

LEWIS & CLARK IN COLUMBIA RIVER COUNTRY



A Lewis & Clark Lesson Plan

Forensic Examination of Artifacts: The Mystery of Meriwether Lewis' Death

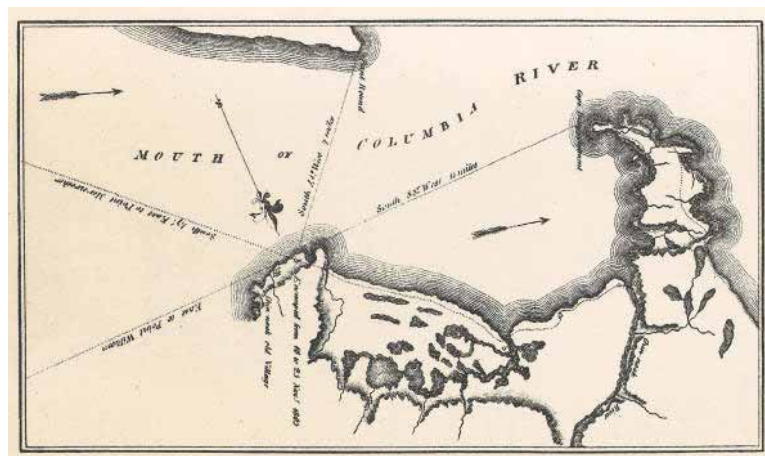
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This can be used as a
Dig Deep: Examining Artifacts & Sources
Classroom-Based Assessment for High Schoolers.

Summary:

We know much about the historical journey of Lewis and Clark and have probably even imagined the fears, uncertainties, and dangers that the Corps of Discovery overcame. Only a few years after the journey's end, however, Meriwether Lewis went from finding himself as one of the most celebrated men in the country and a newly appointed governor to being found dead in some woman's house. Was this a case of suicide? Was this a case of murder? Almost 200 years later, even with all we know about crime scene investigation, we still do not have an answer – only theories.

In this lesson, students will embark on a *webquest* to travel back in time and explore the evidence surrounding the mysterious death of Meriwether Lewis. In the role of a forensic scientist, students will collect data and form their own opinion as a pre-write activity for a letter in which they argue for the exhumation of Meriwether Lewis' body for forensic analysis. Students should have completed a study of the Lewis and Clark Expedition prior to this lesson plan. This will better prepare them with an understanding of the historical background and the historical impact of the expedition.



This detailed map of the mouth and north shore of the Columbia River was originally drawn by William Clark in 1805.

Washington State Historical Society Collections.

Essential Questions for Students:








- What did Meriwether Lewis do after his famous journey with William Clark?
- What evidence can we gain about an event through primary sources that are almost 200 years old?
- How does one develop and support a historical interpretation?
- How will the passing of almost 200 years affect a forensic study of the body?

Essential Understandings:

1. Students will collect data from a variety of primary sources in order to investigate Meriwether Lewis. They will summarize a variety of first-hand accounts of the events surrounding his death.
2. Students will learn to state the premises of various theorists in regard to the death of Meriwether Lewis.
3. Students will utilize the internet to research other theories and findings related to this mystery.
4. Students will be able to state their opinions as to the cause of Meriwether Lewis' death and give reasons and supporting evidence for their decisions.

DOWNLOAD AREA

Download the PDFs required for this lesson plan

-  [The Lesson Plan](#)
-  [Student Assignment Sheet](#)
-  [Forensic Science Materials](#)
-  [Primary Source Documents](#)
-  [Secondary Source Documents](#)
-  [Student Worksheets](#)
-  [Evaluation Rubric](#)

Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs)

This lesson plan satisfies the following EALRs: History 1.1.3b, WH 1.2.3, 2.2.3. as well as Science 2.1.3 and 2.1.5. [Click here](#) to print out the material for your reference.

CBA Scoring Rubric and Notes: The Office of State Public Instruction has created a scoring rubric for the Dig Deep Classroom Based Assessment. [Click here to download](#) and print this rubric for your information.

Method:

A *webquest* is an activity where students direct all or a part of the learning experience through the use of internet-based resources. Here, information is gained from the internet, and students communicate their learning through on-line generators of formatted documents. This activity has been designed to meet various national and state standards in the history classroom, in the science classroom, and in a vocational or elective forensic science classroom. Further, pre-write and writing efforts support the Language Arts classroom, while High School and Beyond (career or work-place writing) efforts are also supported.

This could be used either as a whole class activity with instructional technology support, or as an independent, school-website-based webquest.

Primary Sources for Student Examination (provided):

1. [Letter](#) from Major James Neelly to Former President Thomas Jefferson, October 18, 1809
2. [Letter](#) from Alexander Wilson, May 28, 1811
3. [Public Statement](#) from Captain Gilbert Russell, November 26, 1811
4. [1804 map](#) of North America
5. [1805 map](#) of the Columbia River drawn by William Clark

Primary Sources: A piece of evidence created during the time period under investigation by someone who participated in, witnessed, or commented upon the events that you are studying. It is the surviving record of past events such as photographs, diaries, or artifacts.

Secondary Sources for Student Examination (provided):

1. [Illustration of Grinder's Stand](#)
2. [Schematic Drawing of the Lewis Death Scene](#)
3. [Firearm Diagram](#)
4. [Theories](#)
5. [Articles about the Exhumation](#)
6. [The Mysterious Death of Meriwether Lewis](#)

Secondary Sources: Books, articles, essays, and lectures created, often using primary sources, that describe and interpret a time period after events have taken place.

Materials Needed:

1. Access to a computer lab with internet access (another option is to have students use the library).
2. Maps, visual organizer templates, dictionaries & Lewis and Clark reference materials (recommended)
3. Examples of a formal business letter and a persuasive essay.

Instructions for Teachers:

PREPARATION

A great newspaper article to read in preparation for this lesson (one that inspired the development of this lesson) is "[Starrs still intent on studying remains of Meriwether Lewis](#)" by Carlos Santos, [Richmond Times-Dispatch](#). Teachers may wish to include this in student resources, but it is neither a primary document, nor truly a published interpretation.

"Starrs still intent on studying remains"
Redmond Times-Dispatch article

Students will also need to have an understanding of the basic elements of the Scientific Method. To assist them in their research and writing, make sure they can understand and define the terms below. This may be done either early in this activity or beforehand.

SCIENTIFIC METHOD / INQUIRY:

1. Generate or clarify a question that can be investigated
2. Make a hypothesis about the results of an investigation that includes a prediction with a cause-effect reason.
3. Generate or select a logical plan for, and conduct, a systematic and complex scientific investigation.
4. Identify materials used in the investigation, as well as multiple variables.
5. Gather, record, and organize data, observations, and results via multiple trials.
6. Generate a scientific conclusion including supporting data from an investigation.
7. Describe a reason for a given conclusion using evidence from an investigation.

argument	a reason given in proof or rebuttal: discourse intended to persuade
artifact	object remaining from a particular period
data	factual information (as measurements or statistics) used as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or calculation
exhibit	a document or material object produced and identified in court or before an examiner for use as evidence
fact	a piece of information presented as having objective reality
forensic pathology	a branch of medicine used for legal purposes and concerned with determining cause of death, examination of injuries due to crime and negligence, and examination of tissue samples relevant to crimes; also called <i>forensic science</i> .
hypothesis	a tentative assumption made in order to draw out and test its logical or empirical consequences
opinion	belief stronger than impression and less strong than positive knowledge
primary resource	(as in "Firsthand") obtained by, coming from, or being direct personal observation or experience
scientific method	principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge involving the recognition and formulation of a problem, the collection of data through observation and experiment, and the formulation and testing of hypotheses
testimony	firsthand authentication of a fact : EVIDENCE
theory	a belief, policy, or procedure proposed or followed as the basis of action
thesis	a proposition to be proved

These definitions are from Merriam-Webster Online at: <http://www.m-w.com/> and <http://www.dictionary.com>.

SESSION ONE

Step I.

The mysterious death of Meriwether Lewis serves as a "Cold Case" for investigation by students. This module consists of five sections: engage, explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate. Students will follow the process of research through each one of these steps as they explore the course materials provided and create their own conclusions about the death of Meriwether Lewis.

Cold Case:

A slang term for an unsolved crime.

Familiarize yourself with the materials available in the download section of this lesson plan before introducing the subject to students.

Step II.

Provide students with an 1804 map of North America and the 1805 map of the Columbia River drawn by William Clark. Compare the detail of the Clark map with the relative blankness of the Pacific Northwest on the map created prior to the Lewis and Clark expedition. Use this opportunity to briefly remind the class of the contributions provided by the Lewis and Clark journey and its importance.

1804 map of North
America

1805 map drawn by
William Clark

Tell students that:

- *We know much about the historical journey of Lewis and Clark and have probably even imagined the fears, uncertainties, and dangers that the Corps of Discovery overcame. Only a few years after the journey's end, however, Meriwether Lewis went from finding himself as one of the most celebrated men in the country and a newly appointed governor to being found dead in some woman's house.*
- *Was this a case of suicide? Was this a case of murder? Almost 200 years later, even with all we know about crime scene investigation, we still do not have an answer – only theories.*
- *During this project, you will research the circumstances of Meriwether Lewis' death, by examining evidence and analyzing eyewitness testimony. You will decide for yourself what happened based on these reports and the arguments of prominent scholars about the cause of his death.*
- *As part of your project, you will write a mock one-page letter asking the National Park Service to exhume Lewis' body in order to test the theories about his cause of death. You will also be outlining the theory that you believe is correct and using supporting evidence to back up your choices.*

Step III.

You should continue the lesson with a brief discussion of modern forensics and how the nature of investigation has changed since the time of Meriwether Lewis' death.

To accomplish this, project the "Forensic Science Overview" and "Forensic Evidence" presentations as transparencies or digital projections. The Forensic Science Overview discusses definitions of court roles, crimes and laws. The terminology used may be helpful to students in drafting their letters to the National Park Service. The Forensic Evidence presentation discusses different types of evidence as well as the rules and laws governing its usage in a court of law. Students can take notes during the presentation on the provided handouts.

Forensic Science
Overview Presentation

Forensic Science
Overview Handout

Forensic Evidence
Presentation

Forensic Evidence
Student Handout

SESSION TWO

Step I.

Begin the session by providing students the student assignment sheet by either directing them to: http://www.washingtonhistoryonline.org/lewisandclark/lewis_webquest.html or by printing out the following for them:

Student Assignment Sheet:
The Mysterious Death of Meriwether Lewis

Step II.

Students will begin by reading a summary of the death of Meriwether Lewis. Ask them to complete the associated worksheet in-class.

Student Reading:
The Mysterious Death of Meriwether Lewis

Student Worksheet:
The Mysterious Death of Meriwether Lewis

After students have completed their worksheets, engage them in discussion about the material they have read.

Points for Discussion:

- *After reading this handout, what are your initial impressions of what happened to Meriwether Lewis?*

- *Do you think that any of these individuals may have possessed a bias towards Lewis? Why or why not? Does bias affect testimony?*
- *What kinds of artifacts or sources may still be available today for investigating a death of a person some 200 years ago?*
- *What kind of differences are there between modern forensic investigations and those conducted in the early 1800's? What kinds of new evidence are available to forensic studies due to modern technology?*

Step III.

Ask the class to explore three pieces of testimony about the death of Meriwether Lewis. Remind them that they will need to use their Student Worksheet: Testimonies during their readings to note important information. Have them work in groups to complete the worksheet.

Major James Neelly's
Letter, October 18, 1809

Alexander Wilson's
Letter, May 28, 1811

Gilbert Russell's Public
Statement, November 26, 1811

Student Worksheet:
Testimonies

SESSION THREE

Step I.

Bring students back together to discuss their explorations.

Ask them to describe some of the things that they learned from reading the testimonies:

- *Did you notice any contradictions in testimony? What were they? Why do you think these contradictions exist?*
- *How does testimony differ over a period of time? Do you think that the Neelly letter of 1809 should be regarded in a different light than the Wilson letter and Russell statement from 1811? Why or why not?*

Step II.

Tell the class that they will now be examining a series of four exhibits regarding the death of Meriwether Lewis: an illustration of the place where he died, a schematic drawing of the room in which he died, a firearm diagram and a map of the key locations described in the testimonies. As you provide them with this information, ask them to consider the exhibits in connection with the letters and statements, using all evidence available to try and construct a clear picture of what happened the night of Meriwether Lewis' death. Have them work individually to fill out the Student Worksheet: Exhibits.

Exhibits 1-4

Student Worksheet:
Exhibits

Step III.

Have students work in groups to complete the Pre-Writing Organizer I.

Pre-Writing
Organizer I

Provide a range of materials so that students can located additional information about the time period.

SESSION FOUR

Step I.

Help students develop the guiding Historical Question: "What was the cause of death for Meriwether Lewis"?

Discuss the difference between primary and secondary sources. Explain that the testimonies read previously were primary sources while theories and interpretations are secondary. You may wish to

discuss how to evaluate the credibility of a source as well as issues of bias and perspective by considering:

- *Were they in a position to witness this event firsthand?*
- *Are there reasons that their account may have a bias?*

Have students look at contrasting accounts of the same historical event.

Student Reading:
Theories and Interpretations

"What really happened to
Meriwether Lewis?" by Dee Brown

"The Columbia Country and the Dissolution of Meriwether
Lewis – Speculation and Interpretation" by David Nicandri

Student Worksheet:
Theories

Tell students:

- *You will be developing your own theories about the events of October 10 and 11, 1809. After you have read the interpretations of historians and researchers, review the worksheets that you have completed. You will notice that these interpretations vary from one another. Why do you think that is?*
- *Look for connections between their theories and your own. Consider how the exhibits, testimony and background information that you have relates to these ideas.*
- *On your own sheet of paper, outline how you believe Meriwether Lewis died. Give both the cause of death and the suspect (who or what caused his death).*
- *Bring this paper and all of your worksheets to class as these will be used in your final arguments about the nature of his death.*

After students have read through the provided handouts, you may wish to assign as homework the [Pre-Writing Organizer II](#).

Pre-Writing
Organizer II

SESSION FIVE

Step I.

Refer back to Exhibit IV and review the places traveled by Meriwether Lewis, as well as the routes that he took and the route that he was on when he died.

Step II.

Have students collect all worksheets and pre-writing materials.

Allow students the rest of the class period to complete their [Thesis Organizer Worksheet](#), providing reference and research materials as needed for them to connect their ideas and formulate an outline for their final paper. You may wish to refer them to the way in which the assigned articles used evidence to support their argument.

SESSION SIX

Step I.

Provide students with the student checklist. Work towards shared understanding of the requirements for this curricular unit. Clarify it as needed based on student input.

Forensic Examination of Artifacts
Student Checklist

Step II.

Have students write the rough draft of their letter in class. Inform them that they will be writing a formal business letter to the National Parks Service in which they will be expressing their support for

the exhumation of Meriwether Lewis' body for forensic analysis. Allow them to access computers, reference materials and classroom technology as needed.

In order to complete this assignment successfully, they will need to utilize an online cover letter generator (located at: <http://www.niefs.net/resumes/coverletter.htm>).

At the end of the class period, ask them to turn in all materials used during the unit to you. Students may use the student checklist to verify that they have completed all necessary items. The evaluation rubric should be used to evaluate and grade all papers submitted.

Forensic Examination of Artifacts Evaluation Rubric
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