

Sacagawea

Sacagawea was a Shoshone Indian woman who helped guide explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in their expedition to the Pacific Northwest from 1804 until 1806.

Some of the facts about Sacagawea's life are uncertain, but historians believe she was born about 1786 in what is now the state of Idaho. When she was a pre-teen, she was captured by a band of Hidatsa Indians who lived in western North Dakota. The Hidatsas sold Sacagawea into slavery to the Mandan tribe, which lived in villages along the Missouri River in south-central North Dakota. The Mandans in turn sold Sacagawea to a French-Canadian fur trader named Touissant Charbonneau. He married the young Indian woman.

Lewis and Clark decided to hire Charbonneau as a guide because he had trapped extensively in the area. Lewis and Clark asked Charbonneau to bring Sacagawea and the couple's baby son, Jean Baptiste, along on the trip. The explorers thought Sacagawea would be invaluable as a translator and negotiator with Indian tribes along the way. Also, they believed the presence of an Indian woman and baby would signal to tribes they met that the expedition had a peaceful purpose.

Clark's journals of the trip mention Sacagawea's many contributions. She knew the mountain passes and terrain in the area. That knowledge saved the explorers time as they made the trip west. Sacagawea negotiated with Indian tribes along the way to keep the expedition supplied with fresh horses, food, and other provisions. When their foodstuffs ran low, she showed them how to prepare native plants' berries and nuts to supplement the rations they carried with them.

After Lewis and Clark returned to St. Louis in 1806, the story of what happened to Sacagawea becomes a bit cloudy. She left Charbonneau and spent some time in St. Louis. Some accounts say she died at age 25 from a serious illness she had

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suffered from for most of her adult life. But Native American accounts tell a different story. They say she married several more times and had several more children. One story has her reuniting with her son in Wyoming, becoming influential in the Shoshone culture, and living to the ripe old age of 96.

- How difficult do you think it was for Sacagawea to integrate herself with the various groups with which she lived?

- As the only woman to accompany the Lewis and Clark expedition, what things do you think Sacagawea did to make herself feel less conspicuous?

- The endeavors of Lewis and Clark were invaluable in settling the West. Think of another expedition that was of such significance and describe it.