



## *History 101*

### **Sacajawea**

Sacagawea (May c.1788 – December 20, 1812 or April 9, 1884) was a Lemhi Shoshone woman who, at age 16, met and helped the Lewis and Clark Expedition in achieving their chartered mission objectives by exploring the Louisiana Territory. Sacagawea traveled with the expedition thousands of miles from North Dakota to the Pacific Ocean, helping to establish cultural contacts with Native American populations in addition to her contributions to natural history.

Sacagawea was an important member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The National American Woman Suffrage Association of the early 20th century adopted her as a symbol of women's worth and independence, erecting several statues and plaques in her memory, and doing much to spread the story of her accomplishments.

In 1800, when she was about 12 years old, she and several other girls were kidnapped by a group of Hidatsa in a battle that resulted in the deaths of several Shoshone: four men, four women, and several boys. She was held captive at a Hidatsa village near present-day Washburn, North Dakota. At about age 13, she was sold into a non-consensual marriage to Toussaint Charbonneau, a Quebecois trapper who had also bought another young Shoshone, known as Otter Woman, as his wife.

The Corps of Discovery arrived near the Hidatsa villages, where Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark built Fort Mandan to spend the winter of 1804–05. They interviewed several trappers who might be able to interpret or guide the expedition up the Missouri River. They agreed to hire Toussaint Charbonneau after discovering that his wife, Sacagawea, who was pregnant with her first child at the time, spoke Shoshone.

While Sacagawea has been depicted as a guide for the expedition, she is recorded as providing direction in only a few instances. Her work as an interpreter certainly helped the party to negotiate with the Shoshone; however, her greatest value to the mission may have been simply her presence during the arduous journey, which demonstrated the peaceful intent of the expedition. While traveling through what is now Franklin County, Washington, in October 1805, Clark noted that she reconciled all the Indians they met and convinced them of their friendly intentions.

Following the expedition, Charbonneau and Sacagawea spent 3 years among the Hidatsa before accepting William Clark's invitation to settle in St. Louis, in 1809. They entrusted In addition to her son, Jean-Baptiste, Sacagawea gave birth to a daughter, Lizette Charbonneau, sometime after 1810. It is believed that she died in childhood. Historical documents suggest that Sacagawea died in 1812 of an unknown sickness.

