

# THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY: *THE LEWIS & CLARK STORY*

A Reader's Theatre written by Mr. Jake Miller, Cumberland Valley School District of PA  
For The Gilder-Lehrman Institute



## CAST (18 Roles):

1. Capt. Meriwether Lewis
  2. Capt. William Clark
  3. Sacagawea
  4. President Thomas Jefferson
  5. York – Clark's Slave
  6. Partisan – the Teton Chief
  7. Sgt. Charles Floyd (dies)
  8. Prairie Dog – must be fast!
  9. George Drouillard  
(interpreter and hunter)
  10. Toussaint Charbonneau  
(Sacagawea's French husband)
  14. American Indian Extra
  15. Seaman (Lewis's dog)
  16. Scene Clapper
  17. Narrators 1 & 2
  18. Paparazzi
11. Jean Baptiste (Sacagawea's baby)
  12. Cameahwait – Shoshone Chief
  13. Animal Person (Horse, Bison)

**PROPS:** Tea cups, meter sticks (work as both fake rifles and oars), American Indian head dress, gifts for Indians, horse mask (if possible), scene clapper (if possible), dog ears / collar (if possible), pajamas (for Jefferson to wear)

## SCENE 1: Beginning with an Idea

*In Scene: Jefferson, Lewis*

*NARRATOR 1: President Jefferson is seated at his White House desk, opening a letter in his pajamas. He reads the contents of it and stands aghast.*

**JEFFERSON** (surprised): My heavens! What great luck we have here! I've always said the French never fail to disappoint.

**JEFFERSON** (while screaming off screen): Secretary – get me Meriwether Lewis; we're about to buy Louisiana for \$15 million!

*NARRATOR 2: Lewis runs on-stage and stops abruptly at Pres. Jefferson's desk. As he stops, Jefferson looks up and smiles. Lewis is a young, handsome, confident man. He smiles a Colgate smile.*

LEWIS (while saluting the President): Mr. President, I am your secretary.

JEFFERSON: Yes, yes. Capt. Lewis, we have much important business to discuss. Please, sit down. Have some tea.

LEWIS (while sitting at Jefferson's desk): With certainty, Mr. President!

JEFFERSON: I've just arranged for a purchase of the Louisiana Territory for \$15 million, and I'm going to need someone to explore it for me.

LEWIS: Is that so?!

JEFFERSON: And, if we are able to find that Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean, the purchase will pay for itself. Will you explore it for me?

LEWIS: Most certainly, Mr. President. However, I do ask one thing.

JEFFERSON: Anything, Captain.

LEWIS: I would like to have be able to choose Captain William Clark as my 2<sup>nd</sup> in command.

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SCENE 2: An Old Friend

*In Scene: Lewis, Clark, York, Animal*

*NARRATOR 1: Clark is with his slave, York. Clark, who is a bit older than Lewis, is quiet, calm, and plump. His slave, York, is strong and is unafraid to speak to white men – a rarity in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Together they are attempting to hook a plough to the Animal character, who is playing an Horse. Lewis comes rushing in.*

LEWIS: Captain Clark, Captain Clark! Greetings! Greetings!

*NARRATOR 2: Clark, startled from his work, stops fiddling with the plough. He walks away while York continues to attempt to attach the plough to the Horse.*

CLARK: Lewis, is that you?

LEWIS: It's great to see you, Clark.

CLARK (after the two chest bump or do a funky handshake, or give a quick "bro hug"): I haven't seen you since we've fought the Northwest Indian War. To what do I owe the pleasure?

LEWIS: Well, sir, back then I learned much from your leadership. I've come to repay you for that debt by asking you to join me on an expedition to the West.

CLARK: An expedition?

LEWIS: Yes, it is not yet publicly known, but Pres. Jefferson and the Congress have negotiated a deal with the French to purchase the Louisiana Territory for \$15 million!

CLARK: America doesn't have that kind of money! Do we?

*NARRATOR 21 As York continues to try to fashion the plough to the Horse, the Horse grows temperamental and starts grunting noises and kicking its back legs.*

YORK (while petting the Horse and giving it some oats): Settle down there, fella.

LEWIS: Wow, that slave of yours is great with animals.

CLARK: Indeed, he is.

YORK: Thank you, mister.

*NARRATOR 2: Horse brushes up against York like a cat and makes a variety of horse noises (neigh, perah, eeya).*

LEWIS: So, as I said, to repay that debt, I'd like you to join me and help lead an expedition to search for American Indian tribes and even the Northwest Passage.

CLARK: Hmmmm. I could use a bit of adventure in my uneventful life. Is it just the 3 of us?

YORK: I'm coming with?! Woo-hoo! (York clutches his stomach).

LEWIS: We'll hire 27 other soldiers to join us. I'm currently studying plants, animals, science, and medicine, so, with your mapmaking skills and positive relations with the American Indians, we'll succeed. I promise.

CLARK: My friend, I shall join you hand and heart. What do you say, York?

YORK: I'm not feeling so well.

LEWIS: What's ailing you?

YORK: Supper seems to be disagreeing with me.

LEWIS: You should take one of these.

YORK: What is it?

LEWIS: I call them "Thunderbolt pills." Take 2 or 3 when you feel ill. It cures everything!

*NARRATOR 1: York takes the pills with some water. Soon after he grabs his buttocks and runs out of the room.*

CLARK: What in Sam Hill happened?

LEWIS: I'm not sure. I haven't taken one of them yet.

YORK (from outside the room): These things gave me instant diarrhea!!!!!! [PAUSES] It's not funny!

CLARK (while slapping his knee): Not a bit, York.

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**SCENE 3: A Journey of a 1,000 Miles Begins With One Step**  
*In Scene: Lewis, Clark, York, Animal, Drouillard, Floyd, Seaman*

*NARRATOR 2: It is May 14, 1804. Clark and Lewis stand over their crew.*

LEWIS (in a loud voice): Today, friends, we make history. Today America moves west!

*NARRATOR 1: The crowd erupts in cheers and applause. Drouillard grabs his gun and fires it into the air in celebration. Everyone else helps one another onto the boat before Drouillard hops on last.*

CLARK: Let's load up for the travels. C'mon boys!

SEAMAN: Woof!

DROUILLARD: You heard the Captains. Load up!

*NARRATOR 1: Everyone is now in the boat. Clark stands at the front of the boat, pointing into the distance. Floyd and Drouillard use their oars to paddle upstream.*

*NARRATOR 2: It almost looks like Washington's Crossing of the Delaware.*

CLARK: Don't ruin the moment, Narrator 2.

LEWIS (sits and grabs a pen and paper): Dear Mr. President. Today we embark on a great journey. May God bless us with His and your best wishes. Sincerely, Meriwether Lewis.

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**SCENE 4: A Close Encounter**  
*In Scene: Lewis, Clark, York, Animal, Drouillard, Floyd, Seaman, Partisan, Indian Extra*

*NARRATOR 1: The date is August 18, 1804. It is Captain Lewis's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, and Capt. Clark just celebrated his 34<sup>th</sup>. The Corps have rowed themselves into the territory of the dangerous, hostile Teton Lakota.*

SGT FLOYD: Look, up ahead, on the hills!

*NARRATOR 2: There stands Partisan with the American Indian Extra. With his headdress and weapons, he looks down upon the Missouri River with a hate-filled eye. Seaman begins barking with ferocity.*

CLARK (disgustedly): Oh, no. It's the Teton Lakota!

LEWIS: Why do you say that?

CLARK: Yes, the Teton Lakota are a savage people. They control the Missouri with an iron fist. We must pay a handsome tribute to them to pass through their lands.

YORK (while gesturing back to all the gifts): Thankfully we brought all these gifts.

CLARK: The problem is they'll want to claim all of it.

FLOYD: Or the hide from our backs.

*NARRATOR 1: The Corps lands and is greeted by the Partisan and American Indian Extra. Partisan runs around and encourages The CLASS to join him in an American Indian war whoops. He then stops and approaches Lewis.*

LEWIS: We bring greetings from the Great Chief Jefferson, of the American clan. He is the ultimate father, and would like to bestow upon you many gifts.

*NARRATOR 2: Drouillard translates Lewis's words in sign language. York and Floyd bring gifts for the chief, including the Presidential Medallion.*

PARTISAN: We do not trust your kind. You best be on your way as quickly as possible. These gifts will be taken as a cost for your passage. Do not cross back this way.

*NARRATOR 1: Drouillard signs Partisan's words to Lewis. The rest of the Expedition raise their weapons and point them at the Indians. The Teton Lakota do the same.*

*NARRATOR 2: Seaman goes over to the Teton chief and lifts his leg, as if to pee on him.*

LEWIS: Seaman, get over here! Bad dog! Bad!

*NARRATOR 1: The dog returns to Lewis's side. The Corps back away slowly and board their boat, pushing off back into the Missouri River.*

DROUILLARD: Indeed, the Lakota, who are drunk on their whiskey and inflamed at the presence of the white men, planned to attack us.

FLOYD: A few weeks pass, and I get a really bad tummy ache... ARRRRRGH!

LEWIS: Here, take two of these (hands Floyd two of Dr. Rush's Thunderbolts).

FLOYD: No thanks (throws them aside).

*NARRATOR 1: But not before Sgt. Floyd gets severely sick and dies, becoming the only death on the trip.*

*NARRATOR 2: How'd he die?*

*NARRATOR 1: Most don't know, but many modern doctors suspect his appendix burst.*

FLOYD: For the love of MILEY CYRUS! It came in like a wrecking ball!

*NARRATOR 2: Floyd falls to the ground, gripping his side, and dies very painfully.*

YORK: I think I'd rather die than take those again.

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### **SCENE 5: On the Hunt**

*In Scene: Lewis, Clark, York, Animal, Drouillard, Seaman, Prairie Dog*

*NARRATOR 1: The date is September 7, 1804. Drouillard is out hunting. The Animal is dressed like a buffalo.*

DROUILLARD: There's one!

*NARRATOR 2: Drouillard shoots at a buffalo. It groans loud and falls over hard, with its four legs straight into the air. He goes over to cut up the buffalo to take back and feed the camp.*

DROUILLARD: I had to – these guys eat almost 9 lbs. of meat every day!

*NARRATOR 1: After receiving several letters from Pres. Jefferson, Lewis has been asked to send home a live animal. Lewis, Clark, and York decide to catch a prairie dog.*

CLARK (while attempting to catch the prairie dog): These things are exhaustingly fast.

PRAIRIE DOG: Bark!

LEWIS: No time for talk, Clark!

PRAIRIE DOG: Bark!

*NARRATOR 2: Lewis, Clark, York, and Seaman take turns trying to catch the prairie dog until it runs into a hole (under a desk).*

YORK: Let's flood them out!

LEWIS: Now we're talking!

CLARK: York, take the Horse up there and divert the stream to this hole. This dog should pop right out! (York takes the Horse and does as instructed by his master).

*NARRATOR 1: However, it takes several hours. The two men grow impatient, and, all of the sudden, the dog pops out right into Lewis's lap.*

LEWIS (like a 5-year-old opening gifts): Clark, I've caught it! I've caught it!

CLARK: I'll get the cage!

LEWIS (while placing the animal in the cage): I hope the President enjoys this little guy.

PRAIRIE DOG (in a sad tone): Baaaaaark...

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### **SCENE 6: The Important Lady**

*In Scene: Lewis, Clark, York, Animal, Drouillard, Seaman, Charboneau, Sacagawea, Jean-Baptiste, Paparazzi*

*NARRATOR 2: The date is November 4, 1804. The expedition row their way up the Missouri, until they reached what is modern day Montana. The men leave the boat and began building a fort, which they called Ft. Mandan (after the tribe of American Indians living there).*

CLARK: However, we were about to find their greatest resource there – a young American Indian woman named Sacagawea.

*NARRATOR 1: She stands at the front, hands on hips, and smiles, as the wind blows in her hair. The paparazzi comes up and snaps a picture of her.*

*NARRATOR 2: Clark meets a Frenchman named Charbonneau, who is much like Lewis – handsome, talkative, and maybe overconfident. However, Clark hires him as an oarsman and guide.*

CLARK: Welcome aboard the Corps of Discovery, monsieur!

CHARBONNEAU (speaking in a French accent): But I must also bring my wife with me.

LEWIS: This journey is much too dangerous for a woman.

CHARBONNEAU: But she is very pregnant, monsieur.

SACAGAWEA (while holding her stomach): I will be traveling on this journey. I will not leave my family. (Paparazzi photos).

CLARK: Lewis, let's not be impractical, here. Of course you may join us, Sacagawea. (*Stepping aside, to whisper to Lewis*) Besides, she's Shoshone. She can help us negotiate with the tribe.

LEWIS: And then we can use their horses to help us in our travels.

*NARRATOR 2: At the tender age of 17, she is about 7 months pregnant, Sacagawea has a strong confidence about her, much more than her husband.*

CLARK: How do you say your name? Suck like the Cowboys-ah?

SACAGAWEA: No, it's Sah-cah-guh-way-uh. (Paparazzi writes it down)

CLARK: I'm going to call you "Janey."

*NARRATOR 1: Two months pass, and Sacagawea puts her hand on her stomach. She lies on her back. She's ready to give birth!*

*LEWIS (while approaching Sacagawea like a quarterback): Set, Red 52, Omaha, Omaha, Omaha Nation. Hike!*

*NARRATOR 2: Sacagawea snaps the baby doll like a football right into Lewis's hands. Clark approaches.*

SACAGAWEA (as Lewis hands her the baby): And the name for this cute little guy is Jean-Baptiste. (Paparazzi photos).

CLARK: John Cena?

SACAGAWEA, CHARBONNEAU, and LEWIS (in unison): NO!

CLARK: I'm going to nickname him "Pomp."

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### **SCENE 7: Left for Dead**

*In Scene: Lewis, Clark, York, Drouillard, Seaman, Charboneau, Sacagawea, Jean-Baptiste, Cameahwait, Paparazzi*

*NARRATOR 1: The date is August 12, 1805. The Corps are in the boat, paddling, but their morale is at a new low. They have experienced some major problems.*

CHARBONNEAU: I got us lost and tipped over a few of our boats.

SACAGAWEA (jumping into the water): I then saved a boatload of artifacts and journals! (Paparazzi photos).

CLARK (while wiping sweat from his brow): I navigated us around the Great Falls for 3 grueling weeks.

DROUILLARD (in a disgusted tone): They weren't so "great" after all.

JEAN-BAPTISTE: I have a poopy diaper.

YORK: Did you take a Thunderbolt?



*NARRATOR 2: Worst of all, the Missouri River finally came to an end. Lewis was sure here he'd find the Northwest Passage.*

*NARRATOR 1: Lewis, Seaman, and Drouillard start running uphill with a huge smile on their faces yelling...*

LEWIS & DROUILLARD (in unison): It's here! It's here! I know the Pacific is here!

*NARRATOR 2: However, when Lewis crosses over the Continental Divide, he does not find the Pacific Ocean.*

LEWIS: I. Have. Found. More. Mountains?! C'mon... man!

DROUILLARD: Today we call these the Rocky Mountains, which are quite far from the Pacific Ocean.

YORK: And we were lost in them for weeks. We soon became starved, crazed, and tired.

SACAGAWEA: Finally the captains let me navigate, and I led us into an American Indian camp. It was that of my Shoshone. (Paparazzi photos as she stands with the baby).

*NARRATOR 1: The Shoshone are led by a great leader by the name of Cameahwait (Com-UH-wait), who stands, cautious, with the American Indian Extra.*

*NARRATOR 2: Lewis, Clark, York, Drouillard, Charbonneau, and the Animal are crawling on all fours, whimpering in pain and hunger.*

CAMEAHWAIT: Yes, and these filthy vermin came here and, instead of eating fish we offered them, killed and ate the dogs for food.

*NARRATOR 1: Lewis, Clark, York, Drouillard, and Charbonneau are licking their fingers and finally look to be okay. Seaman runs and hides.*

CAMEAHWAIT: That is, until we kill them. Except... no... that can't be!

SACAGAWEA (walking into the camp from offstage): Cameahwait?

CAMEAHWAIT: Sacagawea?

CLARK: You two know one another?

SACAGAWEA: Yes! Yes! This is my brother!

*NARRATOR 1: The two Shoshone siblings embrace in a strong clutch. Paparazzi takes some photos.*

CAMEAHWAIT: I have not seen you since you were captured 4 years ago.

SACAGAWEA: It is good to see you leading our people. Please, meet your nephew (hands him Jean Baptiste).

CAMEAHWAIT (while clutching the baby): We welcome you, brothers Lewis & Clark, to our village. Thank you for reuniting me with my sister. For that, I give you 20 of my most prized horses.

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**SCENE 8: Westward... Home!**

*In Scene: Lewis, Clark, York, Animal, Drouillard, Seaman, Charboneau, Sacagawea, Jean-Baptiste, Jefferson, Paparazzi*

*NARRATOR 2: The Corps departs the Shoshone camp, and eventually paddle their canoes down the mighty Columbia River. Eventually they reach the Pacific Ocean on November 20, 1805, in what is now the border between Washington and Oregon.*

CLARK (standing at the front of the canoe and pointing ahead) Ocean in view! Oh! The joy!

*NARRATOR 1: When they arrive there, the group was torn about what to do – build camp there, build camp down from the Pacific, or begin their return journey. So the whole Corps voted on it.*

YORK: The vote was revolutionary, as it marked the 1<sup>st</sup> time a black man, though a slave, was allowed to vote in something that was American.

SACAGAWEA: Likewise, since I was also able to vote, it marked the 1<sup>st</sup> time a woman, though an American Indian, was also allowed to vote.

LEWIS: So it's settled; we'll make camp just to the South of the river. I'll name...

CLARK (cutting him off): I'm going to nickname it Fort Clatsop.

LEWIS: Cheese and rice Clark, are you going to nickname everything?

CLARK: #Nicknames

*NARRATOR 2: The group of 29 men, Sacagawea, and Jean-Baptiste would camp there at Fort Clatsop for about 3.5 months.*

DROUILLARD: And it seriously rained like the whole time.

CHARBONNEAU (while crying): Oiu, oui! I don't ever want to see water again!

JEAN-BAPTISTE: Goo goo gaga!

*NARRATOR 1: On March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1806, the group began their return trip. Sacagawea proved to be incredibly important.*

SACAGAWEA: The captains permitted me to lead us home (Paparazzi photos).

*NARRATOR 1: When the group returned, they were hailed as heroes.*

JEFFERSON (singing): Let Heaven and Nature sing! Let Heaaaaaaaaven, let heaaaaaaaaven and naaaaaature sinnnnnnnnng!

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### **SCENE 9**

*In Scene: Lewis, Clark, York, Animal, Drouillard, Seaman, Charboneau, Sacagawea, Jean-Baptiste, Jefferson, Paparazzi*

*NARRATOR 2: So what happened to each of the characters after their triumphant return down the Missouri River to St. Louis on September 23, 1806?*

JEFFERSON: I served as president for the next 3 years, which were some of the worst of my life. I left hating this stupid job (kicks the ground and storms out).

CLARK: The maps I created finally charted the unknown West. I went on to live for another 30 years, serving as the First Superintendent of Indian Affairs and the longest diplomat to our indigenous people.

*NARRATOR 1: Seaman and the Horse high-paw / hoof.*

SEAMAN: Woof! Woof!

ANIMAL: Neigh!!

YORK: There is plenty of mystery behind my experience after the Corps of Discovery. Some say I failed at business, while others say I escaped from Clark, earning my freedom while living among the Crow American Indians.

DROUILLARD: I became a major fur trader in the West, but I was killed by the Crow in 1810.

*NARRATOR 1: Indian extra comes up from behind and kills Drouillard. Drouillard dies dramatically.*

SACAGAWEA: Charboneau and I were killed in anti-white raids during the War of 1812. Not much else is known beyond that.

JEAN-BAPTISTE: I attended college, paid for by Capt. Clark. He took me in as guest student, and later adopted me after my parents were killed. I went on to be a very wealthy trapper and gold miner.

PAPARAZZI: We love you JBC! (starts taking photos and fawning).

LEWIS: I was named the First Governor of Louisiana Territory, but died 3 years later. There is plenty of mystery behind my death, but it was probably a suicide, but possibly a murder.

Fin.