Standard VUS.6b
The student will demonstrate knowledge of the major events during the first half of the nineteenth century by
b) identifying the economic, political, and geographic factors that led to territorial expansion and its impact
on the American Indians.

Essential Skills
Identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary source documents. (VUS.1a)
Explain how relationships between humans and their environment have changed over time. (VUS.1g)

The Lewis and Clark Expedition:
Benchmarks and Primary Sources

Background
Meriwether Lewis and William Clark’s journey included exciting discoveries, many hardships, and new friendships with the Native Americans they encountered. They and the other members of the expedition spent the winter of 1804–1805 with the Mandan Nation in what is now North Dakota. There they built a crude fort that they named Fort Mandan. It was a harsh winter; their keelboat was frozen solid in the Missouri River, and food was scarce. They did, however, enjoy many nights spent with the Mandans, dancing and playing music, and looked forward to returning to Fort Mandan in 1806.

Activity
In this activity, you will read excerpts from the journals of Lewis and Clark, chart the course of their expedition on a map of The Louisiana Purchase, 1803, and answer document-based questions. (Spelling, grammar, and capitalization in the journal entries have been updated for clarity.)

January 10, 1805 (Fort Mandan): The mercury this morning stood at 40° below 0, which is 72° below the [freezing] point. . . . [A]bout 10 o’clock the boy about 13 years of age came to the fort with his feet frosted. He had laid out last night without fire with only a buffalo robe to cover him. [The] customs and the habits of those people have inured them to bear more cold than I thought it possible for man to endure.

May 14, 1805: We proceeded on very well until about 6 o’clock. A squall of wind struck our sail broadside and turned the perogue [small boat] nearly over. She nearly filled with water; the articles which floated out were nearly all caught by the woman who was in the rear. This accident had like to have cost us dearly, for on this perogue were our papers, instruments, books, medicine, a great proportion of our merchandise, and in short almost every article indispensable.

September 3, 1805 (either Ravalli County, Montana, or Lemhi County, Idaho): We met with a great misfortune, in having our last thermometer broken by accident. This day we passed over immense hills and some of the worst roads that ever horses passed. . . . Snow about 2 inches deep when it began to rain, which terminated in a sleet.

September 20, 1805 (descending the Rocky Mountains into an open prairie where they encounter the Nez Perce Nation): A man came out to meet me with great caution and conducted us to a large, spacious lodge . . . those people gave us a small piece of buffalo meat, some dried salmon berries and roots, and some bread made of this root, all of which we ate heartily.
October 30–November 1, 1805 (camped near Cascade Locks, Oregon, on an island just above the Cascades of the Columbia—the Great Shute): I took two men and walked down three miles to examine the Shute and river below. . . . I found by examination that we must make a portage of the greater proportion . . . the Great Shute which commenced at the island on which we encamped continued with great rapidity and force through a narrow channel. . . . [W]e got all our baggage over the portage of 940 yards, after which we got the four large canoes over by slipping them over the rocks on poles placed across from one rock to another . . . in passing those canoes over the rocks three of them received injuries which obliged us to delay to have them repaired.

November 5, 1805 (camped in Columbia County, Oregon, southeast of present Rainier): The constant rain during the night and the noise from an island kept the Corps alerted. I slept but very little last night for the noise kept during the whole of the night by the swans, geese, white and gray Brant ducks on small Sand Island. . . . [T]hey were immensely numerous and their noise horrid.

December 27, 1805: Rained last night as usual and the greater part of this day. The men complete chimneys and bunks today. In the evening a chief and four men come from the Clotsop Nation, Chief Co-ma-wo. They presented us [with] a root which resembles the licorice in size and taste, which they roast like a potato. . . . Those roots and berries are timely and extremely grateful to our stomachs, as we have nothing to eat but spoiled elk meat.

December 29, 1805: The fleas are so numerous in this country and difficult to get clear of that the Indians have different houses & villages to which they remove frequently to get rid of them. Indeed I scarcely get to sleep half the night clear of the torments of those fleas, with the precaution of having my blankets searched and the fleas killed every day.

I. Applying Geography Skills
On the map of the Louisiana Purchase, mark the approximate points where the expedition would have been when the journal entries were made; then print out your work. You may need the typography button on the interactive map to help you locate the points.

II. Document-Based Questions
1. Identifying What geographical features mentioned in the journal entries caused problems for the expedition?
2. Making Inferences What was the attitude towards the expedition of most of the Native Americans they encountered?
3. Calculating How far in feet is the 940 yards the men had to carry the boats in the Cascades of the Columbia?
4. Determining Cause and Effect What attracted white settlers to the western territories, and what were the results of westward expansion for Native Americans?