

# Sacagawea



Sacagawea was born in 1788 or 1789 as a member of the Lemhi band of the Shoshone tribe in the Rocky Mountains in what is now Idaho<sup>1</sup>. She got her name, which means “Bird Woman,” from the Hidatsa tribe, who kidnapped her during a buffalo hunt in 1800<sup>1,2</sup> (though the Shoshone argue that the name means boat-pusher and is her true name<sup>1</sup>). She was enslaved by colonizers and purchased by French Canadian fur trader Toussaint Charbonneau, with whom she had a child<sup>1,2</sup>. Explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark arrived at their camp, needing an interpreter to communicate with the Shoshones to acquire horses to cross the mountains<sup>1</sup>. Sacajawea and Charbonneau joined the expedition, and Sacajawea proved invaluable, translating and trading with tribes along the route and using her local knowledge to find edible plants and safe places to winter. On May 14, 1805, she was riding in a boat that nearly capsized<sup>2</sup>. She remained calm and retrieved important papers, instruments, books, and medicine that were critical to the success of the expedition<sup>2</sup>. Her presence on the expedition helped to convince Indigenous communities that the expedition’s purpose was peaceful. In the 19th century, Sacajawea was hailed as an example of strong, independent women and as an icon for the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

## Citations

1. Sacagawea. *History.com*. (2022, July 28). Retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/sacagawea>

2. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. (2023, February 17). Sacagawea. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sacagawea>