

Journal Quote – August 16, 1805 Unit: Warrior/Soldier (Middle and High School)

Captain Lewis and a small party of men had finally made contact with the Shoshones, from whom they hoped to obtain horses. The expedition desperately needed horses to cross the mountains. Clark and the rest of the Corps, including the only person that spoke Shoshone, Sacagawea, had not yet arrived. Lewis needed to convince the Shoshones to delay their hunting trip until Clark and the interpreters appeared. Observing the strange, well-armed visitors, many in the Shoshone band saw treachery. Cameahwait, the Shoshone chief, became apprehensive that Lewis was leading them into a trap. In this moment of uncertainty, he hit on an idea: to symbolically transform the strangers into Shoshone men.

Meriwether Lewis, August 16, 1805 (excerpt)

They [the Shoshone] all appeared now to have filled themselves, and were in a good humor. This morning early, soon after the hunters set out, a considerable part of our escort became alarmed and returned, 28 men and three women only continued with us. After eating, and suffering the horses to graze about 2 hours, we renewed our march, and toward evening arrived at the lower part of the cove. Shields killed an antelope on the way, a part of which we took and gave the remainder to the Indians. Being now informed of the place at which I expected to meet Captain Clark and the party, they insisted on making a halt, which was complied with.

We now dismounted, and the chief, with much ceremony, put tippets about our necks such as they themselves wore. I readily perceived that this was to disguise us and owed its origin to the same cause already mentioned. To give them further confidence, I put my cocked hat with feather on the chief, and my over-shirt being of the Indian form, my hair disheveled and skin well browned with the sun, I wanted no further addition to make me a complete Indian in appearance. The men followed my example, and we were soon completely metamorphosed. I again repeated to them the possibility of the party not having arrived at the place where I expected they were, but assured them they could not be far below, lest by not finding them at the forks their suspicions might arise to such heights as to induce them to return precipitately.

We now set out and rode briskly within sight of the forks, making one of the Indians carry the flag, that our own party should know who we were. When we arrived in sight at the distance of about two miles, I discovered to my mortification that the party had not arrived, and the Indians slackened their pace. I now scarcely knew what to do, and feared every moment when they would halt altogether. I now determined to restore their

confidence, cost what it might, and therefore gave the chief my gun, and told him that if his enemies were in those bushes before him that he could defend himself with that gun, that for my own part I was not afraid to die, and if I deceived him he might make what use of the gun he thought proper, or in other words that he might shoot me. The men also gave their guns to other Indians, which seemed to inspire them with more confidence. They sent their spies before them at some distance, and when I drew near the place I thought of the notes which I had left, and directed Drewyer [Drouilliard] to go with an Indian man and bring them to me, which he did, the Indian seeing him take the notes from the stake on which they had been placed.

I now had recourse to a stratagem in which I thought myself justified by the occasion, but which I must confess sat a little awkward. It had its desired effect. After reading the notes, which were the same I had left, I told the chief that when I had left my brother chief with the party below where the river entered the mountain, we both agreed not to bring the canoes higher up than the next forks of the river above us, wherever this might happen; that there he was to await my return, should he arrive first; and that in the event of his not being able to travel as fast as usual from the difficulty of the water, he was to send up to the first forks above him and leave a note informing me where he was, that this note was left here today; and that he informed me that he was just below the mountains and was coming on slowly up, and added that I should wait here for him; but, if they did not believe me, that I should send a man at any rate to the chief, and they might also send one of their young men with him; that myself and two others would remain with them at this place.

This plan was readily adopted, and one of the young men offered his services. I promised him a knife and some beads as a reward for his confidence in us. Most of them seemed satisfied, but there were several that complained of the chief's exposing them to danger unnecessarily and said that we told different stories; in short, a few were much dissatisfied. I wrote a note to [Captain Clark] by the light of some willow brush, and directed Drewyer [Drouilliard] to set out early, being confident that there was not a moment to spare.

We finally lay down, and the chief placed himself by the side of my mosquito bier. I slept but little, as might be well expected, my mind dwelling on the state of the expedition which I have ever held in equal estimation with my own existence, and the fate of which appeared at this moment to depend in a great measure upon the caprice of a few savages, who are ever as fickle as the wind.

I had mentioned to the chief several times that we had with us a woman of his nation who had been taken prisoner by the Minnetarees, and that by means of her I hoped to explain myself more fully than I could do [by] signs. Some of the party had also told the Indians that we had a man with us who was black and had short curling hair. This had excited their curiosity very much, and they seemed quite as anxious to see this monster as they were the merchandise which we had to barter for their horses.