

## Lesson Plan – Second Grade

### Meriwether Lewis Journey and Death

**Objective:** I can narrate my perspective of a historical event.

**Common Core Standards: 2.37** (Social Studies) **Key Details #1** (ELA)

**Hook/Set:** Who was Meriwether Lewis? Why do we study him? How did he end up in Lewis County?

**Lecture:** The lecture will be told by a person portraying Meriwether Lewis (if available). He will tell it in the first person instead of as written below.

Meriwether Lewis was born August 18, 1774 near Charlottesville, Virginia. He was the second child of William and Lucy Lewis. William Lewis was constantly away fighting the noble cause of war. Early in his son's life he died from pneumonia. As was the custom in her day Lucy Lewis quickly remarried and moved the family to the Georgia frontier.

**Meriwether Goes Home** – Meriwether Lewis returned to the Charlottesville area and lived with an uncle. He continued his studies here. At the age of 20, Lewis volunteered in the Virginia militia, organized by President George Washington to put an end to the Whiskey Rebellion, which occurred to oppose the new tax on whiskey. Lewis quickly realized that military life suited him. As a member of the regular army Lewis traveled to many frontier posts. He developed his leadership skills and established a reputation of integrity and honesty. Lewis rose to the rank of captain and was later appointed to paymaster of his regiment.

**Presidential Secretary** – President Thomas Jefferson first met Meriwether Lewis when he was a young man. Jefferson was impressed with Lewis' well-rounded Virginia education and his impartiality while a captain in the Virginia militia. In 1801 Jefferson appointed him to the post of private secretary. His tasks were “to aid in the private concerns of the household” and “to contribute to the mass of information which it is interesting for the administration to acquire.” Lewis excitedly accepted the job and looked forward to working with a man he much admired and respected.

However, Lewis soon became bored with the job. Lewis thought the jobs often tedious and he became discouraged and needed an outlet. Since Lewis lived in Jefferson's house (Monticello) he had access to an extensive library which he used and read intensely. During this time Lewis also grew as a writer.

**Their Dream of a Nation** – In 1803 the US bought the Louisiana Territory from France. The deal known as the Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the US and opened a new frontier for exploration. The US paid France \$15 million for the land. President Jefferson was interested in sending an expedition to explore this land west of the Mississippi River. While working for President Jefferson, Lewis had proven himself to be a perfect candidate for the job. The main purpose of the expedition was to look for a commercial water route to the Pacific Ocean.

Lewis was sent to Philadelphia and tutored in the subjects of botany, mineralogy, astronomy and medicine. He also learned how to use the sextant, chronometer, and many other types of measuring instruments. While preparing for his trip Lewis wrote to Lieutenant William Clark,

inviting him to co-command the expedition. He was a close friend of Lewis from his early years of military service.

**The Expedition Begins** – President Jefferson appealed to Congress on the topic of an overland expedition. His proposal included an expenditure allowance. Congress approved the proposal of \$2,500. The expedition ended up costing \$39,000.

The Corps of Discovery, today known as the Lewis and Clark expedition, set out in 1804. While their primary assignment was to find an all-water route to the Pacific Ocean and to map the territory explored, they were also instructed to collect scientific information regarding the land as well as the sociological observations of the Indian tribes who lived there.

Specimens of previously unidentified plants and animals were brought back to be examined and studied by scientists. One animal that had not been seen by an American before was the coyote which Lewis and Clark called a prairie wolf. The detailed journals of Lewis and Clark contained invaluable information and sketches of Indians, wildlife, and many important geographical features. They lost only one man to natural causes on the journey and covered over 6,000 miles. On the journey they were accompanied by Sacagawea, a member of the Shoshone tribe, who served as an interpreter and guide. President Jefferson had Lewis teach the Indians how to inoculate themselves against smallpox as many of them had died from the disease. While exploring this territory, Lewis and Clark named the 3 forks of the Missouri River Jefferson, Gallatin and Madison. Lewis' dog Seaman, a Newfoundland, also accompanied the expedition.

**Governor Lewis** – In 1807, President Jefferson and Congress rewarded Lewis by appointing him governor over the newly acquired Louisiana Territory. As a governor, he was to handle all government affairs in the territory and settle claims among agents. In an effort to obtain reimbursement for expenditures and clarification of disallowed claims, Lewis left St. Louis in September 1809 for Washington, D.C. by way of the Mississippi River.

Not wanting his expedition journals to fall into British hands while traveling through New Orleans, Lewis disembarked at Fort Pickering (present Memphis, TN), in order to take a more direct overland route to Washington, D.C. Lewis and his slave John Pernier (sometimes spelled Pernia) and Chickasaw Indian agent James Neelly and his slave, departed on their long overland journey after spending a week of much needed rest at the fort.

**Death of an Explorer** – On October 6, 1809, Lewis, Pernier, Neelly, his slave and an undetermined number of Chickasaw, started northeast via the Natchez Trace. After crossing the Tennessee River and setting up camp, two horses strayed in the night. Neelly searched for the horses while Lewis and their slaves continued on to Robert Grinder's stand, the first inn north of the Chickasaw Nation operated by whites. Mrs. Grinder, wife of the innkeeper, recounted years later that Lewis was restless throughout the evening. Two gunshots were heard in the night. Too fearful to leave her quarters, Mrs. Grinder said that she never investigated the shots. The next morning Lewis was found, clinging to life with wounds to his head and chest. Meriwether Lewis died on October 11, 1809 at the age of 35.

Neelly arrived the next morning and buried Lewis next to the Natchez Trace, later taking possession of Lewis' horse, rifle, pistol and knife. Pernier returned to Monticello with Lewis' journals and remaining possessions.

In 1848, the state of Tennessee erected a monument over Lewis' gravesite – a broken shaft symbolizing the untimely end of a remarkable life.

**The Controversy** – To this day, a controversy still remains over Lewis' final hours. Did this man who accomplished so much take his own life, or was he killed? The truth may never be revealed. This issue is regularly discussed in literature and other media.

Those who believe the murder theory use these points:

- Lewis was an excellent marksman and would have used a fatal shot if he administered it himself.
- Money was missing that Lewis had with him.
- Political assassination
- Jealous husband
- Neelly was conveniently absent all night
- Pernier (servant) later disappeared
- Lewis' watch turned up in New Orleans
- Robert Grinder was not home when he arrived. He could have shot him upon returning. He also came into a large sum of money and was questioned by authorities though there are no court records available.
- Lewis knew secrets about the former governor of the Louisiana Territory and was going to expose him.

Those who believe the suicide theory use these points:

- Lewis was depressed/melancholy
- Lewis suffered from headaches and fever – could have been from malaria or syphilis
- He was bankrupt
- He drank too much
- Mrs. Grinder says he was pacing and mumbling to himself all night
- Before leaving St. Louis he gave power to associates to distribute his possessions in the event of his death
- Allegedly tried to take his life several weeks prior to this trip
- Recently composed a will

**Hereafter** – By the age of 35, Meriwether Lewis had accomplished more than most could ever imagine. He had earned the title of woodsman, soldier, adventurer, personal secretary, and leader and had become known as one of the greatest American explorers. He is remembered with these sincere words spoken by Thomas Jefferson as inscribed on his monument:

*His courage was undaunted; His Firmness and Perseverance Yielded to Nothing but Impossibilities; a Rigid Disciplinarian, yet Tender as a Father of Those Committed to his Charge; Honest, Disinterested, Liberal with a sound Understanding and a Scrupulous Fidelity to Truth.*

**I do, We do, You do:**

Pictures from his life and expedition. Pair and Share and discuss each picture.

**Assessment:** Check group picture discussions for understanding. Ask how the expedition helped shape America.

**Closure:** Recap Meriwether Lewis life.

**Post Activity:** Complete questions. Writing – Was Lewis' death murder or suicide? (Cite evidence)