



0. SACAJAWEA'S DISCOVERY - Story Preface

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Charles Marion Russell (1864–1926) created this wonderful artistic work (an opaque and transparent watercolor over graphite underdrawing on paper) called “Lewis and Clark on the Lower Columbia.” As depicted in this painting, Lewis and Clark could not have conducted their explorations without the help of Native Americans. Illustration online via [Humanities Texas](#) and Wikimedia Commons. Click on the image for a full-page view.

Getting Shoshone horses—and help to cross the beautiful, forbidding, seemingly impassable Bitterroot Mountains of Montana and Idaho—was critical for the Corps of Discovery to keep moving forward. These needs were uppermost in the leaders’ minds, according to their Journals, but for a long time the explorers could not locate the Shoshone.

When Lewis finally made contact with them, he knew the fate of his mission was more in their hands than in his own. As Lewis and Clark parlayed with the Shoshone chief, Cameahwait, Sacajawea interpreted. Listening to the men talk, she made an incredible discovery. Cameahwait, the chief, was her brother!

Nicholas Biddle, principal editor of Lewis and Clark's notes, included Sacajawea'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 Sacajawea, 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/SACAJAWEA-S-DISCOVERY-Sacajawea>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/SACAJAWEA-S-DISCOVERY-Sacajawea>



Bitterroot Mountains

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