

Jefferson's Instructions to Meriwether Lewis with Key Vocabulary and Guiding Questions

Unit: Preparing for the Trip (Elementary and Middle School)

Instructions: The transcript has been divided into sections. Read one section at a time. Review the vocabulary and guiding questions before starting to read. After carefully reading the section, write in the space next to “Goal” your summary of what Jefferson wanted to have accomplished. Words in < > indicate that they were deleted from the original document, usually by the sender.

(Paragraphs 1 and 2)

June 20 1803

To Captain Meriwether Lewis esq. Capt. of the 1st. regimt, of Infantry of the US. of A.

Your situation as Secretary of the President of the U.S. has made you acquainted with the objects of my confidential message of Jan. 18. 1803 to the legislature; you have seen the act they passed, which they expressed in general terms, was meant to sanction these objects, and you are appointed to carry them into execution.

Instruments for **ascertaining**, by **celestial** observations, the geography of the country through which you will pass, have been already provided. Light articles for barter and presents among the Indians, arms for your attendants, say from 10. to 12. men, boats, tents, & other travelling apparatus with ammunition, medicine, surgical instruments and provisions you will have prepared with such aids as the Secretary at War can yield in his department; & from him also you will recieve authority to engage among our troops, by voluntary agreement, the number of attendants above mentioned, over whom you, as their commanding officer, are invested with all the powers the laws give in such a case.

ascertaining—v., finding out

celestial—adj., of the sky: stars, sun

What preparations had been made?

GOAL:

(Paragraphs 3 and 4)

As your movements while within the limits of the U.S. will be better directed by occasional communications, adapted to circumstances as they arise, they will not be noticed here. What follows will respect your proceedings after your departure from the United States.

Your mission has been communicated to the ministers here from France, Spain & Great Britain, and through them to their governments; & such assurances given them as to it's objects as we trust will satisfy them. The country <of Louisiana> having been **ceded** by Spain to France, <and possession by this time probably given,> the passport you have from the minister of France, the representative of the present **sovereign** of the country, will be a protection <against> with all its subjects, & that from the minister of England will entitle you to the friendly aid of any traders of that **allegiance** with whom you may happen to meet.

ceded—v., given, transferred

sovereign—n., ruler

allegiance—n., country the traders are loyal to, here it means England

Why do they need a passport?

GOAL:

(Paragraph 5)

The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by its course and **communication** with the waters of the Pacific ocean whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado or any other river may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of **commerce**.

communication—n., connection from one river to another

commerce—n., trading goods

GOAL:

(Paragraphs 6 and 7)

Beginning at the mouth of the Missouri, you will take <careful> observations of latitude & longitude at all remarkable points on the river, & especially at the mouth of rivers, at rapids, at islands, & other places & objects distinguished by such natural marks & characters of a durable kind as that they may with certainty be recognized hereafter. The courses of the river between these points of observation may be supplied by the compass, the **log-line** & by time, corrected by the observations themselves. The variations of the compass too, in different places should be noticed.

The interesting points of the **portage** between the heads of the Missouri, & of the water offering the best communication with the Pacific ocean, should also be fixed by observation, & the course of that water to the ocean, in the same manner as that of the Missouri

log-line—n., a device used for measuring distance on water

portage—n., the carrying of goods or boats over land from one body of water to another or around an obstacle

GOAL:

(Paragraph 8)

Your observations are to be taken with great pains & accuracy, to be entered distinctly & **intelligibly** for others, as well as yourself, to comprehend all the elements necessary, with the aid of the usual tables, to fix the latitude and longitude of the places at which they were taken, and are to be rendered to the war-office for the purpose of having the calculations made **concurrently** by proper persons within the U.S. Several copies of these as well as of your other notes should be made at leisure times, & put into the care of the most trust-worthy of your attendants, to guard by multiplying them against the accidental losses to which they will be exposed. A further guard would be that one these copies be on the paper of the birch, as less liable to injury from damp than common paper.

intelligibly—adv., clearly, easily understood

concurrently—adv., at the same time

GOAL:

(Paragraph 9)

The commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue, renders a knowledge of those people important. You will therefore endeavour to make yourself acquainted, as far as a diligent pursuit of your journey shall admit, with the names of the nations & their numbers;

the extent & limits of their **possessions**;
their relations with other tribes of nations;
their language, traditions, monuments;
their ordinary occupations in agriculture, fishing, hunting, war, arts & the **implements** for these;
their food, clothing, & domestic **accommodations**;
the diseases **prevalent** among them, & the remedies they use;
moral & physical circumstances which distinguish them from the tribes we know;
peculiarities in their laws, customs & dispositions;
and articles of commerce they may need or furnish & to what extent.

And considering the interest which every nation has in extending & strengthening the authority of reason & justice among the people around them, it will be useful to acquire what knowledge you can of the state of morality, religion, & information among them; as it may better enable those who may endeavor to civilize & instruct them, to adapt their measures to the existing notions & practices of those on whom they are to operate.

possessions— n., in this case it means territory, not goods

implements—n., tools

accommodations—n., shelter

prevalent—adj., common

GOAL:

(Paragraph 10)

Other objects worthy of notice will be
the soil & face of the country its growth & vegetable productions, especially those not of the U.S.

the animals of the country generally, & especially those not known in the U.S.

the remains & accounts of any which may be **deemed** rare or extinct;

the mineral productions of every kind; but more particularly metals; limestone, pit coal, & salt-petre; salines & mineral waters, noting the temperature of the last & such circumstances as may indicate their character; volcanic appearances; climate, as characterized by the thermometer, by the proportion of rainy, cloudy, & clear days, by lightening, hail, snow, ice, by the access & recess of frost, by the winds prevailing at different seasons, the dates at which particular plants put forth or lose their flower, or leaf, times of appearance of particular birds, reptiles or insects.

deemed—v., judged

GOAL:

(Paragraph 11 and 12)

Altho' your route will be along the channel of the Missouri, yet you will endeavor to inform yourself, by **enquiry**, of the character & extent of the country watered by it's branches & especially on it's Southern side. The North river or Rio Bravo which runs into the gulph of Mexico, and the North river, or Rio colorado which runs into the gulph of California, are understood to be the principal streams heading opposite to the waters of the Missouri, and running Southwardly. Whether the dividing grounds between the Missouri & them are mountains or flat lands, what are their distance from the Missouri, the character of the intermediate country, & the people inhabiting it, are worthy of particular enquiry. The Northern waters of the Missouri are less to be enquired after, because they have been **ascertained** to a considerable degree, & are still in a course of ascertainment by English traders, and travellers. But if you can learn any thing certain of the most Northern source of the Missisipi, & of it's position relatively to the lake of the woods, it will be interesting to us.

<Two copies of your notes at least & as many more as leisure will admit, should be made & confided to the care of the most trusty individuals of your attendants.> Some account too of the path of the Canadian traders from the Missisipi, at the mouth of the **Ouisconsin** to where it strikes the Missouri, & of the soil and rivers in its <traverses> course, is desirable.

enquiry (inquiry)—n., questioning; investigating

ascertained—v., explored and are known

Ouisconsin—n., Wisconsin

GOAL:

(Paragraph 13)

In all your intercourse with the natives, treat them in the most friendly & **conciliatory** manner which their own conduct will admit; **allay all jealousies** as to the object of your journey, satisfy them of it's **innocence**, make them acquainted with the position, extent character, peaceable & commercial dispositions of the U.S., of our wish to be neighborly, friendly, & useful to them, & of our dispositions to a **commercial intercourse** with them; confer with them on the points most convenient as mutual **emporiums**, and the articles of most desirable interchange for them & us...

Given under my hand at the city of Washington this 20th day of June 1803.

... Th. J. Pr. U.S. of A.

conciliatory—adj., offering good will

allay all jealousies—v., calm their suspicions

innocence— n., unthreatening nature

commercial intercourse—n., trade

emporiums—n., places to trade

GOAL: