WHAT IF SACAJAWEA WASN'T THERE?

Following the Evidence Through the Lewis & Clark Expedition

GRADE 4 HISTORICAL INQUIRY • TEACHER LESSON GUIDE



THE BIG QUESTION

How might the Lewis and Clark expedition - and the history that followed - have been different without Sacajawea?



Teacher Quick Start

AT A GLANCE

Everything you need to decide how to teach this lesson - before you start reading the details.

GRADE	4	SHORT LESSON	40-45 min
VIDEO	6:01 total	EXTENDED	65-75 min
BIG SKILL	Evidence -> inference	FINAL THINKING	Claim + evidence + consequence
COMPANION	Student inquiry packet	BEST USE	One class period or extended inquiry

Before class

- Choose which PBS excerpt on Sacajawea best fits your needs.
- Print or open the companion student inquiry activities.
- Have pencils or digital response tools ready.
- Display the role words: guide, interpreter, diplomat, provider, healer, teacher, rescuer, caregiver, and problem solver.
- Create a board space labeled: Role, Evidence, and Without Her.

The lesson in one sentence

TEACHER PURPOSE

Students use specific evidence about Sacajawea's roles to build careful, reasonable explanations of what might have changed without her while distinguishing historical evidence from reasonable inference.

If time is tight

KEEP	SHORTEN OR SAVE FOR LATER
Survival hook • video evidence • one role discussion • domino chain • exit claim	Full role ranking • source-lens comparison • structured debate

KEEP THIS CORE THINKING SKILL

Keep the distinction between **EVIDENCE** and **INFERENCE** at the heart of the lesson. Students should know what the historical evidence tells us—and what we can reasonably infer from it.

Idaho Standards Alignment

This lesson intentionally integrates Grade 4 Idaho Social Studies and English Language Arts. Primary standards are directly taught and assessed; supporting standards are reinforced through the inquiry activities.

PRIMARY IDAHO STANDARDS

SOCIAL STUDIES • 4.SS.1.3	**Identify major groups and significant individuals, immigrant experiences, and their impact on western expansion and the creation of the State of Idaho.** Lesson connection: Students examine Sacajawea and the Lewis and Clark expedition, then evaluate how her contributions affected the journey and western expansion.
ELA • 4.RC.TE.3	**Refer to details and examples in grade-level texts when explaining what texts say explicitly and when drawing inferences from texts.** Lesson connection: Evidence Detective, role/evidence work, the Domino Effect, discussion, and written arguments all require evidence-based inference.
ELA • 4.RC.NF.6e	**Combine information from two texts on the same topic, noting important similarities and differences in focus and information provided.** Lesson connection: The extended inquiry compares expedition journals, Shoshone oral histories, contemporary Shoshone voices, and later public memory.
ELA • 4.W.RW.2	**Write arguments that introduce the topic, express a clear opinion supported with facts, details, and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.** Lesson connection: Students build and defend a claim using evidence, reasoning, a likely consequence, and a counterclaim.

SUPPORTING ELA STANDARDS

STANDARD	WHAT IT ASKS	WHERE IT SHOWS UP
4.RC.NF.6b	Explain events, ideas, or concepts in historical texts, including what happened and why.	Cause/effect and the Domino Effect chain.
4.RC.NF.6c	Explain informational-text structures, including cause/effect, sequence, comparison, and problem/solution.	Cause/effect reasoning and source comparison.
4.RC.NF.6d	Explain how authors use evidence and reasons to support specific points in texts.	Students identify which evidence supports a claim and when a claim is too strong.

TODAY'S STANDARDS IN KID LANGUAGE

- ☐ I can use evidence to explain what Sacajawea did and why it mattered.
- ☐ I can make an inference and support it with evidence.
- ☐ I can explain how one event can cause another event to happen.
- ☐ I can make a claim and defend it with facts and reasons.

Teacher note: Use the kid-language statements as the posted learning targets or read them aloud before the inquiry begins.

Shared Instructional Foundation

Learning goals

- Identify and describe several roles Sacajawea performed during the expedition.
- Use details from a documentary and quoted journal entries as historical evidence.
- Construct a reasonable 'what if' explanation by linking an action to an immediate and longer-term consequence.
- Distinguish a supported inference from a fact stated directly in a source.
- Recognize that written records and Indigenous oral histories can preserve different perspectives.

Student-friendly success criteria

I CAN...

• name at least three roles Sacajawea performed.

• cite a specific moment or statement from the video.

• explain how her absence might have changed what happened next.

• use might, could, likely, probably, and because when discussing an outcome that is inferred from evidence.

Academic vocabulary

WORD	STUDENT-FRIENDLY MEANING
guide / pilot	uses knowledge of places and routes to help others travel
interpreter	helps people understand one another's languages
diplomat	helps groups communicate, negotiate, and build peaceful relationships
provider	finds or supplies something others need
healer	uses knowledge and care to help others who are sick or injured
teacher	shares knowledge or demonstrates a skill
evidence	information from a source that supports an idea
inference	a reasonable idea formed by combining evidence with what we know
oral history	knowledge about the past remembered and shared by speaking and listening
indispensable	so important that success would be very difficult without it

Short Inquiry: 40-45 Minutes

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How might the expedition have been different without Sacajawea?

0-5 MIN | HOOK: SURVIVAL CHALLENGE	STUDENT ACTION
TEACH / ASK Ask: If you were traveling through unfamiliar mountains, what knowledge and relationships would your group need?	Think, pair, and name one need: food, routes, communication, shelter, medicine, or trust.

5-8 MIN | INTRODUCE THE MYSTERY	STUDENT ACTION
TEACH / ASK Introduce the essential question. Explain that students will separate evidence from 'what if' inferences.	Read the success criteria and make an initial prediction.

8-16 MIN | WATCH + COLLECT EVIDENCE	STUDENT ACTION
TEACH / ASK Show the 6:01 cut. Pause briefly after each excerpt so students can record one action and one role.	Collect evidence in the tracker / student packet.

16-25 MIN | BUILD THE ROLE CHART	STUDENT ACTION
TEACH / ASK Ask for the exact video detail that supports each proposed role. Press for precision.	Share evidence and revise vague statements.

25-34 MIN | MODEL THE DOMINO EFFECT	STUDENT ACTION
TEACH / ASK Model: without Sacajawea's interpretation help -> weaker communication -> difficulty negotiating for horses -> a more dangerous or unsuccessful mountain crossing.	Create a second chain independently or with a partner.

34-40 MIN | DISCUSS THE CLAIM	STUDENT ACTION
TEACH / ASK Ask: Is 'savior' a fair description, too strong, or somewhere in between? Require evidence and respectful disagreement.	State and support a position.

40-45 MIN | EXIT RESPONSE	STUDENT ACTION
TEACH / ASK Collect a short claim using two pieces of evidence and one likely consequence.	Write and submit the evidence-based response.

Short Inquiry: Teacher Prompts & Assessment

Questions worth pausing for

ASK FOR EVIDENCE

What did Sacajawea know that the expedition members did not?

Which contribution solved an immediate problem? Which may have changed the entire journey?

How did Jean Baptiste's presence communicate something without words?

What can we reasonably infer, and what can we not prove?

Does a person have to act alone to be called a savior?

Exit response

STUDENT PROMPT

Complete in 5-7 sentences: The expedition would have been _____ without Sacajawea. Use two specific details from the video, explain what each detail shows, and describe one likely consequence of her absence.

Quick assessment

LOOK FOR	MEETS THE GOAL
CLAIM	Answers the essential question with a clear position
EVIDENCE	Uses at least two accurate, specific details from the video
REASONING	Explains how the evidence leads to a plausible consequence
HISTORICAL LANGUAGE	Uses conditional words and avoids presenting an inference as certain

Language to model

HISTORIAN'S LANGUAGE

We know what happened in the historical record. We cannot know for certain what would have happened if Sacajawea had not been there.

Model: might • could • likely • probably • because.

Extended Inquiry: 65-75 Minutes

TWO ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How might the expedition have been different without Sacajawea?
2. How do different kinds of sources shape what we know about her?

Preparation

- Prepare five excerpts in chronological order; plan a pause after the first three.
- Assign or let groups select one role: guide/ pilot, interpreter, diplomat, provider/healer, teacher/craftsperson, rescuer, or peacemaker.
- Use the student packet plus Source Lenses / Claim-Evidence-Reasoning pages as needed.

TIME	TEACHER MOVE	STUDENT THINKING
0-7 min	Survival challenge + predictions	List needed knowledge, skills, and relationships.
7-16 min	Show first three excerpts	Track evidence for an assigned role.
16-27 min	Role expert groups	Choose the two strongest details and explain their importance.
27-35 min	Impact continuum	Place role from helpful to indispensable; defend placement.
35-43 min	Introduce source lenses	Preview what journals, Shoshone speakers, and later public memory may reveal or leave out.
43-48 min	Show final excerpts	Record one insight from oral history and one about legacy.
48-58 min	Compare sources	Discuss strengths, limits, and perspectives.
58-68 min	Structured discussion	Use evidence, acknowledge uncertainty, and address a counterclaim.
68-75 min	Final argument	Write a claim-evidence-reasoning response with a counterclaim.

Discussion positions

- The expedition probably would have failed without Sacajawea.
- The expedition might have continued, but with greater loss, delay, or danger.
- Other people or circumstances might have replaced some of her contributions.
- 'Savior' may be less precise than an indispensable diplomat, knowledge holder, or problem solver.

Teacher Evidence Guide

USE THIS PAGE WHEN STUDENTS GET VAGUE

Move students from admiration ('She was amazing') to historical reasoning ('This specific action mattered because...'). Accept other interpretations when students support them accurately.

ROLE	EVIDENCE IN THE PROGRAM	POSSIBLE WITHOUT-HER INFERENCE
Guide / pilot	Recognized Beaverhead; recommended a mountain gap; knew trails near her homeland.	The party might have lost time, taken a more dangerous route, or struggled to locate Shoshone communities.
Interpreter	Language and cultural knowledge helped communication with Shoshone people.	Negotiations could have failed or produced less trust.
Diplomat	Her reunion and relationship with Shoshone relatives helped secure food and horses.	Without horses, crossing the Rockies could have become far more difficult or impossible at that time.
Peacemaker	Clark wrote that a woman with a party of men signaled friendly intentions.	Some communities might have viewed the armed party as a greater threat.
Rescuer	Saved journals and supplies when a small boat nearly capsized.	The expedition could have lost records, instruments, medicine, trade goods, or other supplies.
Provider / healer	Pointed out food sources; the program describes knowledge of plants prepared as medicinal tea.	Illness and dwindling food could have become harder to manage.
Teacher / craftsperson	Shared knowledge of moccasins and snares for small game.	The party would have had fewer locally appropriate survival skills.
Mother / morale builder	Traveled with infant Jean Baptiste; the program describes his growth as encouragement.	The party would have lost both a peace signal and a source of human connection.

Domino Effect: Teacher Model



Use the image only as a visual prompt; the evidence chain should come from the program and source material.

1 EVIDENCE	Sacajawea helped the expedition communicate with Shoshone people and helped when horses were needed.
↓	
2 FIRST CHANGE	Without that communication help, the expedition might have had more difficulty getting horses.
↓	
3 NEXT CHANGE	Without enough horses, carrying supplies and crossing the Rocky Mountains could have been much harder.
↓	
4 BIGGER RESULT	The expedition might have faced greater delay, danger, or difficulty crossing the mountains.

↓

WHY THIS CHAIN WORKS

It starts with evidence, changes only one condition, connects each step logically, and uses careful words instead of claiming certainty.

Historical Accuracy: Read Before Teaching

WHY THIS MATTERS

The program foregrounds contemporary Shoshone voices. Help students distinguish what journals record, what oral histories preserve, and what they infer.

GUIDE	Use the word precisely. Sacajawea recognized landmarks and advised routes, but she was not the expedition's only guide throughout the journey.
'SAVIOR'	Let students evaluate this as a claim. Do not make it the required conclusion.
SCURVY	The video supports knowledge of food sources and medicinal plants, but does not specifically establish that Sacajawea treated or prevented scurvy.
HORSES	Describe horses first as essential transportation across the Rocky Mountains. Food was not the primary reason the expedition sought them.
SPELLING	The program uses Sacajawea. Other sources commonly use Sacajawea or Sakakawea. Explain that spellings reflect different languages and historical records.

Evidence vs. inference: fast reference

TYPE	EXAMPLE
EVIDENCE	Sacajawea helped the expedition acquire horses.
REASONABLE INFERENCE	The mountain crossing would likely have been more dangerous without those horses.
CLAIM TOO BIG	The United States could not have existed without her.
EVIDENCE	Her presence with a baby signaled peaceful intentions.
REASONABLE INFERENCE	Some encounters may have been less tense because she and Pomp were present.
CLAIM TOO BIG	Every Indigenous nation trusted the expedition because of her.

Differentiation Without Rewriting the Lesson

Grade 4 / developing readers

NEED MORE SUPPORT?

- Provide role cards with a small symbol and one-sentence definition.
- Allow drawing + labels before paragraph writing.
- Replay one excerpt and model turning a video detail into evidence.
- Use the frame: Because Sacajawea _____, the expedition was able to _____. Without her, it might have _____.
- Let students rehearse a claim orally before writing.

Multilingual learners

- Preteach role words with gestures, images, or examples from familiar settings.
- Permit bilingual notes and discussion before English composition.
- Pair a transcript excerpt with the corresponding video moment.
- Assess historical reasoning separately from spelling and grammar when appropriate.

Students ready for more challenge

- Rank Sacajawea's three most consequential contributions.
- Develop an alternate explanation in which another expedition member or Indigenous community fills one of her roles.
- Write a rebuttal explaining why a plausible counterclaim is less convincing than the student's claim.
- Compare how the short and extended video cuts shape the viewer's interpretation.

Discussion safeguards

KEEP THE HISTORY SPECIFIC

Name Shoshone, Hidatsa, Mandan, Nez Perce, and other nations when the source does. Do not frame North America as empty land waiting to be discovered. Acknowledge Sacajawea's youth, captivity, constrained choices, expertise, and agency without turning hardship into spectacle. Do not ask Indigenous students to speak for a nation or culture.

Final Performance Task & Rubric

FINAL TASK

Write or present an argument answering the essential question. Identify at least three roles, use three accurate video details, explain a two-step consequence chain, address one reasonable counterclaim, and include one sentence explaining how a journal entry or Shoshone oral history shaped your understanding.

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
4	Clear claim; 3+ accurate details; logical consequence chain; addresses a counterclaim; distinguishes evidence from inference.
3	Clear claim; at least 2 accurate details; explains a likely consequence; mostly distinguishes evidence from inference.
2	A claim and some relevant evidence are present, but reasoning is incomplete, general, or partly inaccurate.
1	Response gives an unsupported opinion or shows substantial misunderstanding of the video.
0	No response or insufficient evidence to assess.

Teacher source note

The lesson content and clip selections are based on the transcript supplied for the Idaho Experience program about Sacajawea. The quoted expedition entries in the program are attributed to Meriwether Lewis on August 8 and August 17, 1805, and William Clark on October 13, 1805, and July 13, 1806.

PBS: Confirm final clip boundaries against the source video before classroom use.

COMPANION STUDENT MATERIALS

Use with the separate student inquiry packet: Pack for the Expedition, Role & Evidence Sort, Evidence Detective, Domino Effect, contribution ranking, Build Your Argument, and the Sacajawea Expedition Trading Card.

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