days, and continued upriver after an argument over trade goods nearly ended in fighting.

Meriwether Lewis—September 17, 1804

“[t]he plain] already rich pleasing and beautiful was still farther heightened by immense herds of Buffaloe, deer Elk and Antelopes which we saw in every direction feeding on the hills and plains.”

William Clark—September 25, 1804

“The 5 Indians which we met last night Continued . . . we gave them Some of our Provisions to eat, they gave us great [Quantities of Meat] . . . we feel much at a loss for the want of an interpreter the one we have can Speak but little . . . “. . . the 2nd Chief was verry insolent both in words & [gestures] declareing I should not go on, Stateing he had not receved presents sufficient from us, . . . I felt My self Compelled to Draw my Sword . . . the grand Chief then took hold of the [ropel] & ordered the young [warriors] away, I felt My self warm and spoke in verry positive terms.”

The Teton Sioux

At the time they encountered Lewis and Clark, the Teton Sioux occupied two villages, one on the Missouri River, and the other near the Bad River, a tributary of the Missouri. For sacred ceremonies, they may have decorated themselves with feathers from hawks, owls, turkeys, or eagles. They tanned buffalo hides to a soft texture, then made robes from the hides—which usually still had the buffalo’s hair on them, for warmth. The Teton aggressively controlled the traffic that passed through their portion of the Missouri River. They would demand large gifts from passing merchants (or they might use more violent tactics). They weren’t impressed by the show of uniforms or the air gun, but eventually they allowed the expedition to continue up the Missouri.

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- Group Two: Discuss what a Mandan or Hidatsa Indian might have thought about the place and the encounter.
- After your discussions, write about the encounter from the viewpoint of a Mandan or Hidatsa Indian, or from the viewpoint of a member of the expedition.

Encounter:

The Expedition and the Mandan and Hidatsa

Location

The Great Plains • Along the upper Missouri River • In present-day central North Dakota • Number 5 on the map “Lewis and Clark Expedition Westward Route, Native Americans, and Forts”

Lewis & Clark Expedition

The expedition spent the winter of 1804–05 at Fort Mandan, which they built near the Mandan villages and named for their Indian neighbors. The Mandan and the Hidatsa Indians (who lived nearby), gave Lewis and Clark a great deal of information about the land, rivers, and people to the west. Lewis and Clark hired a Frenchman, Toussaint Charbonneau, and his Shoshone wife, Sacagawea, as interpreters. Sacagawea was born a Shoshone, but had been kidnapped by the Hidatsa a few years earlier. That February, Sacagawea would give birth to a boy, Jean Baptiste, whom Clark nicknamed “Pomp.”

William Clark—Tuesday, January 1, 1805

“The Day was ushered in by the Discharge [discharge] of two Cannon . . . At night the party returned [from a visit to a Mandan village] with 3 robes and 13 Strings of Corn which the Indians had given them.”

William Clark—Wednesday, January 16, 1805

“This War Chief gave us a Chart [a map] of the Missouri, he informed us of his intentions of going to War in the Spring against the Snake [Shoshone] Indians we advised him . . . if he went to War against those Defenceless people, he would displease his great father [President Jefferson], and he would not receive that protection & care from him . . . This Chief replied that if going to war . . . would be displeasing . . . he would not go . . .”

The Mandan and Hidatsa

In Mandan and Hidatsa culture, political, economic and ceremonial activity centered around the village, in which people strove together to better each family, clan, and the village itself. Forty or fifty lodges centered around a plaza. Ceremonial lodges and a sacred cedar post, a symbol of a hero of the tribe, were near the center of the plaza. The Mandan and Hidatsa grew corn, squash, beans, and tobacco, and traded with other Indians and even Europeans. Throughout the winter, the Indians exchanged food for goods the expedition carried or manufactured. The expedition’s blacksmiths made axes and repaired the Indians’ weapons in exchange for corn, a food that was crucial to the expedition’s survival that long, cold winter.

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 - Group Two: Discuss what a Shoshone Indian might have thought about the place and the encounter.
- After your discussions, write about the encounter from the viewpoint of a Shoshone Indian, or from the viewpoint of a member of the expedition.

Encounter: The Expedition and the Shoshone

Location

Along the eastern and western ridges of the Rocky Mountains • Number 6 on the map "Lewis and Clark Expedition Westward Route, Native Americans, and Forts" indicates Shoshone on the Rockies' western ridges

Lewis & Clark Expedition

The next obstacle for Lewis and Clark was the Bitterroot Mountains; they knew they would need horses to cross this mountain range. The Missouri River had ended and the expedition needed to find the Shoshone in order to get horses to carry their gear, and directions for the best route to take when crossing the imposing mountains in front of them.

William Clark—Saturday, August 24, 1805

"The plan I stated to Capt. Lewis . . . is to procure as many horses (one for each man if possible) and to hire my present guide . . . and proceed on by land to Some navigable part of the Columbia River, or to the Ocean, depending on what provisions we can procure by the gun added to the Small Stock we have on hand depending on our horses as the last resort."

The Shoshone

The Shoshone, also known as the Snake Nation, occupied a wide range of areas both east and west of the Rocky Mountains. West of the Rockies, they lived in roofless grass huts, hunted birds and rabbits, and caught fish. To the east, they were primarily buffalo hunters who had once lived on the Plains, but rival tribes had pushed them into the mountains, where Lewis and Clark found them living in tepees and eating roots, berries, and small game. Lewis and Clark encountered the Lemhi Shoshone, an eastern band, who probably had never seen white men before. The Lemhi Shoshone traded with the Spanish, who wouldn't give them guns, which they needed for hunting and protection. Lewis and Clark promised that future traders would bring guns and other trade goods.

A happy coincidence occurred during the encounter. Sacagawea, who had been kidnapped from the Shoshone several years earlier, recognized their chief, Cameahwait, as her long-lost brother!

The Shoshone sold horses to Lewis and Clark. Drawing in the dirt with a stick, Chief Cameahwait warned that tall mountains crowded the banks of the Bitterroot River, and that there would be few animals for the men to eat. "Old Toby," a Shoshone man, joined the expedition temporarily to guide them through the mountains.

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- Group Two: Discuss what a Nez Perce Indian might have thought about the place and the encounter.
- After your discussions, write about the encounter from the viewpoint of a Nez Perce Indian, or from the viewpoint of a member of the expedition.

Encounter:

The Expedition and the Nez Perce

Location

Highland Plains • West of the Bitterroot Mountain Range • In present-day Idaho • Number 8 on the map "Lewis and Clark Expedition Westward Route, Native Americans, and Forts"

Lewis & Clark Expedition

An early winter storm in the Bitterroot Mountains made the expedition's trip extremely difficult. By the time they reached the Nez Perce villages, just west of the Bitterroots, expedition members were extremely hungry and exhausted. Some of their horses had not survived the tough crossing.

William Clark—September 16, 1805

"I have been wet and as cold in every part as I ever was in my life, indeed I was at one time fearfull my feet would freeze in the thin Mockirsons which I wore, . . ."

Sergeant Patrick Gass—September 22, 1805

"The Indians belonging to this band, received us kindly, appeared pleased to see us, and gave us such provisions as they had. We were at a loss for an interpreter, none our interpreters being able to understand them."

The Nez Perce

The Nez Perce hunted buffalo on horseback, speared fish, and gathered camas roots in the mountains. They offered food to the expedition.

Their chief, Twisted Hair, drew a map (on white elkskin) of the rivers toward the west. The Indians taught the expedition to make dugout canoes for the next leg of the journey, on the Columbia River system. The Nez Perce agreed to keep peace in the region if Lewis and Clark would help them get guns and other trade goods. The Indians agreed to care for the expedition's horses over the winter.

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