

Sacagawea

by Noah Remnick



In 1804, President Thomas Jefferson sent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on a very difficult expedition. He wanted them to explore the massive 828,000 square miles of territory west of the Mississippi that the United States had bought from France for \$15 million. The deal between Jefferson and the French emperor Napoleon was known as the Louisiana Purchase and it doubled the size of the United States.

Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery were charged with finding a route from the east through this enormous and uncharted new terrain all the way west to the Pacific Ocean. Opening a route to the west would increase trade opportunities with China, particularly for the lucrative fur business. But to do so, the explorers needed to deal with Native American tribes they did not know and whose language they did not speak. They needed to pass over treacherous mountains and rivers that were unfamiliar to them. To complete the job, Lewis

and Clark relied on the language and negotiation skills of a Native American woman.

The woman, Sacagawea, was a member of the Shoshone tribe. As a young girl, she was taken by another tribe, the Hidatsa, who then sold her to the Mandan tribe. When Lewis and Clark met Sacagawea in the early months of 1805, she was married to a Canadian fur trapper named Toussaint Charbonneau. She was pregnant, and by the time the expedition team left the Mandans, she had given birth to a son, Jean Baptiste. With the baby strapped to her back, Sacagawea joined her husband and Lewis and Clark as an interpreter and a guide.

Like many Native American tribes, the Shoshone were nomadic, meaning they traveled from place to place with the seasons. In doing so, they learned how to travel the mountains and the forests, the rivers and the plains. They learned which plants were safe to eat, and which were poisonous. They knew how to hunt for rabbits, foxes, elks and deer, and even how to trap longhorn sheep. As a girl, Sacagawea learned all these skills that helped her and the Lewis and Clark expedition survive.

Some historians say Sacagawea was critical in helping Lewis and Clark make their way through the wilderness and up the Missouri River, and it is generally agreed that just having a Native American woman and baby with them helped put other tribes at ease. By August 1805, the expedition team arrived at the hunting grounds of the Shoshone, Sacagawea's native tribe.

The American explorers needed to trade for horses to cross the Rocky Mountains. As Sacagawea interpreted between Lewis and the chief of the Shoshones, she was shocked. She realized that the chief was her very own brother, Cameahwait. The chief and the entire tribe were thrilled to be reunited with Sacagawea. They held a peace party in honor of her, Lewis and Clark, and the entire expedition team. Lewis and Clark gave their new Shoshone friends gifts from President Jefferson,

including clothing, eyeglasses, beads, and tobacco.

Chief Cameahwait agreed to help Lewis and Clark, and bartered with them for horses and guides. When the time came for the expedition team to leave, Sacagawea had a difficult choice. Should she stay with her tribe, or continue on the journey with Lewis and Clark, her husband and her baby? She decided to stay with the explorers, and bid her family and tribe a tearful goodbye.

The trip over the Rocky Mountains was arduous. The mountains were cold and had no vegetation. The explorers ended up eating candles to survive until they got to the warmer side of the mountain path. Finally, they reached the western coast and the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean. By now it was December and the corps built a winter fort. It was cold and rainy. Lewis and Clark called their new home Fort Clatsop, after a nearby Native American tribe.

The explorers set off on their return trip in March, and they had to make their way back the way they had come. Eventually, through snow, battles with mistrustful Native American tribes, and steep mountain passes, the explorers returned to the village where they first met Sacagawea. Lewis and Clark had journals filled with notes and maps, and precious samples of the plants and animals they had encountered in the new western territory of the United States. It was time to deliver them to President Jefferson, who deemed the expedition a success even though an all-water route was not found. And they might not have been able to do it without the guidance of Sacagawea.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What did President Thomas Jefferson ask Lewis and Clark to do?

- A. negotiate a deal with the French emperor Napoleon
- B. get to know the Native American tribes
- C. find a route through the new territory to the Pacific Ocean
- D. discover new plant and animal species

2. How does the author describe the terrain that Lewis and Clark explored?

- A. enormous, unfamiliar, mountainous
- B. unpopulated, open, grassy
- C. small, hilly, temperate
- D. dry, settled, dotted with lakes

3. Lewis and Clark needed help to explore the new, uncharted territory. What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A. "But to do so, the explorers needed to deal with Native American tribes they did not know and whose language they did not speak."
- B. "To complete the job, Lewis and Clark relied on the language and negotiation skills of a Native American woman."
- C. "Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery were charged with finding a route from the east through this enormous and uncharted new terrain all the way west to the Pacific Ocean."
- D. "They needed to pass over treacherous mountains and rivers that were unfamiliar to them."

4. Why did Sacagawea's presence in the expedition team put other tribes at ease?

- A. because she had a Canadian husband
- B. because she was a skilled hunter
- C. because she was also Native American
- D. because she did not look dangerous

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. the advantages of Native American nomadic culture
- B. the politics and history of the Louisiana Purchase
- C. how Sacagawea was taken from and eventually reunited with her tribe
- D. how Sacagawea helped Lewis and Clark during their expedition

6. Read the following sentence: "Lewis and Clark had journals filled with notes and maps, and precious samples of the plants and animals they had **encountered** in the new western territory of the United States."

As used in the passage, what does "**encountered**" most nearly mean?

- A. came across
- B. avoided
- C. attacked
- D. brought along

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Before the expedition left her tribe, Sacagawea had to decide between staying with her people and finishing the expedition; _____, she chose to continue traveling with Lewis and Clark.

- A. instead
- B. ultimately
- C. therefore
- D. above all

8. Name one of Sacagawea's roles, or jobs, during the Lewis and Clark expedition.

9. Why was it important that Sacagawea came from a nomadic tribe?

10. Would Lewis and Clark's expedition have likely been successful without the help of Sacagawea? Why or why not? Support your argument with evidence from the passage.