

Jefferson's Instructions to Meriwether Lewis
From the Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia

Instructions

The letter been divided into 9 paragraph sections. Each group should do the following in this order: 1) review the vocabulary terms & definitions, 2) read the paragraph, 3) write in the space next to "Goal" your summary of what Jefferson wanted to have accomplished. When each group is finished, we'll share our findings, try to place the goals in the categories, and use one another's information to complete a 10% Summary of the letter.

Paragraph 1

To: Captain Meriwether Lewis Esq., Capt. of the 1st. Regiment of Infantry of the USA

June 20, 1803

Your situation as Secretary of the President of the U.S. has made you acquainted with the objects of my confidential message of Jan. 18. 1803 to the legislature (congress). You have seen the act they passed was meant to sanction these objects, and you are appointed to carry them into execution.

Instruments for ascertaining, by celestial observations, the geography of the country through which you will pass, have been already provided. Light articles for barter and presents among the Indians, arms for your attendants, say from 10-12 men, boats, tents, & other travelling apparatus with ammuniton, medicine, surgical instruments and provisions from the Secretary at War. From him also you will receive authority to engage among our troops, by voluntary agreement, the number of attendants above mentioned, over whom you, as their commanding officer, are invested with all the powers the laws give in such a case.

Ascertaining- finding out

Celestial- the sky, stars, sun

GOAL:

Paragraph 2

As your movements while within the limits of the U.S. will be better directed by occasional communications, adapted to circumstances as they arise, they will not be noticed here. What follows will respect your proceedings after your departure from the United States. Your mission has been communicated to the ministers here from France, Spain & Great Britain, and through them to their governments. The country of Louisiana having been ceded by Spain to France, passport you have from the minister of France, the representative of the present sovereign of the country, will be a protection against with all its subjects, & that from the minister of England will entitle you to the friendly aid of any traders of that allegiance with whom you may happen to meet.

Ceded- given, transferred

Sovereign- ruler

Allegiance- country the traders are loyal to, here it means England

GOAL:

Paragraph 3

The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river & such principal stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado or any other river may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce.

Communication- connection from one river to another

Commerce- trading goods

GOAL:

Paragraph 4

Beginning at the mouth of the Missouri, you will take careful observations of latitude & longitude at all remarkable points on the river & especially at the mouth of rivers, at rapids, at islands & other places & objects distinguished by such natural marks & characters of a durable kind as that they may with certainty be recognized hereafter. The courses of the river between these points of observation may be supplied by the compass, the log-line & by time, corrected by the observations themselves. The interesting points of the portage between the heads of the Missouri & of the water offering the best communication with the Pacific ocean, should also be fixed by observation & the course of that water to the ocean, in the same manner as that of the Missouri.

Log-line- a device used for measuring distance

Portage- the place where travel must change from a river to land, and the boats and goods must be carried

GOAL:

Paragraph 5

Your observations are to be taken with great pains & accuracy, to be entered clearly & intelligibly for others, as well as yourself, to comprehend all the elements necessary, with the aid of the usual tables, to fix the latitude and longitude of the places at which they were taken, and are to be given to the war-office. Several copies of these as well as of your other notes should be made at leisure times & put into the care of the most trustworthy of your attendants, to guard by multiplying them against the accidental losses to which they will be exposed. A further guard would

be that one these copies be on the paper of the birch, as less liable to injury from damp than common paper.

Intelligibly- clearly, easily understood

Concurrently- at the same time

GOAL:

Paragraph 6

The commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue, renders a knowledge of those people important. You will therefore endeavor to make yourself acquainted with the names of the nations & their numbers; the extent & limits of their possessions; their relations with other tribes of nations, their language, traditions, monuments, their ordinary occupations in agriculture, fishing, hunting, war, arts, their food, clothing, & domestic accommodations, the diseases prevalent among them & the remedies they use, moral & physical circumstances which distinguish them from the tribes we know, their laws, customs, and articles of commerce they may need. And considering the interest which every nation has in extending & strengthening the authority of reason & justice among the people around them, it will be useful to acquire what knowledge you can of the state of morality, religion, & information among them; as it may better enable those who may endeavor to civilize & instruct them.

Implements- tools

Accommodations- shelter

Prevalent- occurring frequently

GOAL:

Paragraph 7

Other objects worthy of notice will be the soil & face of the country, its growth & vegetable productions, especially those not of the U.S., the animals of the country generally & especially those not known in the U.S., the remains & accounts of any which may be deemed rare or extinct; the mineral productions of every kind; but more particularly metals; limestone, pit coal, & salt-pete; saline & mineral waters, noting the temperature of the last & such circumstances as may indicate their character; volcanic appearances; climate, as characterized by the thermometer, by the proportion of rainy, cloudy, & clear days, by lightening, hail, snow, ice, by the access & recess of frost, by the winds prevailing at different seasons, the dates at which particular plants put forth or lose their flower, or leaf, times of appearance of particular birds, reptiles or insects.

GOAL:

Paragraph 8

Although your route will be along the main channel of the Missouri, you will endeavor to inform yourself of the character & extent of the country watered by its branches, especially on its southern side, Rio Bravo which runs into the Gulf of Mexico, and the Rio Colorado which runs into the Gulf of California. These are understood to be the principal streams heading opposite to the waters of the Missouri. Inquire whether the dividing grounds between the Missouri & them are mountains or flat lands, what is their distance from the Missouri, the character of the intermediate country, & the people inhabiting it. The northern waters of the Missouri are less to be inquired after, because they have been ascertained to a considerable degree & are still in a course of ascertainment by English traders, and travellers. But if you can learn any thing certain of the most Northern source of the Mississippi it will be interesting to us. Some account too of the path of the Canadian traders from the Mississippi, at the mouth of the Ouisconsing to where it strikes the Missouri is desirable.

Inquiry- questioning; investigating

Ascertained- explored and are known

GOAL:

Paragraph 9

In all your intercourse with the natives, treat them in the most friendly & conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit, allay all jealousies as to the object of your journey, satisfy them of its innocence, make them acquainted with the position, extent, character, peaceable & commercial dispositions of the U.S., of our wish to be neighborly, friendly & useful to them & of our dispositions to a commercial intercourse with them. Confer with them on the points most convenient as mutual places to trade, and the articles of most desirable interchange for them & us.

Given under my hand at the city of Washington this 20th day of June, 1803.

Th. J. Pr. U.S. of A.

Conciliatory- offering good will

Allay all jealousies- calm their suspicions

Emporiums- places to trade

GOAL:

