

**PRESIDENT THOMAS JEFFERSON
LEWIS AND CLARK
The Great Falls Portage***
A play
By Carole L. Cooney

Setting: The White House Presidential Office, the Great Falls of the Missouri River

Characters:

Narrator

President Jefferson

Meriwether Lewis

William Clark

Narrator: President Thomas Jefferson wanted the territory in the American West explored. In 1804, he chose his 29 year old private secretary, Meriwether Lewis, to be the leader of the expedition from the Mississippi River to the West Coast and back.

President: Lewis! I have great confidence in you, therefore, I have selected you for a tremendous challenge!

Lewis: Thank you, Mr. President. What do you have in mind?

President: Well, Lewis, I have been wondering what lies beyond our territory. What is there in the land to the far West?

Lewis: It is hard to imagine, Mr. President.

President: Yes, yes... indeed! What I have in mind is an expedition and I wish you would be its leader. I want you to map out the geography, to get to know the American Indians and what they have to offer us. They tell me there are all kinds of fossils and treasures buried in that unknown land. I want you to dig them up!

Lewis: Mr. President, this is an amazing venture!

President: Well, Lewis, will you do it?

Lewis: Of course! Mr. President. I'd gladly do it!

President: Now, let's get down to business. How much money do you think you will need? You see, I have to convince Congress that this is a worthwhile project and that it will be *cheap*!

Lewis: Mr. President, just give me a few days and I assure you, I shall have a figure that will please Congress.

Narrator: A week later, Lewis met President Jefferson in the presidential office.

Lewis: Mr. President, I have a most reasonable sum of money. I estimate two thousand and five hundred dollars will do it. Please tell Congress that I shall set out immediately to buy approximately 3,500 pounds of supplies such as medicine, uniforms, tents, tools, and of course, presents for those we will meet along the way.

Narrator: And so the purchases began. Lewis even bought an iron frame boat. While waiting over a month for the boat to be constructed, he took short courses in organizing scientific data,

astronomy, botany, surveying and mathematics. After six months of preparation, Meriwether wrote a letter to his military comrade, William Clark.

Lewis: My dear friend, William - I am writing to you with great news. President Jefferson has appointed me to lead an important expedition in search of a route to the West Coast. This is a great opportunity which I want you to share with me. Will you co-lead with me? Send me your word as soon as possible. Your friend, Meriwether Lewis

Narrator: Once William Clark agreed to join the expedition, the men set about gathering and training volunteers.

Clark: This is a great adventure, Lewis! This morning, I was training some new volunteers when I began to realize how young some of them were. Can you imagine being 17 years old, wanting to go into the dangerous frontier not even knowing how to obey orders?

Narrator: Yes, training the men was extremely important. The expedition had many difficulties to endure. One huge problem to solve was how to portage all of their equipment around the Great Falls of the Missouri.

Lewis: Clark, I believe we should scout this territory for the best route around the falls. You take the left fork and I'll take the right fork.

Narrator: Finally, it was decided the right fork was the best route. As the men carried their supplies around the waterfall, Lewis scouted further and found four more waterfalls.

Clark: Lewis, I thought this would be a short, one mile journey. Now it looks as if there are many more miles to go.

Lewis: Tell the men to leave the heaviest equipment near the base of the falls. That will allow them to carry the canoes and the lighter supplies.

Clark: Once there are no more falls, we'll have to make wagons with sails to travel this rugged land.

Lewis: With sails? I've never heard of a wagon with a sail.

Clark: Yes, Lewis. You see, with the help of these strong winds, the sails will help our wagons move over the land at a more rapid pace.

Narrator: Traveling around the 5 falls was 18 miles longer than they expected. Finally, the portaging was completed after one month of hard labor.

Lewis: Clark, even though our work was difficult, the falls were the grandest sight I've ever seen.

Clark: Yes, Lewis. They were beautiful. *Amazingly* beautiful! Let's keep the memory of these magnificent water falls in mind as we continue on our long journey.

Narrator: Having successfully traveled around the falls, Lewis and Clark's next challenge was to find horses to travel over the Rocky Mountains!

*Portage: the act of carrying something, such as carrying boats or supplies around an unnavigable section of a waterway.