In 1803, representatives of President Thomas Jefferson negotiated the Louisiana Purchase, acquiring a territory of 828,000 square miles west of the Mississippi River. This doubled the size of the United States. In this June 1803 letter, Jefferson commissioned Meriwether Lewis, a captain in the U.S. Army, to explore the lands along the Missouri River, make contact with the native tribes there, and bring back maps and detailed reports.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Drawing Conclusions/Hypothesizing**
Why might Jefferson have wanted the kinds of information he asked Lewis to compile about the new territories? How might he have planned to use the information?

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20 June 1803

To Captain Meriwether Lewis esq. Capt. of the 1st regmt. of Infantry of the U.S. of A.

Your situation as Secretary of the President of the U.S. has made you acquainted with the objects of my confidential message of Jan. 18, 1803 to the legislature; you have seen the act they passed, which, tho’ expressed in general terms, was meant to sanction those objects, and you are appointed to carry them into execution.

Instruments for ascertaining, by celestial observations, the geography of the country through which you will pass, have been already provided. Light articles for barter and presents among the Indians, arms for your attendants, say for from 10. to 12. men, boats, tents, & other travelling apparatus, with ammunition, medecine, surgical instruments and provisions you will have prepared with such aids as the Secretary at War can yield in his department; & from him also you will revieve authority to engage among our troops, by voluntary agreement, the number of attendants above mentioned, over whom you, as their commanding officer, are invested with all the powers the laws give in such a case.

As your movements while within the limits of the U.S. will be better directed by occasional communications, adapted to circumstances as they arise, they will not be noticed here. What follows will respect your proceedings after your departure from the United states.
Your mission has been communicated to the ministers here from France, Spain & Great Britain, and through them to their governments; & such assurances given them as to its objects, as we trust will satisfy them. The country of Louisiana having been ceded by Spain to France, the representative of the present sovereign of the country, will be a protection with all its subjects; & that from the minister of England will entitle you to the friendly aid of any traders of that allegiance with whom you may happen to meet.

The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado or any other river may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce.

Beginning at the mouth of the Missouri, you will take careful observations of latitude & longitude, at all remarkable points on the river, & especially at the mouths of rivers, at rapids, at islands, & other places & objects distinguished by such natural marks & characters of a durable kind, as that they may with certainty be recognized hereafter. The courses of the river between these points of observation may be supplied by the compass the log-line & by time, corrected by the observations themselves. The variations of the compass too, in different places, should be noticed.

The interesting points of the portage between the heads of the Missouri, & of the water offering the best communication with the Pacific ocean, should also be fixed by observation, & the course of that water to the ocean, in the same manner as that of the Missouri.

Your observations are to be taken with great pains & accuracy, to be entered distinctly & intelligibly for others as well as yourself, to comprehend all the elements necessary, with the aid of the usual tables, to fix the latitude and longitude of the places at which they were taken, and are to be rendered to the war-office, for the purpose of having the calculations made concurrently by proper persons within the U.S. Several copies of these as well as of your other notes should be made at leisure times, & put into the care of the most trustworthy of your attendants, to guard, by multiplying them, against the accidental losses to which they will be exposed. A further guard would be that one of these copies be on the paper of the birch, as less liable to injury from damp than common paper.

The commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue, renders a knowledge of those people important. You will therefore endeavor to make yourself acquainted, as far as a diligent pursuit of your journey shall admit, with the names of the nations & their numbers; the extent & limits of their possessions; their relations with other tribes of nations;
their language, traditions, monuments;
their ordinary occupations in agriculture, fishing, hunting, war, arts, & the implements for these;
their food, clothing, & domestic accomodations;
the diseases prevalent among them, & the remedies they use;
moral & physical circumstances which distinguish them from the tribes we know;
peculiarities in their laws, customs & dispositions;
and articles of commerce they may need or furnish, & to what extent.
And, considering the interest which every nation has in extending & strengthening the authority of reason & justice among the people around them, it will be useful to acquire what knolege you can of the state of morality, religion, & information among them; as it may better enable those who may endeavor to civilize & instruct them, to adapt their measures to the existing notions & practices of those on whom they are to operate.
Other objects worthy of notice will be the soil & face of the country, it's growth & vegetable productions, especially those not of the U.S.
the animals of the country generally, & especially those not known in the U.S.
the remains or accounts of any which may be deemed rare or extinct;
the mineral productions of every kind; but more particularly metals, limestone, pit coal, & saltpetre; salines & mineral waters, noting the temperature of the last, & such circumstances as may indicate their character;
volcanic appearances;
climate, as characterised by the thermometer, by the proportion of rainy, cloudy, & clear days, by lightning, hail, snow, ice, by the access & recess of frost, by the winds prevailing at different seasons, the dates at which particular plants put forth or lose their flower, or leaf, times of appearance of particular birds, reptiles or insects....
In all your intercourse with the natives, treat them in the most friendly & conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit; allay all jealousies as to the object of your journey, satisfy them of it's innocence, make them acquainted with the position, extent, character, peaceable & commercial dispositions of the U.S[,] of our wish to be neighborly, friendly & useful to them, & of our dispositions to a commercial intercourse with them; confer with them on the points most convenient as mutual emporiums, and the articles of most desireable interchange for them & us. If a few of their influential chiefs, within practicable distance, wish to visit us, arrange such a visit with them, and furnish them with authority to call on our officers, on their entering the U.S. to have them conveyed to this place at the public expence. If any of them should wish to have some of their young people brought up with us, & taught such arts as may be useful to them, we will receive, instruct & take care of them. Such a
mission, whether of influential chiefs or of young people, would give some
security to your own party. Carry with you some matter of the kinepox; inform
those of them with whom you may be, of its efficacy as a preservative from the
smallpox; and instruct and encourage them in the use of it. This may be especially
done wherever you winter.

As it is impossible for us to foresee in what manner you will be received by
those people, whether with hospitality or hostility, so is it impossible to
prescribe the exact degree of perseverance with which you are to pursue your
journey. We value too much the lives of citizens to offer them to probable
destruction. Your numbers will be sufficient to secure you against the
unauthorised opposition of individuals or of small parties; but if a superior
force, authorised, or not authorised, by a nation, should be arrayed against your
further passage, and inflexibly determined to arrest it, you must decline its
farther pursuit, and return. In the loss of yourselves, we should lose also the
information you will have acquired. By returning safely with that, you may
enable us to renew the essay with better calculated means. To your own
discretion therefore must be left the degree of danger you may risk, and the
point at which you should decline, only saying we wish you to err on the side of
your safety, and to bring back your party safe even if it be with less
information....

On your arrival on that coast endeavor to learn if there be any port within
your reach frequented by the sea-vessels of any nation, and to send two of your
trusty people back by sea, in such way as they shall judge shall appear
practicable, with a copy of your notes: and should you be of opinion that the
return of your party by the way they went will be eminently dangerous, then
ship the whole, and return by sea, by the way either of cape Horn, or the cape of
good Hope, as you shall be able. As you will be without money, clothes or
provisions, you must endeavor to use the credit of the U.S. to obtain them, for
which purpose open letters of credit shall be furnished you, authorising you to
draw upon the Executive of the U.S. or any of its officers, in any part of the
world, on which draughts can be disposed of, and to apply with our
recommendations to the Consuls, agents, merchants, or citizens of any nation
with which we have intercourse, assuring them, in our name, that any aids they
may furnish you, shall be honorably repaid, and on demand....

Should you find it safe to return by the way you go, after sending two of your
party round by sea, or with your whole party, if no conveyance by sea can be
found, do so; making such observations on your return, as may serve to supply,
correct or confirm those made on your outward journey.

On re-entering the U.S. and reaching a place of safety, discharge any of your
attendants who may desire and deserve it, procuring for them immediate payment
of all arrears of pay and clothing which may have incurred since their departure,
and assure them that they shall be recommended to the liberality of the
legislature for the grant of a soldier's portion of land each, as proposed in my
message to Congress: & repair yourself with your papers to the seat of government <to which I have only to add my sincere prayer for your safe return>.

To provide, on the accident of your death, against anarchy, dispersion, & the consequent danger to your party, and total failure of the enterprise, you are hereby authorised, by any instrument signed & written in your own hand, to name the person among them who shall succeed to the command on your decease, and by like instruments to change the nomination from time to time as further experience of the characters accompanying you shall point out superior fitness: and all the powers and authorities given to yourself are, in the event of your death, transferred to, & vested in the successor so named, with further power to him, and his successors in like manner to name each his successor, who, on the death of his predecessor, shall be invested with all the powers & authorities given to yourself.

Given under my hand at the city of Washington this 20th day of June 1803.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: ANSWER
Students may answer that Jefferson asked Lewis to bring back information about the Missouri River and any rivers linking it with the Pacific Ocean, information about the different groups of Native Americans living along their route, and about the natural attributes of the territory (such as flowers, animals, soil, minerals, and climate). Students may answer that Jefferson wanted such information because it would help him evaluate what kinds of commercial opportunities the new territory provided. Jefferson seemed particularly interested in locating a water route across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. Others may hypothesize that Jefferson wanted maps of the newly acquired territory, so that decisions could be made about where to build forts to defend the territory. They may also speculate that Jefferson was interested in “civilizing” the Native Americans by providing them with English-style education and trading with them.