

Monday, September 24, 1804

Unit: Politics & Diplomacy (Elementary and Middle School)

Lewis and Clark were excited and maybe even a bit nervous on the Monday morning of September 24, 1804. The captains were going through their bales of trade goods to pick out gifts for the Teton Sioux that they hoped to meet that day, but they also kept their guns and powder horns handy in case the meeting turned out unfriendly.

Everyone, from President Jefferson to the traders they had met, warned the captains that the Sioux were powerful. Nevertheless, Lewis and Clark were hopeful that they could persuade the Sioux to become friends and allies of the new United States government.

The captains had left their best interpreter with the Yankton, so they did not have anyone with them who could fluently speak the Sioux language. They would have to communicate with sign language and the few words they knew.

That evening, Captain Lewis went to an island in the middle of the Bad River and had a “smoke” with the Sioux chiefs. The chiefs said they were ready to talk to the captains the next day. When the meeting ended, Lewis went back to camp and spent the night talking to Clark about what they would do the next day when they met the Sioux chiefs. The captains wanted to get the Sioux to agree to trade with the Americans and to recognize the United States as the true government in the area.

While Lewis and Clark were discussing their plans, the Sioux chiefs, named Black Buffalo, the Partisan, and Buffalo Medicine, also thought about what they wanted from Lewis and Clark. The Sioux traded buffalo robes and other goods for food with the Arikara tribe, who were farmers further upriver. They were at war with the tribes farther upriver, the Mandan and Hidatsa. The Sioux wanted to blockade the river so that the American traders couldn't take goods to the Arikara, Mandan, or Hidatsa. If the Sioux couldn't block the Americans from trading with other upriver tribes, they wanted the Corps to at least pay them a toll for using the river.

Now read what William Clark had to say in his journal on that Monday, September 24, 1804:

- day of the week
- was this a good day for the Corps?
- give clues

Note: Spelling and punctuation have been edited below for easier reading for elementary students. The original spelling is available from the journal entry for Monday, September 25, 1804, by William Clark.

William Clark
Monday, September 24, 1804

Set out early...a fair day the wind from the E. pass the mouth of creek...passed a large island...about 2 miles & mile long on which Colter had camped and killed 4 elk...We prepared some clothes and a few medals for the Chiefs of the Teton's bands of Sioux which we expect to see today at the next river....We soon after met 5 Indians and anchored out some distance and spoke to them...informed them we were friends and wished to continue so but were not afraid of any Indians. Some of their young men had taken the horse sent by their Great father for their chief and we would not speak to them until the horse was returned to us again....

Passed island...we saw several elk, (the island was) about 1 miles long...called Good Humored Island...came to about 1 1/2 miles above off the mouth of a small river about 70 yards wide called by Mr. Evens the Little Missouri River. The tribe of the Sioux called the Teton is camped about 1 mile up on the N.W. side and we shall call the River after that Nation, Teton. [Now it's called Bad River.] This river is 70 yards wide at the mouth of water and has a considerable current. We anchored off the mouth.

The French (boatmen's) perogue come up early in the day, the other did not get up until in the evening. Soon after we had come too. I went and smoked with the chiefs who came to see us here. All well. We prepare to speak with the Indians tomorrow, at which time we are informed the Indians will be here...our party camped on board and remainder with the guard on shore.