Sacagawea

A Reading A–Z Level Y Leveled Book
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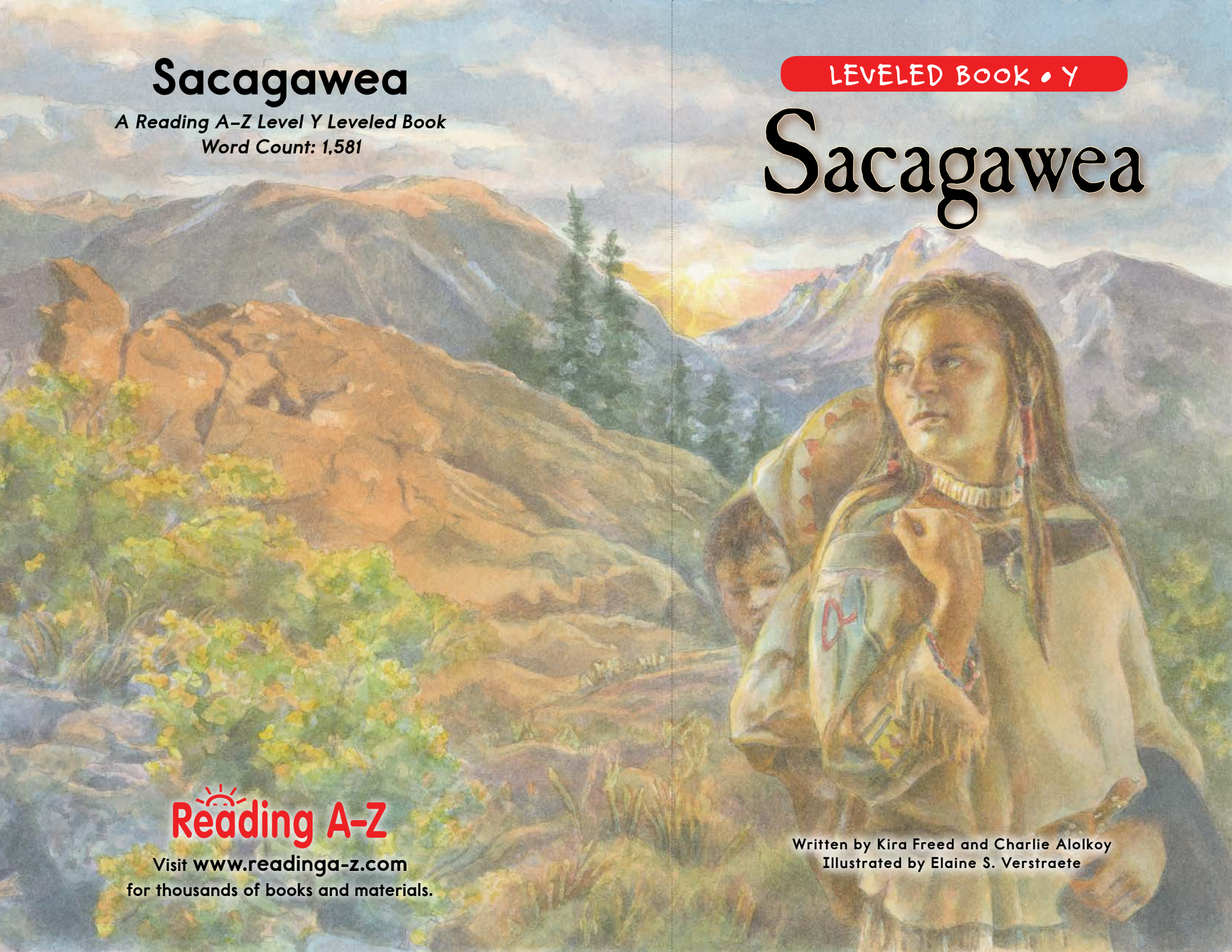

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Sacagawea

Written by Kira Freed and Charlie Alolkoy
Illustrated by Elaine S. Verstraete

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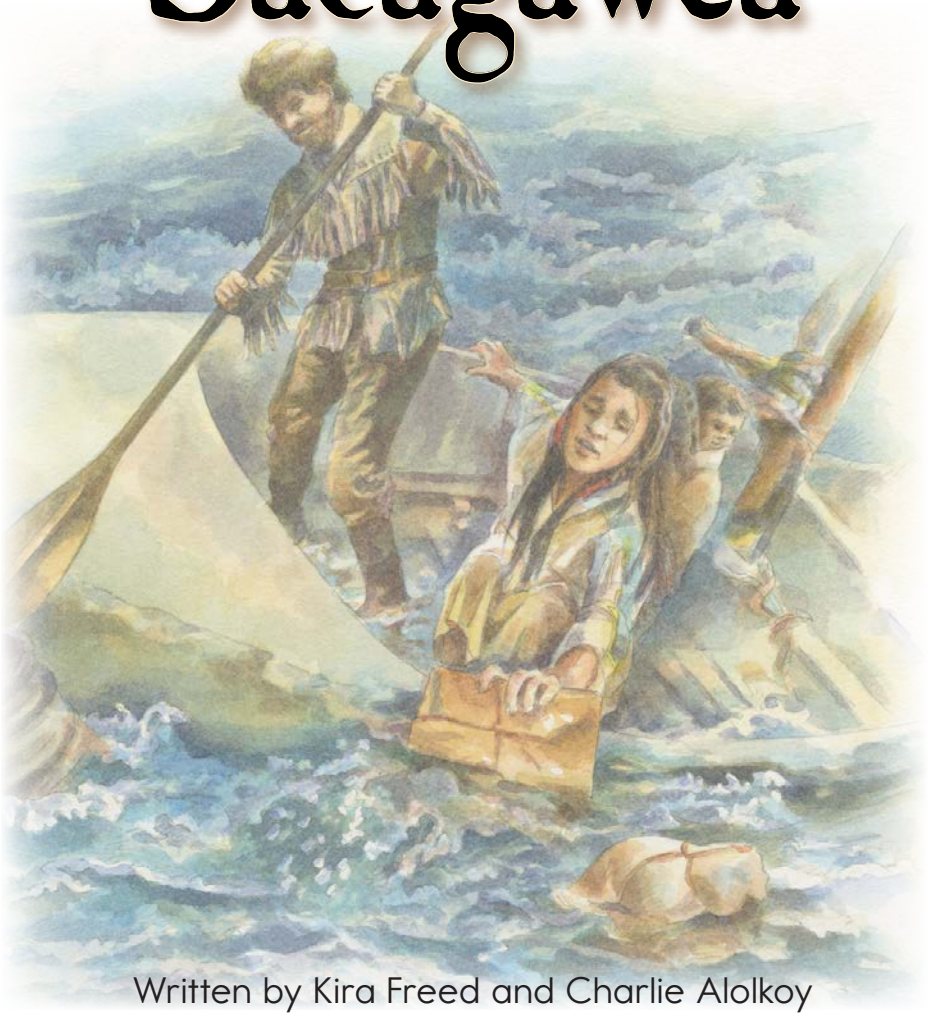

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Correlation

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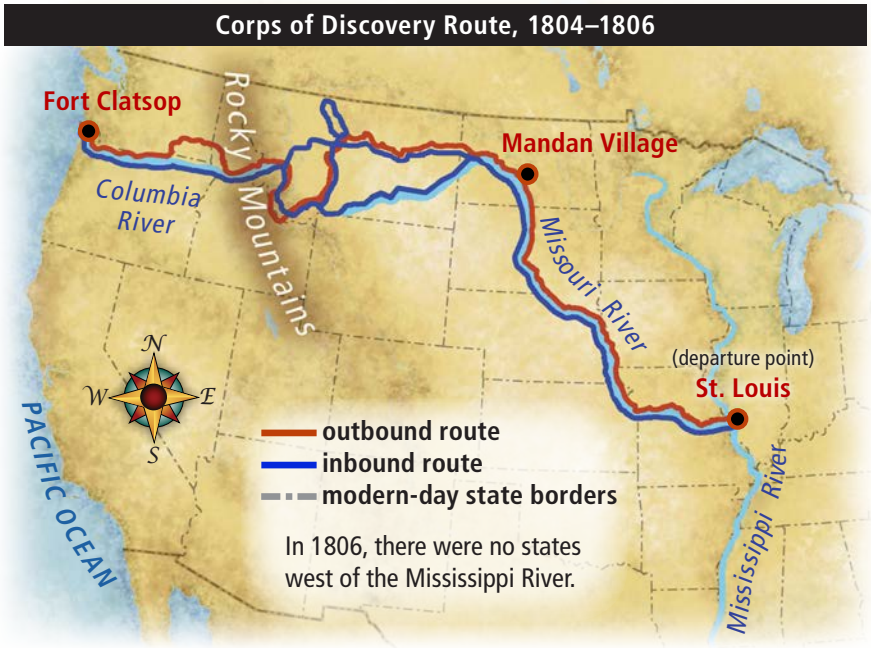


Introduction

In the first decade of the 1800s, a Native American teenage girl of **Shoshone** heritage went on one of the most famous trips in American history. As the only female in the group, she faced isolation. She also faced hunger, illness, severe weather, and challenging terrain—all with an infant to care for. This girl was Sacagawea (sah-kah-gah-WEE-ah), one of the most famous and revered Native Americans in U.S. history.

Sacagawea's Name

Sacagawea's name is written with different spellings, including Sacagawea, Sacajawea, and Sakakawea. Her name is also pronounced in different ways, although (sah-kah-gah-WEE-ah) is common. Her husband claimed that her name meant "Bird Woman."

The Louisiana Territory included all or part of fifteen present-day states.

Growth of the United States

During Sacagawea's lifetime, the United States was a very different place than it is today. In 1803, the United States acquired the **Louisiana Territory** from France. This huge area of land—820,000 square miles (2,123,800 sq km)—west of the Mississippi River doubled the country's size. Many different tribes of Native Americans had been living in that area for thousands of years.

President Thomas Jefferson sent a team of explorers to the area, led by U.S. Army Captain Meriwether Lewis and Second Lieutenant William Clark. Jefferson instructed them to search for the **Northwest Passage**, a waterway believed to connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Their job also included learning about the newly acquired lands. Lewis and Clark's troop, called the **Corps** (KOR) **of Discovery,** began their trip on May 14, 1804, heading up the Missouri River from St. Louis by boat. Their path would cross Sacagawea's less than six months later.

Sacagawea's Roots

Sacagawea was born in 1788 or 1789 in what is now Idaho, the daughter of a Lemhi (LEM-hy) Shoshone chief. Unlike other tribes in the area, her people had no firearms, so they were at the mercy of their enemies. Fearful of the Blackfoot and Hidatsa tribes, they had fled to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

In the fall of 1800, when Sacagawea was about twelve, she was captured by a group of Hidatsa in present-day Montana and taken to live with them. Sacagawea never expected to see her own people again. Within a few years, the Hidatsa sold her to Toussaint Charbonneau (too-SAN shar-buh-NO), a French-Canadian trapper who made her his wife. They lived among the Mandan and Hidatsa in present-day North Dakota.

Joining the Corps of Discovery

After traveling up the Missouri River for six months, Lewis and Clark reached the area where Sacagawea lived. In November 1804, the Corps of Discovery built a fort near the Mandan village. Over the winter, they learned everything they could about the lands to the west from the Mandan and Hidatsa. Lewis and Clark needed horses to cross the Rocky Mountains. They also needed **interpreters** to help them communicate with Native American tribes they would meet on their trip. Lewis and Clark heard about the Shoshones—Sacagawea's people—who owned many horses and who lived at the base of the Rockies.

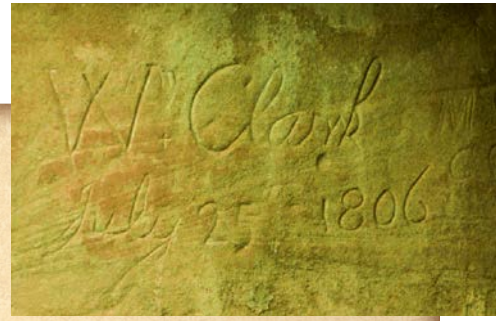
Lewis and Clark hired Charbonneau and asked him to bring Sacagawea to serve as an interpreter. The arrangement was an amazing stroke of luck for both parties. Lewis and Clark were heading into an unknown region, and this girl knew both the area and the Shoshone language. For Sacagawea, this was an opportunity to return to her homeland.

Sacagawea joined the **expedition**, even though she was pregnant at the time. Before the start of the journey, with Lewis's help, Sacagawea gave birth to a son named Jean Baptiste.

During the trip, Clark developed a special fondness for the boy and called him "Little Pomp" or "Pompey." Pomp became the youngest member of the Corps of Discovery and his mother the only female.

The expedition left the Mandan village on April 7, 1805, after the spring thaw. Thirty-three people, including Sacagawea and her baby, traveled in two pirogues—large rowboats with sails—and six canoes. They set out for an unknown land.

On May 14, Charbonneau was steering one of the pirogues when a high wind caused him to lose control. The pirogue tipped, and the expedition's most valuable items, including journals, **navigational** instruments, and medicines, started to float away.



Pomp's Tower

On the return trip, Clark climbed a rock formation in what is present-day Montana. Alongside Native American animal carvings, he carved his name and the date in the sandstone and named the formation "Pompy's Tower." Clark's carving is the only physical evidence of the journey that remains.

Losing those items would have meant disaster for the group. With Pomp on her back, Sacagawea reached out an arm and rescued almost all the items before the current carried them away.

"The Indian woman, to whom I ascribe equal **fortitude** and resolution with any person on board at the time of the [accident], caught and preserved most of the light articles which were washed overboard," wrote Lewis in his journal.

Sacagawea was also helpful to the expedition in other ways. She found edible plants that added important nutrients to their diet of deer and buffalo meat. Lewis was less impressed with Charbonneau, whom he dismissed as "a man of no particular merit."

West to the Pacific

As the expedition approached the Rockies, Sacagawea recognized the area where she'd been **kidnapped**. The Shoshone couldn't be far away. Lewis and three others went ahead to meet them, while Clark and the rest of the group caught up a few days later. Lewis was welcomed into the Shoshone village as a guest of the chief, Cameahwait (kuh-MAY-uh-wate).

While Sacagawea was interpreting for Lewis and Clark during **negotiations** with the chief for horses, she suddenly hugged Cameahwait and cried. She had recognized him as her brother. During that meeting, Cameahwait traded twenty-nine horses for tobacco, knives, beads, and clothing.

The expedition left the Shoshone village on September 1, 1805. Sacagawea left her people to travel with the Corps to the Pacific Ocean.

Crossing the rugged Rocky Mountains was by far the hardest part of the trip. They had no trail and struggled with snow, getting lost, and finding enough to eat. As they navigated one mountain range after another, they realized that there was no Northwest Passage connecting North America's waterways from east to west.

The expedition was in the mountains for three weeks before they could see to the other side. Planning to again travel by water, they needed canoes as well as food. Sacagawea's people had told them about another group of Native Americans—the Nez Perce (NEZ PURS)—who lived just west of the Rockies and would be able to help them. The Nez Perce fed the group, helped them build canoes, and gave them directions.

A Peaceful Presence

At one point, the Nez Perce noticed the expedition's guns and had concerns that they might be a war party—until they saw Sacagawea.

"A woman with a party of men is a token of peace."
—William Clark

"She was a living white flag."
—Meriwether Lewis

The Corps reached the mouth of the Columbia River on November 7, 1805. Here the river rose and fell with the tides and began to taste salty, so they knew that the Pacific Ocean was close. Although relieved, they were facing terrible weather and needed a place to spend the winter. Lewis and Clark took a vote about where to build a fort. Everyone was allowed to vote—including Sacagawea and York, Clark's black slave.

Sacagawea recommended staying in an area that had wapato roots, which could provide a food supply. Lewis and Clark took her suggestion and built Fort Clatsop there (near present-day Astoria, Oregon). The Rockies would be too snowy and harsh for travel until spring, so they spent the winter making maps and notes of the area.

The Return Trip

After winter ended, the expedition left Fort Clatsop and began their return trip up the Columbia River. On the way, they bought horses from the Nez Perce for crossing the Rockies.

At one point, Lewis and Clark separated, with Sacagawea, Pomp, and Charbonneau accompanying Clark's group by land. On their way to the Yellowstone River, back in Shoshone lands, Clark accepted Sacagawea's suggestion of which route to take. "The Indian woman who has been of great service to me as a pilot through this country recommends a gap in the mountain more south, which I shall cross," Clark wrote.

After reuniting with Lewis's party, the expedition traveled to the Mandan village.

Lewis and Clark parted ways with Sacagawea at the Mandan village on August 17, 1806. Clark offered to take Pomp back with him to St. Louis and arrange for him to get an education. Sacagawea said he was too young but that he could go in a year. After leaving, Clark wrote a letter to Charbonneau thanking him for Sacagawea's service.

For such a long and dangerous journey, Clark wrote, she deserved a greater reward than they could offer her when they parted.

After the Expedition

Lewis and Clark were heroes back in Washington, D.C. Congress gave each member of the party extra pay as well as land. When Charbonneau heard about the rewards, he took Sacagawea and Pomp, now four, to St. Louis, where Clark lived, in the fall of 1809. Pomp stayed in St. Louis with Clark, while Charbonneau and Sacagawea left after two years to join another expedition in present-day South Dakota. Sacagawea gave birth to a daughter, Lisette, in August 1812. Four months later, at about age twenty-five, Sacagawea died of a fever. The following summer, the fort's clerk, John Luttig, took Lisette to join Clark and Pomp in St. Louis. Clark became the legal guardian of both children.

A Different Ending

Sometime in the 1850s, an old woman arrived on a Shoshone reservation in Wyoming claiming to be Sacagawea. She told stories about the Lewis and Clark expedition that no one else could have known about. She died in 1884; if her story were true, she would have been nearly one hundred when she died.

No one knows which story about Sacagawea's death is true. However, there's more evidence that she died around age twenty-five. Otherwise, Clark probably would not have taken her daughter to raise.

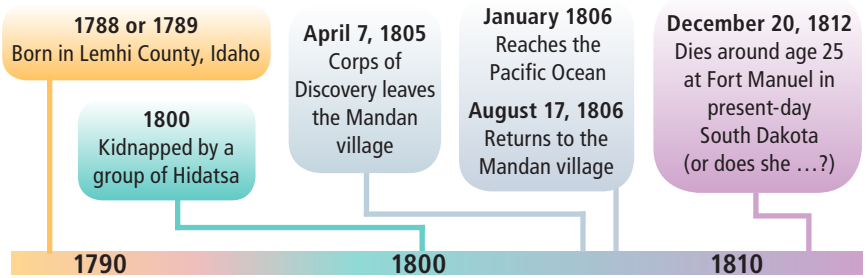
Sacagawea Remembered

We don't know much about Sacagawea, but we do know that she traveled thousands of miles and survived extreme conditions as part of the Lewis and Clark expedition. She found food, served as an interpreter, and reassured the people they encountered that the expedition had peaceful intentions.

Sacagawea U.S. dollar

Sacagawea's life has been the subject of myths that exaggerate her **contributions,** yet her real contributions were impressive enough. She came from the humblest of beginnings as a female Native American in the 1700s who was kidnapped and sold. She showed sufficient **character** and courage in difficult circumstances to prompt two famous explorers to write about her. The fact that we continue to tell her story and create art to honor her is evidence of her contributions. Sacagawea left a lasting mark on American history.

Sacagawea Time Line



Glossary

character *(n.)* the moral strength of a person; the overall nature of a person or place (p. 15)

contributions *(n.)* payments, efforts, or other things given to a common goal, cause, or purpose (p. 15)

Corps of Discovery *(n.)* a U.S. Army unit led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, which from 1804–1806 explored land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase (p. 5)

expedition *(n.)* a group of people who go on a journey or voyage (p. 7)

fortitude *(n.)* strength; endurance (p. 9)

interpreters *(n.)* people who translate one language into another (p. 7)

kidnapped *(v.)* taken away by force, usually for the purpose of getting money in exchange for release (p. 10)

Louisiana Territory *(n.)* a large area of land west of the Mississippi River sold by France to the United States in 1803 (p. 5)

navigational *(adj.)* relating to steering a course toward a destination (p. 8)

negotiations *(n.)* attempts to reach a formal agreement through discussion (p. 10)

Northwest Passage *(n.)* an imaginary trade route across North America that went up the Missouri River and down the Columbia River (p. 5)

Shoshone *(n.)* a member of a group of Native Americans in the Northwest (p. 4)