

Exploring the Mighty Mekong: A Comparison with the Lewis and Clark Voyage

Project Description:

As we celebrate the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark voyage this piece of history is becoming an increasingly popular curriculum choice in many classrooms. The French exploration of the Mekong in the years 1866-1868 offers a unique comparison with this voyage. This comparison offers the students not only the opportunity to explore an important period in American History, but a comparison with a very different voyage during a slightly later time period, on the other side of the world.

The French Mekong Expedition of 1866 offers a unique comparison for students and an opportunity to learn about a different region of the world. In 1866, Doudart de Lagree led a large party of six principle explorers and sixteen interpreters and soldiers in search of a commercial route by which the French would have easy access using the Mekong for trade with Western China. Early in the voyage the explorers discovered that the Mekong was not navigable because of rapids and waterfalls. However, they continued their voyage up the Mekong turning it into a mission of exploration much like the voyage of Lewis and Clark. The voyage had an artist (Louis Delaporte) that created detailed sketches, watercolors and drawings of the people, villages, and sites they experienced on their voyage. In addition, he created maps of many sections of the river that they traveled.

In Studying these two voyages students will be given the opportunity to do research using books, maps, Internet, video and a variety of other resources. Students will begin by creating timelines of the two voyages and then comparing and contrasting the events of each voyage. Additional areas of study will include; a look at the mapping done by each of the voyages; a look at the native cultures and how each voyage interacted with the local people; and a look at the way each voyage interacted with the natural environment and studied the new flora and fauna they were exposed to.

Goals and Objectives:

1. Students will use a variety of resources to research topics related to the voyage of Lewis and Clark and the French Exploration of the Mekong.
2. Students will learn about the Lewis and Clark Expedition and its importance in the history of America.
3. Students will learn about the French Exploration of the Mekong and its relation to the history of the region.
4. Students will compare maps from these expeditions with present day maps of the same area.
5. Students will learn about the native cultures in North America and Southeast Asia.

Activity One: Creating Timelines

Students will create timelines of both the Lewis and Clark Voyage and the French Exploration of the Mekong. The students will use the information they have gathered to compare and contrast these two voyages. This project asks students to determine the salient events from each of the voyages and put them into a sequential order. The computer program *Timeliner* is an excellent resource for creating timelines. (I have students create personal timelines as an introduction to creating time lines.)

Methods:

1. Have the students create timelines of the Lewis and Clark Voyage using the resources available. This requires the students to research the expedition and determine the events that they feel are most important and should be highlighted on the timeline.
2. Have the students create timelines of the Mekong Expedition using information from the Osborn book (chapters 5 and 6). The appendix has a sample timeline of this voyage.
(Encourage students to use visuals to enhance their timelines.)
3. Have students use the timelines to compare and contrast these voyages.

Internet resources with time lines of the Lewis and Clark Expedition:

[http://www.ourheritage.net/index_page_stuff/Following Traiks/Lewis and Clark/Lc timeline.html](http://www.ourheritage.net/index_page_stuff/Following_Traiks/Lewis_and_Clark/Lc_timeline.html). This site has a detailed timeline with excellent information, but no graphics.

<http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/archive/time/>. This website has a timeline that combines graphics and written explanations.

Activity Two: Mapping Unexplored Territories

Mapping unexplored territories was one of the important missions of each of these voyages. As the western world moved into new areas they needed to create accurate maps of these new areas.

1. Have students create a map of their route to school. (Depending on the experience of students you may include each of these activities.)
 - a. Have students in small groups look at a variety of maps and create a list of the items that it is essential for each map to have. These lists can be used as the starting point for a class discussion about mapping. Think about the items you want students to include such as a key or compass rose.
 - b. Have groups of students create maps of the classroom, or route to a class at the school. Have the students include all the features they have studied from the maps.
 - c. Have students map their route to school. Have students share these maps in small groups and discuss what is important to make a map accurate and readable.
2. Have students look at maps created by the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the Mekong expedition (the Delaporte book has maps from the expedition) and discuss what they explorers would have to do to create such accurate maps. Below are websites that have maps of the Lewis and Clark Expedition or related information;
 - a. http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/archive/idx_map.html
 - b. <http://www.nps.gov/jeff/LewisClark2/TheJourney/Mapmaking.htm>
 - c. <http://spatialnews.geocomm.com/features/lewisclark0103/index.html>
satellite imagery along the Lewis and Clark trail.
 - d. <http://math.rice.edu/~lanius/pres/map/maphis.html>
This website explores the history of map making.
 - e. <http://www.visit-mekong.com/images/maps/mekongairportmap360.jpg>
This link has maps of the Mekong River Today.
3. Have the students compare these maps with area maps today. Ask them to look at changes and think about what has caused these changes.

Extension Activities:

1. Journaling: Have the students look at the records that Meriwether Lewis kept of the new species he encountered on the journey. Have the students' research a plant or animal from the region travel be either voyage and make a journal entry as if they are discovering a new species. Ask the students to write a detailed description of the species and draw an accurate drawing.
2. Have students look at what each of the expeditions does to prepare for the expedition. Questions:
 - a. What did each expedition do to prepare for its voyage?
 - b. Was their planning adequate?
 - c. What would you do to prepare for an expedition of this kind?
3. Writing Biographies: Have students choose different people from the expeditions, research each of these people and write short biographies.
4. Study of Native Cultures: Both expeditions have writing and drawings telling about their interactions with the local cultures. These documents along with research can be used to do studies of different culture.
 - a. What were the native cultures that each voyage met as they traveled?
 - b. How have these cultures changed over time?
 - c. What are the stories and myths of each culture?

Assessment:

Work with students to create rubrics for each of these assignments. Have the students determine what is needed for a project. Then work with the students to use the rubrics as a means of assessing their work as they go, so that they become fully engaged in creating a project that is excellent and they understand what is needed to make a project outstanding.

There are many Internet resources that can be helpful in creating rubrics.

1. <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php> Internet tool that helps you and your students create rubrics for any type of project.
2. <http://webquest.sdsu.edu/rubrics/rubrics.html> This website gives a good introduction for the process of creating rubrics.

Resources/References: Lewis and Clark Voyage:**Books:**

- Ambrose, Stephen. *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson and the Opening of the American West*. Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- Ambrose, Stephen and Abell, Sam. *Lewis and Clark: Voyage of Discovery*. National Geographic Society, 1998.
- Duncan, Dayton and Burns, Ken. *The Journey of the Corps of Discovery, Lewis and Clark: an Illustrated History*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.
- Smith, Roland. *The Captain's Dog: My Journey with the Lewis and Clark Tribe*. Gulliver Books. 1999. (The adventure of Lewis and Clark told from the point of view of Lewis's dog Seaman written for children.)

Video:

- Burns, Ken. *Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery*. PBS Home Video, 1997.

Internet:

<http://www.lewisandclarkexhibit.org/400/index.asp>

** Both *Time For Kids* and *National Geographic for Kids* have issues devoted to the Lewis and Clark Voyage.

French Exploration of the Mekong:

Books:

Davies, Ben. *Laos: A Journey Beyond the Mekong*. Luna Publications Ltd., 2001.

Delaporte, Louis and Garnier, Francis. *A Pictorial Journey on the Old Mekong: Cambodia, Laos and Yunnan*. White Lotus. 1998 (Translated and Composed by W. Tips).

Lewis, Paul and Elaine. *Peoples of the Golden Triangle*. River Books, 1984.

Osborne, Milton. *The Mekong: Turbulent Past, Uncertain Future*. Grove Press, 2000.

Sarasin, Julie. *The Magic of the Mekong*. Hawk's-Eye Publication, 2001.

Suarze, Thomas. *Early Mapping of Southeast Asia*. Periplus Editions; (December 1999)

Internet:

http://www.thewaterpage.com/mekong_river.htm The water page website has information about the Mekong River and the Countries that border it.

<http://www.mongabay.com/fish/data/ecosystems/Mekong%20River.htm> This website has a list of the species of fish present in Mekong River with detailed information and pictures of each species.

Appendix:

1. Timeline of the French Exploration of the Mekong
2. Pictures contrasting sights from the expeditions art and what we saw on our Fulbright-Hays trip in 2003.
3. Mekong River Map