

Student Reading – Sacagawea Source List

Unit: Women (Middle and High School)

Primary Sources

1. “We had on board a Frenchman named Charbonet, with his wife, an Indian woman of the Snake nation, both of whom had accompanied Lewis and Clark to the Pacific, and were of great service. The woman, a good creature, of a mild and gentle disposition, greatly attached to the whites, whose manners and dress she tries to imitate, but she had become sickly, and longed to revisit her native country; her husband, also, who had spent many years amongst the Indians, was become weary of civilized life.”

—*Excerpt from Henry M. Brackenridge, Views of Louisiana, 1814*

2. This source offers a clue about her death. A fur trader at Fort Manuel on the Missouri wrote this record of the death of Charbonneau’s unnamed wife.

Sunday the 20th.

“This Evening the Wife of Charbonneau, a Snake Squaw, died of a putrid fever. she was a good [*sic*] and the best Woman in the fort, aged abt. 25 years she left a fine infant girl.”

—*Excerpt from the journal of John Luttig, 1812*

3. The year eighteen hundred nine the twenty-eighth of December, I brother Urbain Guillet Reu of the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of Good Help near Cahokia, in the Illinois Territory, baptized a child born the eleventh of February in the year eighteen hundred four of Toussaint Charboneau, living in this parish and of _____ savage of the Snake Nation. The godfather was Auguste Chouteau* and the godmother Ulalie Chouteau both of this parish.

[*August Chouteau was a prominent merchant and the head of St Louis’s most prominent family at that time. Eulalie Chouteau was his daughter.]

—*Baptismal record of Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, son of Sacagawea, 1809*

St. Louis Cathedral

4.

[c. 1825-28]

Men on Lewis & Clarks Trip

Capt. Lewis Dead

Odoway Dead

N. Pryor at Fort Smith

Rd. Windsor on Sangamah Ills.
 G. Shannon Lexington Ky.
 R. Fields near Louisville
 Wm. Bratten near Greenville Ohio
 F. Labieche St. Louis
 R. Frazier on Gasconade
 Ch. Floyd Dead
 P. Gass Dead
 J. Collins ditto
 J. Colter ditto
 P. Cruzate Killed
 J. Fields ditto
 S. Goodrich dead
 G. Gibson dead
 T.P. Howard
 H. Hall
 Alr. Willard Mo.
 Geo. Drulard Killed
 Tous. Charbono Mand[ans]
 Se car ja we au Dead

—*Excerpt from Clark's List of Expedition Members*

Secondary Sources

1. A popular theory evolved that purported Sacagawea died at age 100, April 9, 1884, and was buried at Fort Washakie, Wind River Indian Reservation, Wyoming. There indeed was a celebrated Shoshoni Indian woman interred at Fort Washakie in 1884, who had a son named Basil.

Through a regrettable circumstance resulting from oral history interviews transcribed through interpreters, together with written “remembrance” testimonials obtained from persons who allegedly knew “Basil’s mother” to be “*Sacajawea*” on the reservation, she was mistakenly determined to be the Shoshoni woman of Lewis and Clark Expedition fame. Collected during the period 1905-1930, 21 to 46 years after the death of “Basil’s mother” in 1884, those recollections, no matter how well-intended, were unsupported by antiquarian written records of any kind, to link her to the 1804-1806 exploring enterprise.

—*Excerpt from “Sacagawea: Her Name and Her Destiny,” by Irving W. Anderson and Blanche Schroer, in We Proceeded On, November 1999.*

2. The evidence for her 1812 death is indirect. Clark compiled a list of expedition members sometime between 1825 and 1828. Beside the name he noted whether each was still living. Next to her name he wrote the word “dead.” The source for Clark’s belief that she died is generally assumed to be John Luttig, clerk of the Missouri Fur Company, who kept a journal of his 1812-13 trip on the river. He returned to St. Louis in 1813 and is assumed to have conveyed the news of her death to Clark at that time. . . .

The line of logic linking the three texts places her (i.e., Sacagawea) on the way to South Dakota with Charbonneau in late 1811 (based on Brackenridge’s journal entry), dying there (based on Luttig’s observation) in 1812, and Clark recording the event some fifteen years later, when he makes a list of the surviving members of the expedition.

The problems with this three-text chain include the following: (1) There is a lapse of over a decade, without intervening comment by Clark, between Luttig’s journal entry and Clark’s list; (2) Luttig does not name the dead wife of Charbonneau in his entry and Charbonneau is known to have had two Shoshone (Snake) wives. Perhaps it was the other wife who died in 1812 and her daughter Lizette whom he sent to St. Louis with Luttig the following year; (3) Clark’s list is known to contain at least one other error. He described Patrick Gass as dead when in fact Gass was still alive and would outlive Clark and all other members of the expedition; (4) Brackenridge’s journal may be evidence for her being alive in 1811, but it is certainly not proof that she was dead before 1813; (5) Brackenridge may have mistaken her identity—she is not named in the journal—or embellished his story by substituting her for Charbonneau’s less famous wife; (6) There is evidence directly linked to her and confirmed by multiple sources that the Shoshone woman who accompanied Lewis and Clark lived another seventy-two years.

—*Excerpt from “Porivo’s Story,” from Exploring Lewis and Clark, by Thomas P. Slaughter, p. 89.*

3. In December 1924 the federal government hired Sioux physician and author Charles Eastman to investigate the life story of Sacagawea. Eastman’s job was to settle a dispute among historians in Wyoming, Montana, and the Dakotas over where and when the indigenous woman had died. . . . The Anglo-American feminist historian Grace Raymond Hebard, of the University of Wyoming, had begun to lobby Congress to appropriate money for a monument to Sacagawea (whom she called Sacajawea) on the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming. Since 1905 Hebard had been collecting evidence among white agents and missionaries at Wind River showing that the woman who had accompanied Lewis and Clark had found her way back to Shoshones at Fort Bridger sometime in the 1850s, and had lived on the reservation at Fort Washakie until her death in 1884. By March 2, 1925, after a short but intense investigation, Eastman concluded that Sacagawea, known to the Shoshones as Porivo, had, as Hebard argued, lived until 1884, sometimes in a tepee and sometimes in a government-built wooden house, and died at Wind River. The woman who died in 1812, Eastman believed, was Charbonneau’s other Shoshone wife, Otter Woman. . . .

—Excerpt from “Seeking Sacagawea,” pp. 13, 14, 15, *Twenty Thousand Roads—Women, Movement, and the West*, by Virginia Scharff
<http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9636/9636.ch01.html>

Oral Tradition and Indian Perspectives

1. My name is Bullseye. I am of the Hidatsa (Gros Ventres). I have seen 58 winters.... My father’s name was Lean Bull. He was Hidatsa; he was a brave man. My mother’s name was Otter Woman. She was Hidatsa. I was four years old when she was killed by an enemy. She died sitting up against a wagon wheel. My grandmother died of a wound in her side. The name of my mother’s mother was Sakakawea. She was my grandmother....

When my grandmother was 18 years old, her father gave her to a white man. She married this white man, who was my grandfather. His name was Sharbonish. He lived among the Mandans and Hidatsas then. That was at the village of the Knife River....

I will tell you how my grandmother Sakakawea died. My mother Otter Woman died at the same time nearly. This place is in Montana....

During one of these trips to a trader’s place to get coffee she was with two wagons with oxen hitched to them. My grandmother and my own mother, Otter Woman, and myself were in the party.... I was asleep on the ground between the hind wheels of the wagon by the side of my grandmother, my mother was under the front wheels. During the night I was awakened by shooting; the camp was attacked by some enemy; the men were firing through the wheels.

My mother said to grandmother, “Take the child to the willow gulch. So Sakakawea took me by the arm and we ran into the brush of the gully there. The firing of the guns kept on for awhile and then quit. All the yelling had ceased....

Several people lay there dead around and under the wagons. My mother was sitting up against a wheel of one of the wagons. She had been struck and was badly wounded there.

My grandmother was also hit in the side with a bullet, but did not say anything about that. My grandmother did not cry any. My mother said, “Take the boy to the trader’s place. I am dying now. The boy is yours to look after now.”

... So we walked over the hills and prairies to the trader’s store. Sakakawea, my grandmother, died at the trader’s place from her wounds several days after that time.

This, Major Welch believes, is the true story of the death of Sakakawea, the “bird woman” of the Mandan and Gros Ventres villages who guided Lewis and Clark....
—Excerpt from “Bullseye’s Story of Sakakawea to Major Welch in Council” (Bullseye

claimed to be the grandson of Sacajawea.) Van Hook Reporter, April 2, 1925, pgs. 1, 4, 5

2. As a Lemhi Shoshone, directly related to Sacajawea through her parents and brother Cameahwait, I have an irrefutable kinship relation to her.

The Lemhi Shoshone call her Sacajawea. It is derived from the Shoshone word for her name, Sacatzah we yaa. We do not believe it is a Minnetaree (Hidatsa) word for her name. Sacajawea was a Lemhi Shoshone not a Hidatsa. Her people, the Lemhi Shoshone, honor her freedom and will continue using the name Sacajawea. Most Shoshone elders conclude that her name is a Shoshone word: Sacatzah we yaa which means burden.

There are many controversies that surround Sacajawea including what tribe she was, when she died, where she is buried, and even what her name means and how it should be pronounced. After years of research and compilation by historians of materials written by expedition members, no documents have been discovered stating that Sacajawea was Comanche, Ute, Hidatsa, or whatever other tribes compete in claiming her as their member.

But what of the other debates, which concern how old Sacajawea was when she died and where she is buried? Most of these misperceptions were started by non-Indians. The Lemhi Shoshone people know that Sacajawea died young. We accept the journal accounts of Missouri River traders and travelers who document that she died in 1812 at Fort Manuel. We have oral history about Sacajawea's arrival to her people with the whitemen but none about her return to her homeland. We do not accept the death date of 1884, and do not believe that the woman buried on the Wind River Reservation in Fort Washakie, Wyoming is Sacajawea. It was Grace Raymond Hebard, a non-Indian professor of political science at the University of Wyoming, who created the story of an aged Sacajawea living out her life in Wyoming.

—*Excerpt from "A Lemhi Shoshone (Agaidika) Perspective," by Rozina George*

3. Pat [an older relative of the author] also disputes that Sakakawea was a Snake Indian; a term for Shoshone in those days....He said that Cherry Necklace [Sakakawea's brother] fasted many days in a snake den.... They had snake medicine, meaning Cherry Necklace and his sister, Sakakawea. Their implication is that somewhere in the translation, the term "snake" was erroneously given as the tribal affiliation for Sakakawea, where she really meant that she had snake medicine. In the journals, Lewis effectively administered rattles from a rattlesnake to Sakakawea, who was in labor, to help her give birth.

Margie, Pat's sister, also added an interesting note. She said that Sakakawea's real name was Eagle Woman or Ma-eshu-weash. It wasn't Bird Woman; however, it was changed in the translation.

—*Excerpt from "Another View of Sakakawea," by Calvin Grinnell in We Proceeded On, May 1999. Calvin Grinnell is Hidatsa*

