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Hollywood or History? Lewis and Clark's Expedition to the West

Grade	Estimated Time Needed for Lesson	NCSS Theme
Fifth	40-60 minutes	Time Continuity and Change

Background

Lewis and Clark's Expedition to the West

In 1804, Thomas Jefferson commissioned Meriweather Lewis and William Clark to travel to the west with a small group of about thirty men to explore the land west of the Mississippi River. The story of Lewis and Clark, the Corps of Discovery, their Native American Guide Sacagawea, and the traditional American message of manifest destiny is woven throughout the history narratives elementary teachers are expected to cover in upper elementary school. However, in the portrayals we typically find in textbooks, attention is rarely given to historical thinking or multiple perspectives, and learning about this event typically takes place in ways that reinforce oppression, centering European perspectives and ignoring Indigenous perspectives altogether (Schmitke et al., 2020).

This lesson, which utilizes primary sources and secondary sources from both European and Indigenous perspectives along with The Simpson's *Magical History Tour* (Season 15, Episode 11), attempts to disrupt the traditional way of presenting Lewis and Clark's Expedition to the West by encouraging students to consider why the way we tell history matters and whose perspective is missing from a reading or retelling. In the end, students will be able to articulate

whether Lewis and Clark's Expedition to the West was successful while taking into account the multiple perspectives introduced in the lesson.

The Simpson's Magical History Tour (Season 15, Episode 11)

In this episode of *The Simpsons*, Lewis, played by Lenny, and Clark, played by Carl, are tasked with "exploring the West" by President Thomas Jefferson, played by Mayor Quimby. On their journey, they quickly meet up with a Native American tribe whose chief, Homer, offers them his daughter as a guide. In the episode, Homer claims his daughter's name, Sacagawea (played by his daughter Lisa) means, "Little know-it-all who will not shut her maizehole." Sacagawea joins the expedition accompanied by her husband, Charbonneau, played by Milhouse. Later, Charbonneau is slaughtered by Sacagawea's brother, played by Bart. Throughout this short clip, Lewis and Clark are portrayed as quite stupid. In a short amount of time, it becomes clear that without Sacagawea's help, they would be unable to survive the land. Despite this, at the end of the clip, when Sacagawea can no longer handle Lewis and Clark she attempts to leave but ends up being saved from a cougar by Lewis and Clark. Eventually, the entire group reaches the Pacific Ocean. In the end, the explorers honor Sacagawea by creating the Sacagawea dollar which, according to Marge, can be exchanged at the bank for a "real" dollar.

In a little less than five minutes, director Mike Anderson and writer Brian Kelley have presented their audience with a slew of inaccuracies that complicate the story of Lewis and Clark's Expedition to the West. While on the surface this does not seem like a positive thing, the sort of tongue in cheek telling of a familiar story that *The Simpsons* are so good at actually has two positive results. First, it provides a nice, clear example of the artistic license given to Hollywood that is not always immediately visible to students in a film like Disney's *Pocahontas*,

and second, it makes finding examples of both accurate and inaccurate portrayals of history easy, providing an opportunity for students to critique information received through a television show in a way they might not have considered before. Ideally, participating in this lesson helps students to make connections between what they are learning at school and what they are consuming at home, and it gives them permission to speak back to any sort of media they encounter.

Lesson Plan (Draft)

Guiding Questions

Were Lewis and Clark successful in their Expedition to the West?

Does the way we tell history matter?

Whose perspectives are missing from a reading?

Objectives

Students will know who Lewis and Clark were and provide reasons why they traveled to the west. Students will also be able to articulate whether this expedition was successful, taking into account the multiple perspectives considered.

Assessment Strategies

Formative Assessment will be conducted through analysis of classroom discussion, completion of graphic organizers, and line of contention activity.

Summative Assessment will be conducted through concluding writing activity.

Teaching Strategies Highlighted

Primary Source Analysis

Guided Reading

Think Aloud

Graphic Organizer

Line of Contention

Writing an Essay (Communicating Conclusions)

Lesson Procedures

1. Viewing primary source materials: Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with a set of primary source photographs, including images of Lewis, Clark, the Sacagawea doller, a telescope, Shoshone women, and men from the Discovery Corps building a camp. As students look at the collection of pictures ask them if they know who is in each picture and what event in history they think this group of pictures might represent. After giving groups time to brainstorm and share their prediction with the class, tell students today they will be learning about Lewis and Clark’s Expedition to the West. These pictures are primary sources from the Lewis and Clark Expedition.
2. Guided reading of textbook section about Lewis and Clark: As a whole class, read chapter aloud with students, pausing to ask questions designed to help students think about what they are reading and make connections to other historical and/or current events.
3. Quick Q&A: Ask students “Whose perspectives are missing from this conversation? If we wanted to know more about Lewis and Clark’s Expedition to the West, whose perspective might we want to include?”
4. Guided reading of excerpt from *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States*. While reading, the teacher should pause to “think aloud,” i.e. explicitly ask questions or make

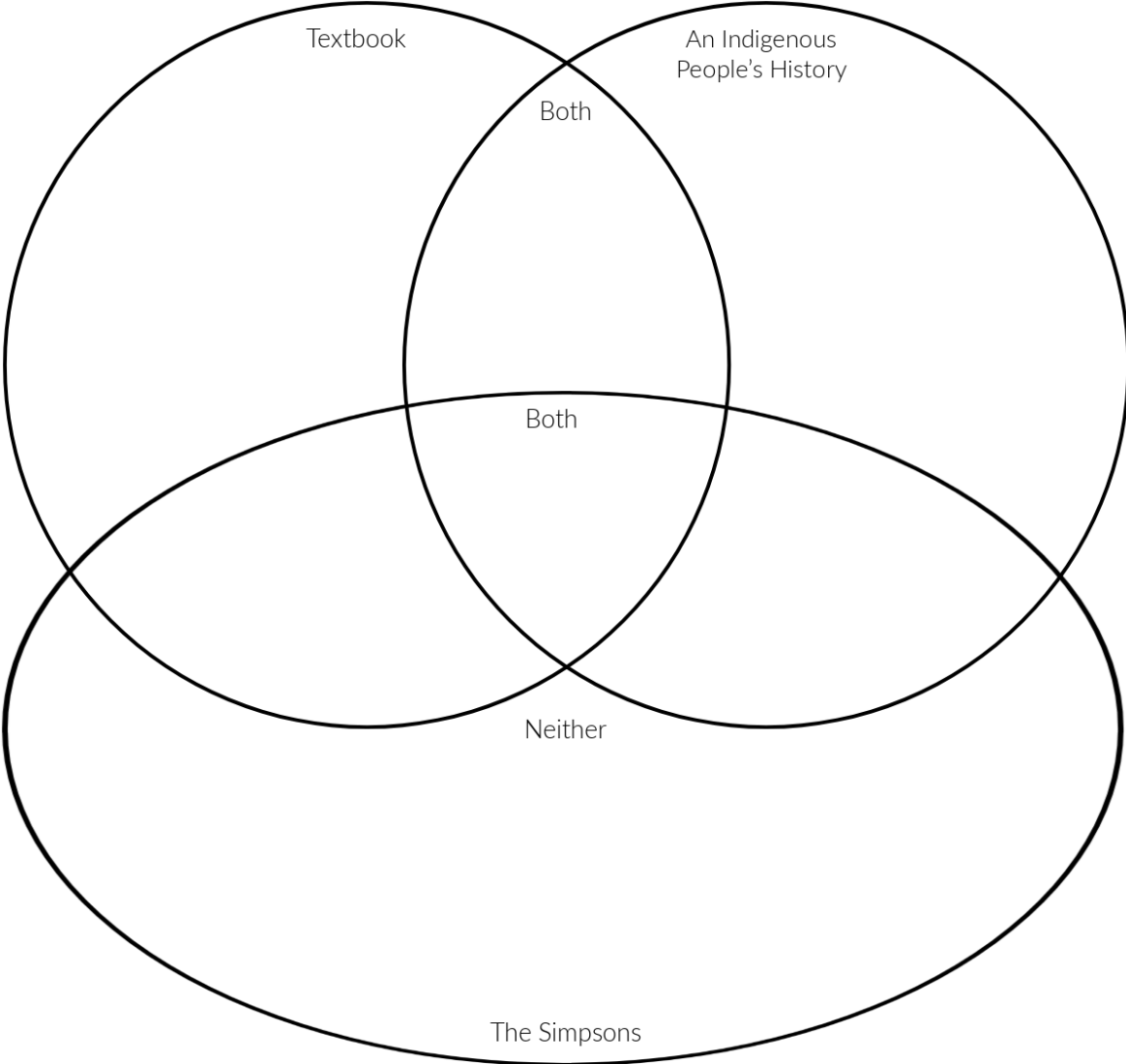
statements that model connections (or the lack of connection) between the first and second reading.

5. With their initial group and using the graphic organizer for the lesson, ask students to complete the top section. What does their textbook say about Lewis and Clark's Expedition to the West? What does *An Indigenous People's History* say? Which events are the same, and which are different? Remind students they can use the five W's plus how to help fill out the graphic organizer.
6. Tell students, frequently, in movies or cartoons, writers and actors will try to portray events that happened throughout history, but they don't always get it right. Explain that today we are going to watch a short clip from the cartoon *The Simpsons* that tells the story of Lewis and Clark's Expedition to the West. As you are watching, think about whether this portrayal of history aligns with our textbook, the indigenous perspective, both, or neither.
7. Display *Magical History Tour* Episode Clip 7:57-12:40.
8. In their small groups ask students to discuss whether this portrayal of history aligns with the perspective presented in the textbook, the indigenous perspective, both, or neither. Record example of how it aligns with each perspective on the bottom portion of the graphic organizer.
9. Using their graphic organizer as a resource, ask students to evaluate the accuracy of the *Magical History Tour* Episode Clip. Place signs across the room labeled 0%, 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100%. Each student must physically move to the percentage they think best represents the amount of accurate knowledge in the clip. Once there, have students discuss with other students the parts they felt were accurate/inaccurate, then share with the class.

**I'm not sure this is what I would choose to do, but I was unclear whether it's a required part of the Hollywood or History technique. If not, I might experiment with ways to conduct a value lines discussion instead.*

10. Using the attached rubric as a summative assessment guide, ask students to write a summary that addresses who Lewis and Clark were, provides reasons why they traveled to the west, and discusses whether this expedition was successful from more than one perspective.

Graphic Organizer



Resources for Teachers and Students

- Blee, Lisa (2005). Completing Lewis and Clark's Westward March. *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 106(2), 239-245. Retrieved from <https://www.ohs.org/research-and-library/oregon-historical-quarterly/upload/Blee-Completing-Lewis-and-Clark.pdf>
- Chen, A. (2021, April 23). Guest review: An-Lon Chen's review of WHO WAS SACAGAWEA? by Judith Bloom Fradin and Dennis Brindell Fradin. *American Indians In Children's Literature*. Retrieved from <https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/2021/04/guest-review-lon-chens-review-of-who.html>.
- Conner, Roberta (2006). Our People Have Always Been Here. In Josephy, Alvin Jr. (ed.), *Lewis and Clark through Indian Eyes: Nine Indian Writers on the Legacy of the Expedition*. Vintage.
- Mendoza, J., Reese, D., & Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2019). *An Indigenous peoples' history of the United States for young people*. Beacon Press.
- Schmitke, A., Sabzalian, L., Edmundson, J. (2020). *Teaching critically about Lewis and Clark: Challenging dominant narratives in K-12 curriculum*. Teacher's College Press.