

Lewis & Clark | Lesson Plan

What qualities made Lewis and Clark successful explorers, and how can these qualities inspire us today?

Students will understand the enduring impact of the Lewis and Clark expedition on American history, geography, and cultural development.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify and explain the who, what, where, when, and why of the Lewis and Clark expedition and its historical context.
- Analyze the challenges and opportunities faced by Lewis, Clark, and their team, and how these experiences reflect the broader story of exploration and westward expansion.
- Summarize key ideas and details from the text about the expedition's journey, discoveries, and significant encounters.
- Examine how the expedition contributed to cultural diplomacy with Native American tribes and expanded scientific and geographical knowledge.
- Reflect on why learning about Lewis and Clark's contributions is relevant today and how their legacy continues to inspire exploration and innovation.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Corps of Discovery:** A group led by Lewis and Clark to explore the Louisiana Territory (1804–1806).
- **Louisiana Purchase:** The 1803 U.S. acquisition of land from France, doubling the nation's size.
- **Continental Divide:** A ridge in the Rocky Mountains that separates river systems flowing to opposite oceans.
- **Diplomacy:** The practice of managing relationships and negotiations between groups or nations.
- **Sacagawea:** A Shoshone woman who guided and interpreted for Lewis and Clark during their expedition.
- **Keelboat:** A flat-bottomed boat used for transporting supplies, especially on rivers.
- **Westward Expansion:** The 19th-century movement of settlers into the western United States to claim land and resources.

Educational Standards: CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.2, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.R.10, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.7, CCRA.W.8, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.SL.4, CCRA.SL.5, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.6

Academic Subject Areas: Language Arts, History, Westward Expansion

What You'll Need

- PragerU Kids *Trailblazers of America: Lewis & Clark* (Download [Here](#))
- Worksheets: *Trailblazers of America: Lewis & Clark* (Click [Here](#))
- Optional: Purchase the book from Amazon (Click [Here](#))
- One index card per student for Exit Ticket



Pre-Lesson Preparation: Reading the Book

For Teachers:

1. Teachers should assign the entire *Trailblazers: Lewis & Clark* book as a pre-reading activity.
 - Depending on the schedule and grade level, this can be done as an in-class activity or as a take-home assignment.
 - Use this pre-reading time to introduce students to the themes of exploration, perseverance, teamwork, and Lewis & Clark's contributions to westward expansion and American history. An Introduction for Pre-Reading is included below.
 - Optional Pre-Reading Activities:
 - Vocabulary Preview: Introduce the key vocabulary terms (e.g., expedition, Corps of Discovery, Louisiana Purchase, diplomacy, and cartography) using visual aids or an interactive activity like matching terms to their definitions. Discuss how these terms set the stage for understanding Lewis and Clark's story and their pivotal role in exploring the American West.
 - Anticipation Guide: Provide students with a list of thought-provoking statements to agree/disagree with before reading, such as:
 - *Lewis and Clark's journey was just as legendary as it was real.*
 - *Exploring uncharted territory required teamwork and bravery.*
 - *The Louisiana Purchase was essential to America's westward expansion.*

For Students:

1. As they read the *Trailblazers: Lewis & Clark* book, encourage students to:
 - Highlight or underline key events, challenges, and achievements in Lewis and Clark's lives.
 - Note surprising facts or write down any questions they have about Lewis and Clark's journey.
2. Optional Student Task:
 - Ask students to jot down a list of personal qualities they think an explorer or pioneer like Meriwether Lewis and William Clark would need to succeed. This will help them connect Lewis and Clark's story to broader values like perseverance and innovation.

Introduction for Pre-Reading (10 minutes)

1. Introduce Lewis and Clark:

- Share the following key points about Lewis and Clark:
 - Meriwether Lewis was born on **August 18, 1774**, in Virginia, and William Clark was born on **August 1, 1770**, in Virginia. Together, they became famous as the leaders of the **Corps of Discovery**, a legendary expedition to explore the Louisiana Purchase and map the western territories of the United States.
 - Their expedition, which lasted from **1804 to 1806**, helped chart uncharted lands, establish trade and diplomatic relationships with Native American tribes, and document plants, animals, and geography in the region.

- Their journey was commissioned by **President Thomas Jefferson** after the Louisiana Purchase in **1803**, a monumental land acquisition that doubled the size of the United States.
- Their lives and accomplishments spanned key historical events, including
 - American Revolution
 - Louisiana Purchase
 - Westward Expansion (Early 1800s)
 - Native American Relations in the Early 19th Century
 - Scientific Exploration and Cartography
- Ask students the following questions:
 - *What do you already know about Lewis and Clark and their expedition?*
 - *Why do you think exploring and mapping uncharted territory was so important in the early 1800s?*
 - *What kind of qualities or skills do you think it took for Lewis and Clark to lead an expedition through unknown lands for over two years?*

2. Explore the Geography of Lewis & Clark's Time:

- Display the "America in the Time of Lewis & Clark" (pages 10-11 in the book).
 - Highlight the route that Lewis and Clark traveled, beginning with St. Louis, Missouri, and following the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean and back.
 - Use the map to trace the major landmarks along their journey, such as the Missouri River, the Rocky Mountains, and the Columbia River.
 - Note the locations where the Corps of Discovery set up winter camps, such as Fort Mandan (in present-day North Dakota) and Fort Clatsop (near the Pacific Coast).
 - Discuss the challenges of traveling in Lewis and Clark's time through regions that included:
 - Rugged terrain
 - Wildlife
 - Interactions with Native American tribes
 - Rapid rivers
 - Extreme weather conditions
- Ask students:
 - *What do you think motivated Lewis and Clark to lead an expedition into unknown territory?*
 - *What risks do you think they and their team faced on their journey?*
- Brainstorm as a class:
 - List possible motivations for exploring the frontier on the board (e.g., mapping uncharted territory, establishing trade routes, documenting new plants and animals, etc.).

3. Conclude with the Context of Lewis and Clark's life during the Westward Expansion:

- Explain:
 - During Lewis and Clark's lifetime, westward expansion was gaining momentum, fueled by the **Louisiana Purchase (1803)**, which doubled the size of the United States.
 - Their expedition through the western territories opened the door for future settlement by mapping routes, establishing relationships with Native American tribes, and documenting plants, animals, and geography.

- Lewis and Clark’s journey symbolized the spirit of westward expansion: perseverance, teamwork, and a commitment to discovery.
- Reading Focus:
 - Encourage students to think about this question as they read: What qualities do you think Lewis and Clark needed to succeed as explorers and leaders during their journey into uncharted lands?

Post-Reading Lesson Plan (one 60-minute class period)

Warm-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Re-engage students with the subject matter and transition into the post-reading analysis with a Rapid Recall and Connect Activity:
 - Prompt: Ask students to write down or share aloud:
 - One thing they remember about Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.
 - One challenge each of them faced.
 - One reason why these men are remembered in American history.
2. Interactive Brainstorm:
 - Write students’ responses on the board under three headings: Key Events, Challenges, and Legacy.
 - Encourage students to build on each other’s ideas.
3. Transition:
 - Explain that the day’s lesson will dig deeper into Lewis and Clark’s lives by organizing key information using two graphic organizers.

5 Ws Chart: (15-20 minutes)

1. Hand out the 5 Ws graphic organizer to each student. Explain that the purpose of this activity is to analyze the key elements of Lewis & Clark’s life and accomplishments by answering the five key questions.
2. This activity is designed to build a strong foundation of knowledge about Lewis and Clark’s expedition, which students will use later to analyze their contributions and legacy in more depth.
3. Go over each section of the 5 Ws Chart to ensure students understand what is expected. Provide examples to guide their thinking:
 - **Who:** Identify who the book is about, including those who played significant roles in the expedition.
 - Examples: *Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, explorers, cartographers, diplomats, leaders of the Corps of Discovery, and Sacagawea, a Shoshone woman, guide and interpreter.*
 - **What:** Describe what Lewis and Clark accomplished during their expedition.
 - Examples: *Mapped the western territories, established trade and diplomatic relations with Native American tribes, documented plants and animals, found routes for future settlers, and reached the Pacific Ocean.*
 - **Where:** Identify the places where Lewis and Clark traveled, explored, or camped.
 - Examples: *St. Louis (starting point), Missouri River, Rocky Mountains, Columbia River, Pacific Coast, Fort Mandan, Fort Clatsop.*
 - **When:** Record the time periods and important events in Lewis and Clark’s journey.
 - Examples: *1770 (Clark’s birth), 1774 (Lewis’s birth), 1803 (Louisiana Purchase), 1804–1806 (expedition of the Corps of Discovery).*

- **Why:** Explore Lewis and Clark's motivations and reasoning behind their expedition.
 - Examples: *Desire to explore and map new territories, establish trade and diplomatic relations, study the natural world, open the West to settlers, and fulfill Thomas Jefferson's vision for westward expansion.*
- 4. Model Expectations:
 - Choose one or two sections to model for students. For instance:
 - Who: Write "Lewis and Clark - Pioneers, Cartographers, Diplomats." Ask students to come up with other people, such as Sacagawea, if they'd like, and other roles that Lewis and Clark may have had.
 - What: Write: "*Mapped the western territories.*" Ask students to come up with other accomplishments he made from the book.
- 5. Guide Student Work:
 - Encourage students to use evidence from the book, class discussions, and notes to complete their chart.
 - Allow students to work in small groups or pairs, brainstorming together before filling out their charts.
 - Circulate the room, answer questions, and offer prompts.
- 6. Class Discussion and Sharing:
 - After students complete their charts, facilitate a class discussion to share their findings.
 - Create a master chart on the board, asking students to contribute ideas for each section.

Pioneer Legacy Profile: (15-20 minutes)

1. Hand out the Pioneer Legacy Profile graphic organizer to each student. Explain that the purpose of this activity is to understand Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's contributions to westward expansion and their relevance to American history.
2. Define and explain the three sections of the organizer to ensure students clearly understand what is expected. Provide examples to guide their thinking:
 - **Values & Traits:** Students should identify the personal qualities and values that enabled Lewis and Clark to succeed as leaders and explorers. Encourage them to consider how these traits helped them overcome challenges and accomplish their mission.
 - Examples: *Perseverance, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, courage.*
 - **Impact on History:** Students will evaluate the long-term significance of Lewis and Clark's expedition and how their actions influenced the development of the United States. Encourage students to think beyond *what they did* and focus on *why their accomplishments mattered* in shaping history and westward expansion.
 - Examples: *Opened the West for settlement by creating detailed maps that guided future pioneers.*
 - *Set a precedent for scientific exploration and discovery in America.*
 - *Established early relationships with Native American tribes, showing the importance of diplomacy.*
 - *Helped define the U.S. as a nation willing to explore, expand, and innovate.*
 - **Lessons for Today:** Students will reflect on the relevance of Lewis and Clark's story in the modern world. This section encourages students to consider what we can learn from their experiences and how their legacy continues to inspire exploration, teamwork, and discovery.

- Examples: *Lessons in perseverance, collaboration, leadership, dedication to achieving a shared goal, and the value of curiosity in advancing knowledge and understanding new frontiers.*
3. Model Expectations:
 - Use one example for each category to demonstrate how to fill out the organizer effectively. For instance, under "Values & Traits," write "*Perseverance*," explaining that Lewis and Clark endured challenges such as navigating the Missouri River, crossing the Rocky Mountains, and surviving harsh weather conditions, all while leading their team to success.
 4. Guide Student Work:
 - Encourage students to use evidence from their reading, class discussions, and notes. Allow them to brainstorm individually, in pairs, or in small groups before completing the organizer independently.
 5. Class Discussion and Sharing:
 - After students complete the organizer, facilitate a class discussion where they share their responses. Write key ideas on the board for each category to reinforce understanding and encourage collaboration.

Wrap-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Begin wrapping up the lesson by posing the following reflective questions to the class. Encourage students to share their thoughts and connect their answers to what they wrote in their Pioneer Legacy Profile organizer:
 - *Why do you think Lewis and Clark are still remembered today?*
 - *What do Lewis and Clark's actions teach us about perseverance and teamwork?*
 - *How might the United States' westward expansion have been different without Lewis and Clark's maps, scientific discoveries, and diplomacy with Native American tribes?*
 - *What values from Lewis and Clark's life—like courage, curiosity, or leadership—do you think are still important in today's world?*
2. Reflection Exit Ticket: Distribute an index card or have students complete a short journal entry answering one of the following prompts:
 - *What is one thing about Lewis and Clark's legacy that is most important for people to remember, and why?*
 - *How does learning about Lewis and Clark help you better understand the challenges and triumphs of settlers on the American frontier?*
 - *If you were inspired by Lewis and Clark's story, what actions or values would you embrace to make a difference in the world?*
3. Wrap up the discussion by connecting Lewis and Clark's legacy to larger themes such as perseverance, teamwork, and exploration. Highlight how these values not only shaped the American frontier but also continue to inspire collaboration, curiosity, and innovation in today's world.
 - Example Closing Statement: Lewis and Clark's journey shows us that making a difference doesn't require certainty or ease—it takes perseverance, teamwork, and dedication to a shared goal. Their expedition opened new frontiers, fostered diplomatic relationships with Native American tribes, and inspired scientific exploration. Their legacy reminds us of the power of collaboration and curiosity to overcome challenges, discover the unknown, and shape a better future.

Enrichment Activity Options

These activities are designed to extend learning by exploring the natural and technological aspects of Lewis and Clark's time using the "Field Guide to Plains & Missouri River Animals and Plants" and "Field Guide to Plains & Missouri River Weaponry & Technology" sections of the book. Teachers can use these options to encourage creativity, critical thinking, and hands-on exploration of Lewis and Clark's world.

1. A Field Guide to Plains & Missouri River Animals and Plants:

- **Animal Research and Presentation:**
 - Assign each student or group an animal from the guide (e.g., Bighorn Sheep, Prairie Dog, American Bison, Jackrabbit).
 - Students create a visual presentation that includes the animal's habitat, diet, and significance to the Plains & Missouri River ecosystem. They should:
 - Sketch the animal.
 - Note its behavior, diet, and habitat.
- **Plant Identification Hike:**
 - Take students on a nature walk to observe and identify plants, emulating Lewis and Clark's cataloging efforts. Use guides or resources featuring plants mentioned in the book, like **bur oak**, **Indian hemp**, or **shortgrass**. If these specific plants aren't available in your area, provide images or pressed plant samples for comparison.
 - Sketch and describe the plant's features (e.g., leaves, flowers).
 - Students can press the plants into a book or on a page.
 - Encourage students to sketch the plants they observe, note their physical characteristics, and hypothesize how the plants might have been used for survival, trade, or scientific study during the expedition.
- **Native Plants and Animals Diorama:**
 - Students build a small diorama of the Great Plains with labeled plants and animals from that region. Students can use craft supplies like clay, paper, and paint to create a realistic representation of the region, emphasizing the challenges and adaptations of life on the Great Plains.

2. A Field Guide to Plains & Missouri River Weaponry & Technology

- **Dugout Canoe Mini-Challenge:**
 - Have students simulate hollowing out a canoe by "carving" a bar of soap or a block of clay. Encourage them to think about the effort and tools needed, like fire and scraping.
 - Compare the challenges Lewis and Clark faced in making canoes to modern engineering techniques.
- **Star Navigation Exploration:**
 - Introduce basic star navigation techniques and how Lewis and Clark used celestial tools to find their way. Provide a star chart and have students "plot" their course on a map.
- **Bow and Arrow STEM Exploration:**
 - Students design and test a miniature bow and arrow using simple materials like craft sticks, string, and straws. They experiment with variables such as string tension, bow length, and arrow weight to determine how these factors affect the arrow's distance and accuracy.

- Have students measure and record the distance traveled by their arrows under different conditions. Encourage them to hypothesize which design elements (e.g., tighter string tension or lighter arrows) optimize performance for long-distance or precision shooting.
- 3. **Cross-Sectional Project: Map Your Neighborhood Expedition.** Combine both field guides into a larger project:
 - **Expedition:**
 - Send students on a "mini-expedition" to map a familiar area (e.g., school grounds, a park, or their neighborhood). Include:
 - Compass directions
 - Landmarks
 - Scale drawings of key features
 - **Expedition Supplies Packing List:**
 - Ask students to create their own "expedition packing list," considering modern tools and supplies they'd need to survive and explore for two years. Have them justify their choices based on the challenges faced by Lewis and Clark, such as harsh weather, wildlife, and river travel.