

Sacagawea Overview

Here is some basic information about Sacagawea that students should be introduced to before the presentation. There will be an opportunity for questions after the monologue, and it's helpful to have students prepare written questions beforehand to ask at the presentation. Spontaneous questions can also be asked.

Sacagawea was born in 1788 and grew up in the Rocky Mountains. She was Shoshone. Her tribe lived in teepees and moved around during the year to gather food and hunt buffalo. One day, when she was around twelve years old, Sacagawea's tribe was attacked by another tribe called the Hidatsa. She was captured and taken as a servant. They took her all the way back to their village far away. Life with the Hidatsa was different than with the Shoshone. The language was different, and they lived in a village and grew crops such as squash, corn, and beans instead of moving around to hunt and forage. While she was still a young teenager, the Hidatsa sold Sacagawea to a French fur trapper named Charbonneau. She soon became pregnant with her first child.

In 1804 an expedition led by Captain Lewis and Captain Clark arrived near where Sacagawea lived. They built a camp there called Fort Mandan and stayed for the winter. They had been sent by President Jefferson to explore the Louisiana Territory and lands to the west. Lewis and Clark were looking for guides to help them with their journey so they hired Charbonneau and asked him to bring Sacagawea along so she could help interpret when they reached the Shoshone who had horses they would need to carry supplies over the Rocky Mountains. In April of 1805 the expedition started up the Missouri River. Sacagawea had given birth that winter to a son named Jean Baptiste who she carried with her. He was only two months old. Sacagawea was the only woman on the expedition. The journey was very difficult with all extremes of weather, terrain and wild animals. Having Sacagawea on the trip helped keep peace with Native American tribes along the way who when they saw a woman and child with the group knew it wasn't a war party. She collected edible roots and other plants to help feed the men. She also helped rescue some important supplies when one of the boats capsized in the river. The men were impressed with her quick action. When the expedition reached the land of the Shoshone, Lewis and Clark met with the local chief to trade for horses. They brought in Sacagawea to interpret for them. Much to her surprise, the chief was her brother who she had not seen since being captured 5 years earlier. She cried with joy to see him again. The chief agreed to give horses to Lewis and Clark in exchange for trade goods. From there the expedition climbed over the Rocky Mountains then travelled downriver until finally reaching the Pacific Ocean in November of 1805. They camped near the ocean for the winter before beginning the journey home. By the time they returned to Sacagawea's Hidatsa village, she had been on the expedition for 1 1/2 years and had travelled over 4,000 miles. A few years after the expedition Sacagawea gave birth to a daughter named Lizette. Not much is known of her life after this.



Below is the basic route (in red) of the Lewis and Clark expedition, beginning from St. Louis, up the Missouri River to the Hidatsa territory where they built Fort Mandan as a winter camp. This is where they met Sacagawea and her husband Charbonneau. Then in the spring they continued up the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains where they met with the Shoshones to trade for horses. Then they crossed the Rocky Mountains, and on the other side they followed a river that took them all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

