

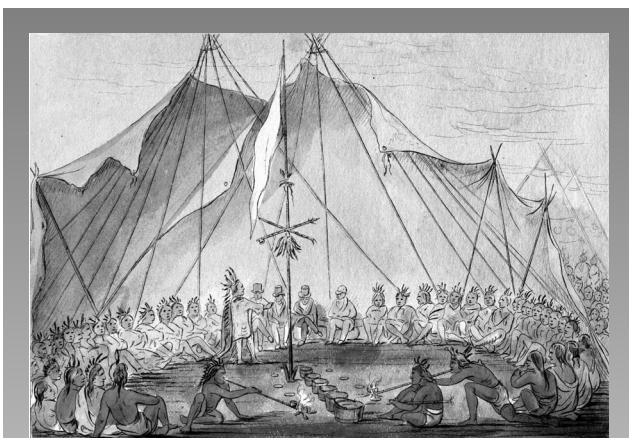
Politics and Diplomacy

At 4 p.m. on May 14, 1804, the Corps of Discovery crossed the Mississippi River and entered the Missouri. The three boats rode low in the water with about 30 tons of supplies and equipment, enough to fill three modern semi trailers. The group was on its way, going against the

current of the mighty river.

Jefferson was aware that many Indian groups lived in the Louisiana Territory. The expedition was a United States government mission, so one of Lewis and Clark's duties was to begin diplomatic relations with the Indian tribes they encountered. United States law defined Indian tribes as foreign nations,

no different from France or Spain. So it was important for Lewis and Clark to greet the Indians with official ceremony. They would explain to the Indian nations that the United States now claimed the land and wanted peaceful relations with them. The United States also wanted to establish trade with the Indians.



Council with the Teton Sioux, 1832 (copied 1866) by George Catlin — Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis

Almost 30 years after Lewis and Clark's expedition, artist George Catlin met the Teton Sioux and painted this image of a council meeting.

During the expedition's travel across what is now the state of Missouri, it encountered small groups of Indians but did not pass any major villages. The men must have wondered where the Indians were until they learned that all the tribes in the lower Missouri River region were out hunting buffalo away from the river. It was not until they reached the area near present-day Council Bluffs, Iowa, that they held their first meeting, or council, with Indian leaders — 14 members of the Oto and Missouri tribes.

Continuing on, they entered the territory of the powerful Sioux Indians. The Sioux territory spread all the way from present-day Wisconsin west to the Rocky Mountains. The Sioux sought to control traffic on the river and wanted to keep the expedition from heading upriver and providing guns and trade goods to their rivals and enemies. They saw the armed boats piled with supplies and did not want the expedition to continue. After a tense standoff where guns and bows and arrows were drawn, peace prevailed and Lewis and Clark continued upriver. They learned that not every encounter with Indians would be easy.



Jefferson peace medal, 1801 (reproduction)

What do you think this is? What designs are on it? What message might it communicate to you if you were an Indian not familiar with Euro-American gestures, such as shaking hands?

Gifts were the universal symbol of goodwill. European nations had been giving peace medals to Indian leaders for years. One style that Lewis and Clark gave showed President Jefferson's image on the front. Lewis and Clark took along at least 89 silver peace medals of three different kinds and five different sizes. They presented the medals to Indian leaders, giving larger medals to the most important men. But making that distinction was not always easy.

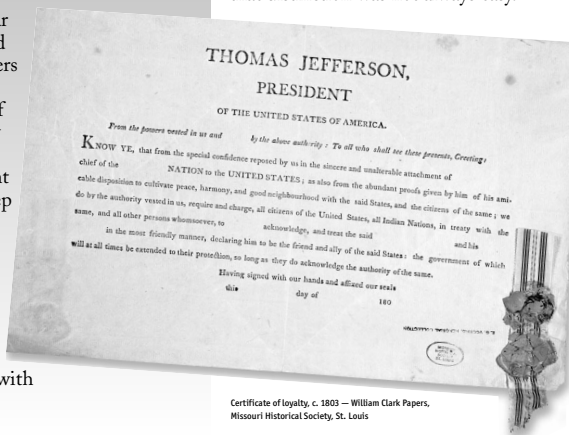
Activity

Medals were designed to communicate peace and friendship. Design your own medal below to communicate these qualities. Keep in mind that not every culture has the same symbols for peace.



The structure of tribal government was not the same as that of the American government, and often Lewis and Clark had to guess at the ranks of Indian leaders. Do you think they always got it right? Lewis and Clark called this process "making chiefs."

Lewis and Clark also gave certificates of loyalty and American flags to Indians. The certificates, along with the medals and flags, were designed to show other nations that the Indians were supposedly allied with the United States.



Certificate of loyalty, c. 1803 — William Clark Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis