

## Dressed for Battle

Unit: Warriors/Soldiers (High School)

From *Lewis and Clark: Across the Divide* by Carolyn Gilman

Both Indian and Euro-American men went into battle dressed in regalia that symbolized their deeds and status. The leader of a plains war party was often distinguished by a painted shirt that detailed his war record and by leggings with horizontal stripes symbolizing vanquished enemies. On such war shirts, the contours of the animal skin were often left intact as a sign of respect to the animal, so that it would lend its qualities to the wearer. The most powerful shirts were fringed with locks of human hair that symbolized enemy scalps but that could be given by relatives and supporters to represent the man's responsibilities to his relations. "To don . . . a scalp shirt . . . indicates intention to do an act of bravery," said Thunder Bear, a Lakota. "To habitually wear it indicates a brave who has done a notable act of bravery. To wear it temporarily indicates a position of responsibility that may be dangerous."

The soldiers of Lewis and Clark's troop wore clothing designed not to advertise their individual deeds but to obliterate their differences and make them uniform. Their clothing symbolized the fact that in battle, they acted not as individual warriors but as a coordinated group following orders. There were differences in their uniforms, but the differences reflected organization rather than individuality. The Corps included men of both infantry and artillery regiments, distinguished by the color of the buttons and piping on the uniforms (gold and yellow for artillery, silver and white for infantry) and by the design of the hats. The officers, who were obliged to provide their own uniforms and equipment made to a specified design, were distinguished from the men by showy decorations like crimson sashes, engraved swords, and sword knots (a tassel attached to the hilt, made in symbolic colors). The army lavished effort on designing and specifying the details of uniforms, knowing the psychological impact they had.