

## ***THE WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION***

### ***Classroom: Grades 9-12***

#### ***President as Visionary: "Others Ask Why Not?"***

#### ***Activity - River Tales: The Stories of the Lewis and Clark Expedition***

On September 12, 1806, the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery was almost back to St. Louis. Unlike so many parts of the river where they had traveled the previous months, they were now encountering boat after boat going in the opposite direction—fur traders and other explorers, headed upriver. John Ordway, one member of the expedition who kept a journal, describes this scene:

Met Mr. McC [Ilellan] with a large keel Boat. . . . He was rejoiced to see us [and] gave our officers wine and the party as much whiskey as we all could drink. Mr. McC [Ilellan] informed us that the people in general in the united States were concerned about us, as they had heard that we were all killed. Then again, they heard that the Spaniards had us in the mines [of Mexico].<sup>7</sup>

The journals of Lewis and Clark are full of exciting stories. The members of the Corps met Indian tribes with customs very different from their own. They saw spectacular scenery, collected plant and animal specimens that were entirely new to them, and at times feared for their lives. Meriwether Lewis described the time when two of his men were chased into the canoe on the river by a grizzly bear: "He pursued two of them . . . so close that they were obliged to throw aside their guns and pouches and throw themselves into the river, altho' the bank was nearly twenty feet perpendicular; so enraged was this animal that he plunged into the river only a few feet behind them."<sup>8</sup>

From the library, check out a copy of *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*. Read as much as time permits. Choose a couple of dramatic or highly interesting passages from your reading, and commit the facts and flavor of the entries to memory. After you and another four or five of your classmates have chosen two favorite stories each, plan a "keelboat" skit. Pretend you are a part of the Corps of Discovery, and you just met up with the keelboaters described in the opening paragraph. Since the keelboaters thought you and your whole party were dead, they are excited to hear all of your tales. Use as many props as you can to create the scene, and dress in a costume that is the closest you can come to looking like a river man. Ask a couple of other classmates to play the roles of the questioning keelboaters, and use the queries as a vehicle for telling your stories.

As an alternative, repeat the activity above, but instead of creating a skit to tell the stories, illustrate them, using pen and ink. After you and your classmates have completed your own drawings, arrange them chronologically and put them into a booklet titled

"Tales of the Voyage of Discovery." Be sure someone designs a cover. Leave the book on display for your classmates to read and enjoy.