

# Sacagawea

c. 1787–1812



**WHY SHE MADE HISTORY** Sacagawea was a Shosone Indian woman famous for her role as interpreter and guide during the Lewis and Clark Expedition.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Sacagawea's presence on the Lewis and Clark expedition made history.*

Sacagawea, whose name is believed to mean “bird woman,” was a member of the Shoshone Indian tribe in what is now Idaho. When she was about 12 years old, she was kidnapped by a rival Indian tribe and eventually sold as a slave to Toussaint Charbonneau, a French-Canadian fur trader. Charbonneau made Sacagawea his wife and brought her along with him when he joined the expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.

While Charbonneau spoke Hidatsa and French, Sacagawea spoke Hidatsa and Shoshone. Clark hired both of them to be **interpreters** for their expedition. Sacagawea helped Lewis and Clark communicate with the Shoshone Indians, her native tribe. She also helped them buy horses from the tribe.

During her travels with Lewis and Clark, Sacagawea gave birth to a son, Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau. This was fortunate for the expedition. Many Indians at this time had never seen white men. Indians viewed Lewis and Clark friendlier and welcomed them, because of Sacagawea. It was unheard of for a war party to travel with an Indian woman and a baby. This led the Native Americans to believe that the travelers were explorers, not warriors.



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## VOCABULARY

**interpreter** one who translates from one language to another

Sacagawea had another child, a daughter named Lisette, six years after the Lewis and Clark expedition. However Sacagawea was in poor health, and she died shortly after giving birth. Sacagawea died at a Missouri Fur Trading post, where she was with her husband. Less than a year after her death, Clark legally adopted Lisette and Jean-Baptiste.

Sacagawea is remembered today as a heroic guide and great female interpreter. In early 2000, the United States began circulating a dollar coin that featured Sacagawea's likeness. Many landmarks and monuments have also been named after Sacagawea.

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

1. What key role did Sacagawea play in the expedition of Lewis and Clark?

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2. **Summarize** Recall what you have learned from the passage, and write a summary of the life of Sacagawea.

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**ACTIVITY**

Think about what kinds of things Lewis and Clark might have asked Sacagawea to translate for them on their journey. Write a few questions and answers that might have been exchanged during their expedition.