Student Handout 1: Timeline of the Lewis and Clark Journey
(adapted from PBS online)

1804

May 14: Expedition sets off from Camp Dubois “under a jentle brease,” Clark writes.

August 3: First official council between representatives of United States and western Indians occurs north of present-day Omaha, when Corps of Discovery meets with small delegation of Oto and Missouri Indians.

August 30: Expedition holds friendly council with Yankton Sioux (near what is now Yankton, South Dakota). According to Yankton oral tradition, when a baby is born, Lewis wraps him in a United States flag and declares him “an American.”

October 24: North of what is now Bismarck, North Dakota, the Corps of Discovery reaches the earth-lodge villages of the Mandans and Hidatsas. Some 4,500 people live there—more than live in St. Louis or even Washington, D.C. at the time.

November 4: The captains hire Toussaint Charbonneau, a French Canadian fur trader living among the Hidatsas, as an interpreter. His young Shoshone wife, Sacagawea, had been captured by the Hidatsas several years earlier and then sold to Charbonneau (along with another Shoshone girl). Having been told that the Shoshones live at the headwaters of the Missouri and have many horses, the captains believe the two will be helpful when the expedition reaches the mountains.

1805

January: The Mandans perform their sacred “buffalo calling” ceremony and a few days later, a herd shows up. The Indians and explorers hunt buffalo together. Several expedition members get frostbite, as does an Indian boy whose toes Lewis has to amputate, without anesthesia or a surgical saw.

August 8: Sacagawea recognizes a landmark—Beaverhead Rock, north of present-day Dillon, Montana—and says they are nearing the river’s headwaters and home of her people, the Shoshones.

August 17: Having discovered a village of Shoshones, Lewis tries to negotiate for the horses he now knows are all-important to cross the daunting mountains. On this day, Clark and the rest of the expedition arrive and Sacagawea is brought in to help translate. Remarkably, the Shoshone chief, Cameahwait, turns out to be her brother. The captain names the spot Camp Fortunate.

August 31: With 29 horses, one mule, and a Shoshone guide called Old Toby, the expedition set off overland.

Late September: After debating what to do about the strangers who have suddenly arrived in their homeland, the Nez Perce (on the advice of an old woman named Watkuweis) decide to befriend them. The men get sick from gorging themselves on salmon and camas roots. A chief named Twisted Hair shows them how to use fire to hollow out pine trees and make new canoes.

October 19: Lewis presented Yellept of the Walla Wallas with a small peace medal and promised to return.

November 20: Captain Clark speaks of presenting medals and engaging in trade with the Chinooks.

November 24: To make the crucial decision of where to winter, the captains decide to put the matter to a vote. Significantly, in addition to the others, Clark’s slave, York, and Sacagawea are allowed to vote. This is 60 years before slaves in the United States would be emancipated and enfranchised and a century before either Indians or women are granted full rights of citizenship.

1806

April 27/28: The principal chief of the Walla Wallas, Yellept, and six men of his nation welcome the Corps back.

May—late June: The expedition arrives back with the Nez Perce but have to wait for the snows to melt on the Bitterroots before trying to cross them. They play a game of “base” with the Indians, who once again provide the explorers with food. Lewis calls them “the most hospitable, honest and sincere people that we have met with in our voyage.”

July 26-27: Heading back toward the Missouri, Lewis encounters eight Blackfeet warriors.