

Preparing for The Lewis and Clark Expedition

Try to imagine what it would be like to walk from St. Louis, Missouri to Portland, Oregon, and back again. Now imagine that you have no roads, towns, stores or hotels along the way. The only people you are likely to meet do not speak your language. They may even be hostile. To top it all off, there is not even a map available to show you where to go. Does it sound like a tough job? That is the task that Meriwether Lewis and William Clark decided to tackle in 1804. Lewis and Clark were the leaders of a group of men known as the “Corps of Discovery” which was commissioned by the third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson.

In 1803, President Jefferson negotiated a deal with Napoleon Bonaparte, the leader of France. The US purchased a huge amount of land known as the Louisiana Territory. Jefferson paid about \$23 million dollars for 828,000 square miles that included parts of 15 present-day states. The President was motivated to make the purchase out of concern that Spain or France might gain power over the port of New Orleans. Because that city controlled access to the mouth of the Mississippi River, it was vital to America’s future to have New Orleans and surrounding areas as part of the United States.

Once the purchase was made, President Jefferson needed to find a way to explore the vast lands. He wanted to use their natural resources for the good of the country. He was hoping the expedition would find a waterway that would reach all the way to the Pacific Ocean and make trading within Western territories much easier. The President also wanted to make contact with the native peoples who lived in the region and to befriend them if possible. He was interested in learning about the wildlife and other resources in the area. Additionally, he wanted Lewis and Clark to map their route to provide information about geographical features for explorers that would follow them.

Lewis and Clark recruited 36 men to travel with them on their arduous journey. Most of them were soldiers but a few were French boatmen or trappers who would serve as translators. The Captains planned to send a few of the men back to Missouri after the first winter on the trail. Men in this group were called the return party, and they would deliver some of the first maps and scientific specimens to Washington DC. Those who would make the entire trip were known as the permanent party.

Captain Lewis spent most of a year gathering supplies for the journey. He bought guns and ammunition, navigational tools, and gifts to be used to trade with the natives. He also directed the building of a keelboat to journey up the Missouri. It was a large, flat-bottomed vessel that could carry a cargo weighing about 12 tons. It had a sail, but the plan was propel it upstream mostly by paddles and poles. After the preparation was done, the Corps of Discovery departed for lands unknown on May 14, 1804.

Name _____

Date _____

Preparing for The Lewis and Clark Expedition Questions

Use the context of the story to make your best guess as to the meaning of the following words. Then, write a dictionary definition that shows whether you were right or wrong.

Word	Best Guess	Definition
1. Hostile		
2. Commissioned		
3. Negotiated		
4. Motivated		
5. Vast		
6. Arduous		
7. Specimens		
8. Vessel		

Name _____

Date _____

Preparing for The Lewis and Clark Expedition Questions (Cont'd)

Subtitles are often used in nonfiction materials to help a reader process the information he or she is learning more easily. Reread each of the five paragraphs in the story. Write a subtitle for each paragraph that expresses its main idea.

Paragraph

1. _____

Paragraph 2.

Paragraph 3.

Paragraph 4.

Paragraph 5.

Imagine that you are a member of the Corps of Discovery. Write a letter to your family back home as if you are just getting ready to leave on this trip through the west. How are you feeling? What do you expect to happen? What are the other members of the group like?

Name _____

Date _____

Preparing for The Lewis and Clark Expedition Answers

Word	Best Guess	Definition
1. Hostile	<i>Answers will vary</i>	Relating to an enemy.
2. Commissioned		Appointed or assigned a task.
3. Negotiated		Brought about through a conference or discussion.
4. Motivated		Brought to action.
5. Vast		A boundless space.
6. Arduous		Difficult to achieve.
7. Specimens		Examples of things belonging to a larger group.
8. Vessel		A structure used for navigating on the water.

