



0. SACAGAWEA: TRIUMPHANT MISSION - Story Preface

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Edgar Samuel Paxson created a mural which is located in the lobby of Montana's House of Representatives. This image depicts detail of that mural, which is entitled *Lewis & Clark at Three Forks*. With the famous explorers is Sacagawea.

Most of the details of Sacagawea's life are shrouded in mystery. The spelling of her name, for example: Is it correctly transcribed in English as "Sacagawea" or "Sacajawea?" Did she die in childbirth, at age 25, or did she live to be an old woman? There are different versions of the story.

The *Journals* of Lewis and Clark always spell her name with a "g" which means "Bird Woman." But the woman who lived to old age, and is buried in Wyoming, spelled her name with a "j." The English translation of that name is "Boat Launcher." (It is worth noting that while Lewis and Clark were great explorers, their journals are replete with misspelled words.)

What is not a mystery is the outcome of the expedition. It was one of the most brilliant ever recorded. And Sacagawea greatly contributed to that result in August of 1805.

The teenager had been away from her family and the Shoshone tribe for many years, since the Hidatsa kidnapped her as a child. As the Corps of Discovery continued west, leaving the Mandan village where Jean Baptiste was born, they followed the Missouri River to Shoshone territory. Sacagawea would interpret for Lewis and Clark when they reached her homeland.

Getting Shoshone horses - and help to cross the beautiful, forbidding, seemingly impassable Bitterroot Mountains of Montana and Idaho - was uppermost in the leaders' minds. Lewis parlayed with the Shoshone chief, Cameahwait. As she listened to the men talk, the interpreter herself made an incredible discovery. Cameahwait, the chief, was her brother!

Nicholas Biddle, principal editor of Lewis and Clark's notes, included Sacagawea's reaction in History of the Expedition, an official record of events:

She instantly jumped up, and ran and embraced him . . . After some conversation between them she . . . attempted to interpret for us, but her new situation seemed to overpower her, and she was frequently interrupted by her tears.

Knowing that Sacagawea, a daughter of the Shoshones, was traveling with the expedition greatly affected how the tribe viewed the Corps. Not only did the Indians sell the group much-needed horses, they provided a guide to lead them across the Bitterroots.

Even so, the trip was filled with hardship. These white men, from east of the Mississippi River, were traveling across a land completely foreign to them. It has been said that white Easterners of the time knew more about the face of the moon than they knew about the interior of the American continent.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/SACAGAWEA-TRIUMPHANT-MISSION-Night-at-the-Museum>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
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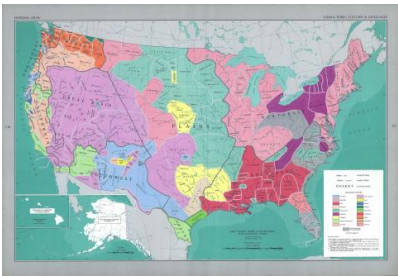
Media Stream



Missouri River - Lewis and Clark

Image online, courtesy the Missouri River Recovery Program [website](http://www.missouririverrecoveryprogram.org/).

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Native-Americans - Homeland Territory

Map online, courtesy Virtual Library.

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Bitterroot Mountains - Corps of Discovery

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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