

Bird Woman's River: Sacagawea's Diligence in a Historic Journey

- **Compelling Question**
 - How can you be diligent in situations where the odds may seem to be against you?
- **Virtue:** Diligence
- **Definition** – Diligence is intrinsic energy for completing good work.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, students will understand the diligent behavior of Sacagawea throughout her journey with the Lewis and Clark expedition through discussion and writing a journal prompt about her decision to save their supplies in an icy river. They will also think about ways in which they can be diligent in their own lives and write a narrative about a real or fictional experience in which they show diligence.
- **Objectives**
 - Students will analyze Sacagawea's identity, purpose, and performance during the Lewis and Clark expedition.
 - Students will understand and appreciate Sacagawea's diligent behavior.
 - Students will apply the knowledge about diligence to their own lives.
- **Background**
 - Sacagawea was the daughter of a Shoshone chief born around 1788 in what is now Idaho. She was captured by an enemy tribe when she was about 12 years and then was sold to a French-Canadian trapper named Toussaint Charbonneau. She later married Charbonneau and was carrying his child when the Lewis and Clark Expedition made its way to their home in what is now North Dakota. Lewis and Clark hired Charbonneau and Sacagawea to accompany them on their trek and act as interpreters. Sacagawea died at the young age of twenty-five after giving birth to her second child. Soon after her death, William Clark adopted both of her children.
- **Vocabulary**
 - Lemhi Shoshone
 - Flora
 - Fauna
 - Specimen
 - Seasoned
 - Pirogue
 - Instinctively
 - Salvaged
 - Terrain
- **Introduce Text**
 - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the "Walk-In-The-Shoes" question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.
- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
 - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?
- **Observation Questions**
 - Explain how Sacagawea's identity changed from the time she started on the trek with the Corps of Discovery to the end of the expedition.
 - What was Sacagawea's purpose on the expedition?
 - What diligent behavior did Sacagawea display during her time with Lewis and Clark?

- **Discussion Questions**

- Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?

- **Additional Resources**

- Ambrose, Stephen E. *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- DeVoto, Bernard. *Journals of Lewis and Clark*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1953.
- Hunsaker, Joyce Badgly. *Sacagawea Speaks: Beyond the Shining Mountains with Lewis and Clark*. Guilford, CT: Falcon Publishing, 2001.
- "Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Core of Discovery." Directed by Ken Burns. PBS, 1997. <http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/>
- "Sacagawea: Reunited & Saved." *Bio*. A&E Television Networks, 2015. <http://www.biography.com/people/sacagawea-9468731>

Handout A: Bird Woman's River: Sacagawea's Diligence in a Historic Journey

Background

Sacagawea was the daughter of a Shoshone chief born around 1788 in what is now Idaho. She was captured by an enemy tribe when she was about 12 years and then was sold to a French-Canadian trapper named Toussaint Charbonneau. She later married Charbonneau and was carrying his child when the Lewis and Clark Expedition made its way to their home in what is now North Dakota. Lewis and Clark hired Charbonneau and Sacagawea to accompany them on their trek and act as interpreters. Sacagawea died at the young age of twenty-five after giving birth to her second child. Soon after her death, William Clark adopted both of her children.

Narrative

Sacagawea was in the middle of her journey with the Lewis and Clark expedition in which she acted as an interpreter and helped navigate through the wilderness. Her infant son, born three months earlier, was active, alert, and growing. His given name was Jean Baptiste, but her companions nicknamed him "Pompy." Carrying him on her back every day, she talked to him about most everything they saw...and together, they saw a great deal. As she noticed birds and small animals—clues to what plants she may find in an area—she pointed them out, described them aloud, and told him their names. When she foraged for edible and medicinal plants, she did the same. As they walked through forests, climbed hills, and rowed along rivers, he was her captive audience.

She was a Lemhi Shoshone woman called Sacagawea, and married to a member of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery—a Frenchman named Charbonneau. Born and raised in the territory they were exploring, she knew the terrain and the weather that awaited them and was undaunted by the unknowns that lay ahead.

The Corps' journey was the first American expedition into the uncharted western frontier. They were exploring territory unknown to previous citizens of the young United States. Its purpose was scientific, political, and grand: to discover the route to the Pacific Ocean and to faithfully and accurately record their observations about the terrain, the flora, the fauna, the people they encountered along the way—and to establish friendly relations with those native nations. As they traveled, they sent journals and specimens, both living and dead, back to President Jefferson so that, should they not survive, the president and the young republic could still learn about the western territory extending to the Pacific. Sacagawea became a valuable member of the group, identifying edible and medicinal plants, recognizing geographic landmarks, and on at least one vital occasion, serving as translator.

By the late spring of 1805, a full year into their journey, these rugged travelers may have been the most seasoned adventurers the world had ever known. Sacagawea and the others had encountered creatures they had never before imagined, some curious and some terrifying. She helped explore terrain that was both beautiful and intimidating and trekked beneath sunlight-stream forest canopies and survived a long winter in Dakota Territory. Still, what they encountered on May 14, 1805 nearly devastated the expedition. If not for Sacagawea's diligence in the wilderness, the group may have faced disaster.

The morning of Tuesday, May 14 was clear and pleasant, but cold and with a hard, white frost. Some of the men's moccasins, placed near the fire the night before, had frozen overnight. The thermometer showed 32 degrees above zero. A wind blew from the southwest. An icy fog hung over the river, a rare occurrence.

The group was traveling that icy river and set out on it to continue their journey, Sacagawea and her husband Charbonneau were in the pirogue (a type of large rowboat with sails) that carried the all-important scientific equipment, journals, books (including a particularly valuable botany reference book), bullets, and medicine.

Sacagawea was observant, and likely noted a slight change in the sky to the west, and the steady pace at which it moved in their direction. She may have seen the tails of animals as they scurried for shelter. Instinctively, perhaps not even consciously, she began mental preparations for what would happen, and at what spot on the river they might be, when that wind from the west reached her group. In the early evening a breeze picked up, and the men on Sacagawea's boat lifted a sail to catch it.

Then the wind suddenly picked up. With its sail up, Charbonneau's boat tipped. All the equipment and books began to wash overboard, into the choppy river. While most panicked, Sacagawea remained calm. Clark described the sequence of events:

"A squall of wind struck our sail broadside and turned the pirogue nearly over, and in this situation the pirogue remained until the sail was cut down, in which time she nearly filled with water—the articles

which floated out was nearly all caught by the squaw who was in the rear. This accident had like to have cost us dearly; for in this pirogue were embarked our papers, instruments, books, medicine, a great proportion of our merchandise, and in short almost every article indispensably necessary to further the views, or insure the success of the enterprise, in which, we are now launched to the distance of 2,200 miles."

The medicine and the lead bullets sank to the bottom of the river. The team managed to dredge up some of them. The medicines could not be recovered. But Sacagawea diligently fought to salvage the cargo most critical to the expedition by jumping into the icy river. Because of her actions the scientific equipment, the journals, and Lewis's revered botany reference book were recovered. The losses were significant and could have been devastating. And while the sudden turn of events seemed to have surprised the others, it seems not to have surprised Sacagawea. She had encountered more difficulty, and developed her a quick thinking and calm responses, during her childhood in what is now Idaho and North Dakota. Because of her quick thinking, her attentiveness to the details of the sky and weather, and her willingness to literally dive in to icy water to save the supplies, all was not lost. In doing so, Sacagawea effectively saved the expedition.

"Nearly all caught by the squaw who was in the rear. This accident had like to have cost us dearly; for in this pirogue were embarked our papers, instruments, books, medicine, a great proportion of our merchandise, and in short almost every article indispensably necessary to further the views, or insure the success of the enterprise, in which, we are now launched

Through most of her time with the Corps, Sacagawea was also the mother of an infant. As she trekked the difficult terrain, helped to navigate unfamiliar territory, and even rescued the expedition from failure, she was carrying her young son on her back. Even with that additional responsibility, her contributions—the result of her commitment and diligence—were vital to the success of that historic expedition.

Lewis wrote that "Sacagawea was as brave as anyone on the expedition." Grateful for her quick thinking and diligent rescue efforts, he and Clark named one of the Missouri River tributaries "Sacajawea."

"A handsome river of about 50 yards in width discharged itself. This... we called 'Sacagawea,' or 'Bird Woman's River,' after our interpreter, the Shoshone woman."