**Lewis & Clark: A Native American View**

**Overview:**

The Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804–1806 was of great consequence for the developing United States, the future state of Oregon, and the Native American people who had been living in the American West for thousands of years. The passage of time, mythmaking, and selective interpretation have obscured or distorted both minor and major realities about the purposes of the expedition, the people involved, and its impact. As is said, every story has (at least) two sides, and until recently the Native American point of view has rarely been heard.

In this lesson, students will learn about primary and secondary sources, as well as point of view and bias and the impact they can have on the intention behind the recording and retelling of history. They will do so by reading three accounts (see reading packet in the class materials) from an incident that occurred during the Lewis and Clark expedition on October 19, 1805, in which the explorers encountered a Native American tribe near the Umatilla River in Oregon. Students will read one primary source relating to the incident (an entry from William Clark’s journal for the day), as well as two secondary sources that provide different points of view or interpretations of how the explorers and the Native Americans saw each other and judged each other’s intentions. Each article is followed by a set of reflection questions students can answer individually in class, as homework, or together with peers, in pairs or small groups. The session ends with a whole-class discussion using prompts that help students be better-informed and adept learners of American history.

**Background for teachers:**

The Lewis and Clark Expedition, which began in May 1804 and ended in September 1806, was the first U.S. government-sponsored expedition to explore the interior of the American West. President Thomas Jefferson commissioned the expedition, also known as the Corps of Discovery, to explore and map the newly acquired territory of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, find an overland route to the Pacific Ocean, and establish an American presence in the region before other European countries tried to claim it. The expedition was also charged with studying the region’s plants and animals and learning about and establishing trade with the Native American tribes they encountered.

The expedition was generally successful in meeting these goals, and it has been commemorated and honored as a pivotal moment in U.S. history ever since. However, much of the interpretation of the expedition and the history of the American West since then has omitted, obscured, or minimized the contributions Native Americans made to the expedition and its impact on them afterwards. The Corps of Discovery crossed paths with more than 50 tribes, whose generosity, hospitality, and forbearance enabled the corps to complete the voyage from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean and back (as Lewis, Clark, and other corps members attested in their journals).

Unfortunately, Lewis and Clark also helped open the American West to Euro-American encroachment, settlement, and colonialism, which had catastrophic consequences for many generations of Indigenous people.

The story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition is only one example of how the Native American perspective has been left out of the historical record, often intentionally. Slowly, this is beginning to change, as more Native people, in Oregon and elsewhere, are finding ways to share their versions of the story of U.S. history and to counter the ignorance and arrogance that often accompanies it.

**Learning Outcomes:**

• Students will describe the difference between primary and secondary sources and their benefits and challenges for understanding history.

• Students will describe how perspective and bias can affect how people understand history.

• Students will understand why the Lewis and Clark Expedition may be viewed differently by Native Americans than by other Americans.

**Standards:**

**Oregon English Language Arts Standards**

8.RL.6 – Determine an author’s perspective, and/or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to any conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

8.RL.9 – Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation. Oregon Social Sciences Standards

8.29 (Historical Thinking) – Use and interpret relevant primary and secondary sources pertaining to U.S. History from multiple perspectives. 8.32 (Social Science Analysis) – Critique and analyze information for point of view, historical context, distortion, bias, propaganda and relevance including sources with