

## **LEWIS AND CLARK: OVERCOMING OBSTACLES**

### **Overview:**

To better understand challenges the Lewis and Clark Expedition faced, students will review three obstacles the expedition encountered, focusing on how geographic information can influence a decision. Students will work cooperatively to make a decision, and experience the difficulty of weighing options, assessing risks, and learning different consequences of choices. This lesson can be conducted whether or not students see the large-format film *Lewis and Clark: Great Journey West*. If the movie is part of the lesson, begin the lesson before students see the movie and finish it afterwards.

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

geography, history

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

Standard 4: "The physical and human characteristics of places"

Standard 15: "How physical systems affect human systems"

Standard 17: "How to apply geography to interpret the past"

### **Time:**

one hour

### **Materials Required:**

- Photocopies of the five-page student handout "Obstacles and Decisions" ([Download a free copy of Adobe Acrobat Reader to view this file.](#))
- Photocopies of the map "Lewis and Clark Expedition Westward Route, Native Americans, and Forts"
- Envelopes (at least 10)

### **Objectives:**

Students will:

- Use geography to evaluate the options and risks of a crucial decision on the expedition's journey
- Describe how the decisions made affected the outcome of the expedition

### **Geographic Skills:**

**Asking Geographic Questions**  
**Acquiring Geographic Information**  
**Organizing Geographic Information**  
**Answering Geographic Questions**  
**Analyzing Geographic Information**

## **Suggested Procedure**

### **Opening:**

Ask students to think of a problem or obstacle they have had to overcome that required perseverance, courage, and thoughtful consideration of the possible consequences. What did they want or need to know to solve the problem?

### **Development:**

1. Briefly review where the expedition was going, and why. Explain that Lewis and Clark faced many obstacles on their journey that related to the geography of the land. Based on very few facts, the expedition had to make critical choices that would influence not only whether or not they succeeded, but whether they lived or died! How would students feel if they had to make a life-or-death decision? Students are going to examine three decisions that the expedition faced—and just for today, the course the expedition takes will be in *their* hands.

2. Briefly discuss the three decisions. (Optional: Make an overhead transparency of the list below.) Discuss the geographic aspects of each place, which you can locate on the map "[Lewis and Clark Expedition Westward Route, Native Americans, and Forts](#)". **Important: Do not** show students this map, or any map of the expedition's route, before they make their decisions—because a map will reveal the answers!

A Fork in the River: Which Way is the Missouri?

- Lewis and Clark reach an unexpected fork in the Missouri River.
- Which branch should they take?

Winter Camp: Location, Location, Location . . .

- The expedition has reached the Pacific Ocean and must build winter quarters.
- Should they build a fort at one of two sites closer to the Pacific Ocean, or further inland?

3. Divide the class into four groups. Give two groups the "Fork in the River" scenario and two groups the "Winter Camp" scenario (the first two pages of the five-page handout "[Obstacles and Decisions](#)." Each group should examine the choices, then review the facts, add other relevant factors, and determine what is at stake. Groups should list any other factors that may influence the decision (center column), and list the pros and cons of the choices (right-hand column). Finally, the group must vote: How will the expedition proceed?

4A. Students should see the large-format film [Lewis and Clark: Great Journey West](#) at this point in the lesson. Have students pay close attention to the decision points and record the outcomes. After the movie, have the groups compare their decisions to the ones the expedition made. Were they the same? If not, how might the expedition have turned out if the group had followed students' recommendations?

4B. If students will not be seeing [Lewis and Clark: Great Journey West](#) reveal the decisions the expedition made by using the "Decisions and Consequences" cards (the last three pages of the "[Obstacles and Decisions](#)" handout).

Before you conduct the lesson, prepare two envelopes for each "Fork in the River" group and three envelopes for each "Winter Camp" group.

- Photocopy the five "decision" cards—two for "Fork in the River," three for "Winter Camp." Cut out the cards.
- On the outside of an envelope, write a decision "headline" (e.g., "Take the Left Fork"). Write the other decision headlines (e.g., "Take the Right Fork") on other envelopes.
- Put all the decision cards in the corresponding envelopes (e.g., "Take the Left Fork" decision card in the envelope labeled "Take the Left Fork," and so on).

5. Give each group the envelopes that correspond to the decision they made. Have each group open the envelope with "their" decision. Give the groups a minute or two to reflect on the consequences. (Students can open the other envelopes.) How did each group's choice compare to the choices that were actually made? How did students go about the decision-making process? How did geography factor in their deliberations?

6. Give students copies of the map "[Lewis and Clark Expedition Westward Route, Native Americans, and Forts.](#)" Have them locate where the decisions took place. Would their decision have been easier if they could have referred to a map? ("A Fork in the River" occurred where the Marias River flows into the Missouri River, just east of the Great Falls. "Winter Camp" took place at Fort Clatsop, number 10 on the map.)

**Closing:**

As co-captains, Lewis and Clark determined the course of the expedition. They were two very different men, who nonetheless seemed to command as one. There is no record the two friends ever argued or disagreed on an important decision. How did working in a group affect the decision-making process?

(Note: Lewis and Clark let all members of the expedition vote on where to site their camp during the winter they spent near the Pacific Ocean. This was believed to be the first time in recorded U.S. history that a slave (York, Clark's slave) or woman (Sacagawea, a Shoshone Indian) was allowed to vote.)

**Suggested Student Assessment:**

Have students think about the physical characteristics of the geographic obstacles that challenged Lewis and Clark. Students should assume the role of a member of the expedition and write a journal entry from that person's point of view. Students should describe the situation, the information the captions had, and how Lewis and Clark's geographic knowledge influenced their decisions.

**Extending the Lesson:**

Have students review other challenges faced by Lewis and Clark, including encounters with Native American tribes. What knowledge did Lewis and Clark need when they met or negotiated with Indians? How did they make their decisions? What were the consequences of their choices?

—Lesson adapted from an educational activity by the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, USDA, Forest Service.

**Related Links:**

[Lewis and Clark Education Center](#)  
[Montana Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Site](#)  
[Public Broadcasting System](#)