Westward Turning Point

How a purchase and an expedition opened new possibilities

8.H.12 "Interpret how the events surrounding the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and Lewis and Clark expedition (1803-1806) allowed for America's initial push towards westward expansion."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline what the purchase changed, circle what the expedition learned or received, and draw an arrow in the margin linking one of each to show how they supported westward expansion.

A Purchase, Then a Journey

1 In 1803, farmers west of the Appalachian Mountains sent crops down the Mississippi River to the port of New Orleans. If another country blocked that route, selling crops would be harder. France controlled New Orleans and a vast region called Louisiana. President Thomas Jefferson sent diplomats to buy New Orleans, but France offered to sell the entire territory. Napoleon needed money for war in Europe and had lost hope of rebuilding a French empire in the Americas. The United States agreed to pay $15 million.

2 The Louisiana Purchase roughly doubled the size of the United States, giving its government a claim to land stretching west toward the Rocky Mountains. It also secured U.S. control of New Orleans and much of the Mississippi River. Yet buying land on paper did not tell officials how to travel through it or what resources it held. Jefferson had already requested an expedition before the purchase was completed. In 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark led a group up the Missouri River to study the region and seek a route to the Pacific.

3 The expedition traveled from 1804 to 1806, crossing mountains and reaching the Pacific Ocean before returning. Its members recorded rivers, land, plants, and animals, information that helped later travelers plan routes. They depended on knowledge, trade, and aid from Indigenous peoples, including Sacagawea, a Shoshone woman who helped the group communicate. The journey showed that no easy, unbroken water route crossed the continent. The purchase and expedition encouraged U.S. movement west, but the land was not empty: Indigenous nations already lived there and held their own claims.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the importance of New Orleans to farmers help lead to a purchase that expanded U.S. territory?

2. Why did buying Louisiana not give U.S. leaders all they needed to encourage travel west, and how did the expedition address that gap?

3. How did help from Indigenous peoples make the expedition more useful for later westward travel?

4. Why were the purchase and expedition an initial push rather than complete control of the West? Give two reasons from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine the expedition never took place, but the Louisiana Purchase still happened. In four or five sentences, predict how this would have affected early westward expansion, use two facts from the passage to explain your prediction, and acknowledge the Indigenous nations already living in the region.

ANSWER KEY

Westward Turning Point

GRADE 8 · 8.H.12

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline what the purchase changed, circle what the expedition learned or received, and draw an arrow in the margin linking one of each to show how they supported westward expansion. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the importance of New Orleans to farmers help lead to a purchase that expanded U.S. territory?	**Farmers needed New Orleans to ship and sell crops, so Jefferson sent diplomats to buy the port. France instead offered all of Louisiana, which roughly doubled U.S. territory.**
2	Why did buying Louisiana not give U.S. leaders all they needed to encourage travel west, and how did the expedition address that gap?	**The purchase gave the United States a claim to land but little knowledge of routes or resources. The expedition recorded information that later travelers could use.**
3	How did help from Indigenous peoples make the expedition more useful for later westward travel?	**Indigenous peoples shared knowledge, traded, and aided the group, while Sacagawea helped its members communicate. That help supported the journey that produced records for later travelers.**
4	Why were the purchase and expedition an initial push rather than complete control of the West? Give two reasons from the passage.	**Indigenous nations already lived on the land and held their own claims. The expedition also found no easy, unbroken water route across the continent.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

If Lewis and Clark had never traveled west, the Louisiana Purchase still would have given the United States control of New Orleans and a claim to a vast territory. However, later travelers would have had fewer recorded details about rivers and mountain crossings to guide them. They also would not have learned from this journey that no easy, unbroken water route crossed the continent. Indigenous nations already lived in the region, so the purchase alone could not give the United States complete control.

Accept supported predictions that distinguish the purchase's territorial claim from the expedition's practical information. Responses should not describe the purchased land as empty or treat a U.S. claim as complete control.