

## **LEWIS AND CLARK: FACING CHALLENGES—REAL AND IMAGINED**

### **Overview:**

Everyone has “mental maps,” the internalized representation of what we know about locations and the characteristics of places. “Maps of the mind” are one way we make sense of the world, and how we store and recover information about the patterns and shapes of physical and human characteristics on Earth. We create mental maps based on what we experience, read, or hear. Before the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Europeans knew little about what lay west of the Mississippi River. The mental maps of expedition members could not prepare them for what lay ahead; nonetheless, they met and overcame numerous challenges. In this lesson, students will consider how they perceive geographic features and obstacles, and how expedition members might have done so. If possible, begin the lesson before your students see the large-format film *Lewis and Clark: Great Journey West*, and finish it after they’ve seen the movie.

### **Connections to the Curriculum:**

geography, history

### **Connections to the National Geography Standards:**

Standard 2: “How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context”

Standard 4: “The physical and human characteristics of places”

Standard 6: “How culture and experience influence people’s perceptions of places and regions”

### **Time:**

one hour, not including time to see movie

### **Materials Required:**

- Photocopies of the map “[Lewis and Clark Expedition Routes](#)”
- Internet access to, or photocopies of, the photo gallery “[Challenges of the Lewis and Clark Expedition](#)” from the large-format film *Lewis and Clark: Great Journey West*

### **Objectives:**

Students will:

- Describe and draw their perceptions of geographic features
- Consider what Lewis and Clark might have known or thought about the geography of the West before they began their journey
- Compare and contrast perceived challenges with real challenges
- Realize that perceptions can change based on experience
- Determine how to overcome obstacles

### **Geographic Skills:**

**Asking Geographic Questions**

**Acquiring Geographic Information**

**Organizing Geographic Information**

**Answering Geographic Questions**

**Analyzing Geographic Information**

## **S u g g e s t e d P r o c e d u r e**

**Opening:**

Ask students to describe the following: mountain, river, prairie, desert, ocean. Why do they picture these geographic features as they do? Have they seen these features? Read about them? Seen movies or read stories about such places? Have students draw each of these features, and briefly explain why they “see” these features as they do.

**Development:**

1. Show students the map “Lewis and Clark Expedition Routes.” Before Lewis and Clark began their journey, most of the West was unmapped, and Europeans had no idea what the West was like. Lewis and Clark’s men believed they would face challenges such as mountains and wild animals—some geographers of the time thought that the expedition might encounter volcanoes, woolly mammoths, or even the Lost Tribes of Israel. Write on the board or an overhead:

- physical features
- native groups
- wild animals

2. Below are some of the ways people thought about western North America in the early 1800s. Have students draw or map how Lewis and Clark might have pictured these things:

- A “Northwest Passage” existed—a river or series of closely connected rivers that crossed the continent all the way to the Pacific Ocean.
- Western mountains consisted of only a single ridge.
- There were mountains of pure salt, and erupting volcanoes.
- The Indians were blue-eyed people who spoke Welsh.
- Prehistoric animals such as woolly mammoths roamed the land.

3. At this point in the lesson, have students see the large-format film *Lewis and Clark: Great Journey West*. Have students pay particularly close attention to the trek through the Bitterroot Mountains, an encounter with the Teton Sioux, the herds of buffalo, and the grizzly bear encounter.

4. Students can also see photographs of obstacles Lewis and Clark actually faced in “Challenges of the Lewis and Clark Expedition” an unexpected snowstorm in the Bitterroot Mountains, a tense encounter with the Teton Sioux, an angry grizzly bear, and a thundering herd of buffalo.

5. How were students’ original ideas similar to or different from the actual encounters? Were the actual obstacles anything like Lewis and Clark might have imagined? Were they more or less dangerous than they had expected? How were Lewis and Clark able to overcome the obstacles they faced?

**Closing:**

Ask students to think about obstacles they may have faced in their own lives. Were they prepared to overcome them? How? Remind students that every experience they have helps prepare them for whatever “obstacle” may lie ahead.

**Suggested Student Assessment:**

Once Lewis and Clark reached the Pacific Ocean, were they better prepared to face unknown obstacles on the return journey? Draw mountains, rivers, and wild animals, based on what Lewis and Clark may have expected on their return journey. Explain how and why Lewis and Clark’s ideas may have changed.

**Extending the Lesson:**

Consider geographic obstacles students may face in getting from home to school, or from school to a park. How can these be overcome?

Do students think Lewis and Clark were adequately prepared to meet the challenges they faced? Were encounters with the land and animals “obstacles”? Were encounters with Native Americans “challenges”? Why or why not?

**Related Links:**

[Lewis and Clark: Great Journey West](#)  
[Public Broadcasting System](#)