

THE WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Classroom: Grades 9-12

President as Visionary: "Others Ask Why Not?"

Activity - Two Visions: Just For Fun

The leadership of President Thomas Jefferson was crucial to the success of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and President John F. Kennedy is credited with providing the impetus that made the United States the first nation to plant its flag on the moon (the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo projects). Certain elements of these two important events in the nation's history seem similar. Using the Student Text and as much information as you can gather from other sources, complete a compare-and-contrast display for your classroom, following the steps below as an organizational structure.

Step 1: Working in class partnerships, conduct research on one of the thirteen questions provided in the box at the end of this list of steps. One partner should research the Lewis and Clark answer, the other the space race answer. Gather notes, and write a one- or two-page report on your findings.

Step 2: After discussion with your partner, write two to four compare-and-contrast statements based on your findings. On a large sheet of paper, using a marker, write a short version of your question, along with your compare-and-contrast statements.

Step 3: Draw a symbol or some other illustration that adds artistic interest to your part of the chart. Display that above or below your answer strip.

Step 4: Get someone in your class with an artist's flair to "unify" the chart in some way, using color or bold overarching titles.

Step 5: Discuss your findings with the class, noting the most dramatic similarities and differences.

Step 6: Using specific examples from your preparatory work, write an in-class essay supporting or refuting this thesis: In many respects, both in terms of leadership and outcomes, the Lewis and Clark Expedition bears many similarities to the space race of

the 1960s. In both cases, the growth and development of the United States as a powerful nation greatly increased.

Or, as a variation, after each partnership has collected and displayed the chart information, join with one of your classmates to role-play a conversation between Thomas Jefferson and John F. Kennedy. Plan a costume, and then write a script. The script should set up a logical sequence for this "across time" meeting and be rich with information gleaned from the chart about the two events. Remember that the conversation you construct should be friendly, but competitive, reflecting the personalities of the two presidents.

Ask your classmates to write one or the other of you a letter explaining what they learned about each mission from the dialogue, using at least three compare-and-contrast statements.

Suggested Questions

1. To what degree were the two presidents directly involved in the inception of the idea that resulted in the exploration?
2. How elaborate were the supplies and equipment needed for the two events, and in what way was each president involved directly in the planning of these events?
3. In what ways were the motivations of the two presidents similar—politically, economically, socially, scientifically, intellectually? How did their motivations seem to match the mood of the citizens at that time?
4. Were the two leaders influenced by visionary or pragmatic impulses? How so?
5. How did each president promote and support his project? Search for strong examples.
6. To what degree were the two presidents influenced by external events in their decision-making? For example, did the U.S. relationship with the British and with the French have an impact on the importance Jefferson attached to the Lewis and Clark journey? How was Kennedy affected by the Bay of Pigs failure and the lack of success he experienced in early space exploration?
7. In what ways were the methods used for selecting the participants in both missions similar or different?
8. How much did each mission cost? Which mission was the better bargain in terms of outcomes?

9. What were the relative dangers of the two missions in terms of those who carried them out? (Which was scarier: facing down a grizzly bear or worrying about heat shield re-entry problems?) In an emergency, when help was needed, which mission seemed better off?
10. How well were the participants in the two missions able to communicate with their home bases?
11. How much was already known about the respective sites to be explored?
12. Which mission yielded the most useful or dramatic information?
13. In what ways did each expedition influence the development of the nation? What were the lasting effects both positive and negative?