

## **LEWIS AND CLARK: “THE OBJECT OF THIS MISSION IS...”**

### **Overview:**

When Lewis and Clark began their expedition across North America, other countries were interested in the same land. What claims did other countries have on the land? In this lesson, students will be pitted against each other for the best “land” and “resources” in the classroom as a way to introduce issues involved in vying for land. They’ll learn about the mission of the expedition and why the expedition was so important to Thomas Jefferson, then cap off the lesson by writing a “mission” statement. Conduct this lesson before students see the large-format film *Lewis and Clark: Great Journey*.

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

geography, language arts, history

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

Standard 13: “How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth’s surface”

Standard 16: “The changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources”

Standard 17: “How to apply geography to interpret the past”

### **Time:**

one hour

### **Materials Required:**

- Printout of the map “[Lewis and Clark Expedition Routes and Control of Lands](#)”
- Printout of “[Jefferson’s Instructions to Lewis](#)” (Excerpts)

### **Objectives:**

Students will:

- Simulate how groups compete for resources
- Identify the mission of the Lewis and Clark expedition and its importance to the country’s future

### **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:**

As students enter the classroom, hand them (or tell them) the number that corresponds to the order in which they arrive, then have them “stake their claim” by picking the “best” place (“territory”) to sit. The person who ‘gets there first’ often gains benefits!

Thomas Jefferson was convinced that “getting there first” was essential, one reason that he commissioned the Lewis and Clark expedition. He believed the future of the young country lay in the West, and knew that other countries had claims on western lands. Have students

discuss what they know about the mission of the expedition, and why it was important to Jefferson.

**Development:**

1. Have students examine the map “Lewis and Clark Expedition Routes and Control of Lands.”

Ask students:

- What do you think Jefferson knew about western lands? (If you want to show students early maps of North America, you can find maps at the links below.)
- What area do you think Jefferson knew the least about? Why?
- Who, if anyone, had more or different information about those areas?
- What other countries had interests in North America? What land had they claimed?
- Why was it important for Jefferson to learn about this land?

Have students create a list of eight to ten things Jefferson might have wanted Lewis and Clark to accomplish.

2. Give students printouts of “Jefferson’s Instructions to Lewis” (Excerpts). (You can use the links below to find a transcription or a copy of the entire letter.) Have students compare their list to Jefferson’s instructions. On their list, have students highlight (or place a star next to) items that match Jefferson’s instructions. Then have them add Jefferson’s additional requests to their list.

3. Have students write a concise “mission” statement or a slogan. They can brainstorm by asking questions: Why was a journey through uncharted territory so important? Why were Lewis and Clark willing to undertake the mission? Why did they never give up, even when they were exhausted, freezing, or near starvation?

**Closing:**

Ask each student to comment on any of the following:

- Jefferson’s instructions to Lewis
- The tasks of the expedition
- Perspectives of other countries
- The geography of the land the expedition explored

**Suggested Student Assessment:**

Set up this scenario: You’re Meriwether Lewis, and you’re about to begin your journey into uncharted land. Write a letter to your mother that describes what President Jefferson has asked you to do. Explain why Americans must “get there first” and how the observations and “discoveries” you make will impact the future of the country.

**Extending the Lesson:**

- Have students write a letter from President Jefferson to Congress asking for \$2,500—the amount Jefferson requested—to fund the expedition. The letter must convince Congress of the importance of the mission to the U.S.
- Have students complete an “Application for Employment” to participate in the Lewis and Clark expedition. They should include special qualifications that would make them suitable for the mission.
- How might other countries with claims to western land have perceived the Lewis and Clark expedition? From the perspective of a leader of another country, write a letter to President Jefferson that explains why and how you think the expedition may impact your country and your people.

(credits) —“Jefferson’s Instructions to Lewis” from “Education Volunteer Notebook,” Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, USDA, Forest Service, 2000-2001. Full text of letter found in Donald Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783–1854* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1978) pp. 61–66.

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