

Lewis and Clark and Me

A DOG'S TALE



by Laurie Myers illustrations by Michael Dooling

Genre

Historical fiction is based on real events in history, but it is a story that could never really happen—in this case, because a dog can't write. As you read, look for the facts on which this story is based.



Question of the Week

What opportunities can be found in new places?



Note to readers: The extracts from Meriwether Lewis's journal published in this excerpt retain their original spelling.

The year is 1803. Lewis and Clark are planning their expedition to explore the territory west of the Mississippi River. Lewis is looking for a dog to accompany the expedition, and as the story opens, he meets a 150-pound Newfoundland dog named Seaman, who goes on to tell of their adventures.

“Seaman!”

I glance at the man beside me.

“Look alive. Here’s buyers.”

Something caught my attention beyond him, down the wharf—a group of men, but I saw only one. It was Lewis. He was a full head taller than the other men I had known on the docks. And he was dressed in a different way—white breeches and a short blue coat with buttons that shone in the sun. A tall pointed hat with a feather made him look even taller.

Lewis walked along the dock with a large stride. There was a purpose about him. My life on the wharves was good, but I was a young dog and yearned for more. At the time I didn’t know exactly what. I sensed that this man was part of what I wanted. I sat straighter as he approached. The man who owned me stood straighter, too. Lewis slowed.

“Need a dog, sir?” my man asked.

“I’m lookin’,” Lewis replied. He stooped down and looked me right in the eye. I wagged my tail and stepped forward. I wanted to sniff this strange man. He extended his hand for me. He didn’t smell like any I had ever smelled, and it made me want to sniff him all over.

Lewis scratched the back of my neck, where I liked to be scratched.

“I’m headed out west, up the Missouri River,” Lewis said. My man’s face brightened.

“This dog be perfect, sir. These dogs can swim.

Newfoundlands, they call them. Rescue a drowning man in rough water or in a storm. Look at these paws. You won’t find another dog with paws like that. They’s webbed.” He spread my toes to show the webbing.

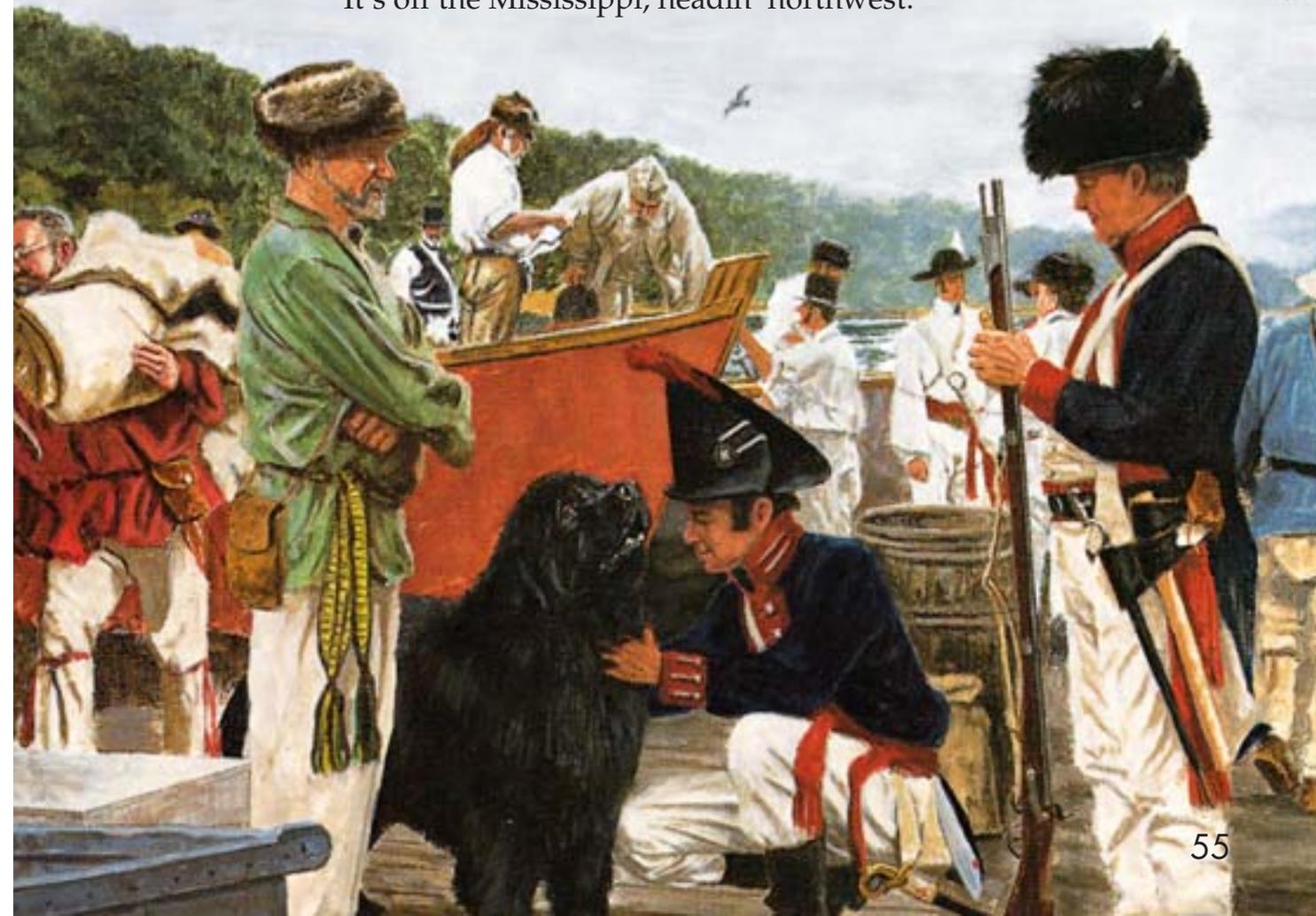
“So they are,” Lewis replied. Lewis began feeling my chest and hindquarters. His hands were large and muscular.

“Water rolls off this coat,” my man added. He pulled up a handful of my thick, dense double coat.

Lewis examined my coat and nodded.

“I know the Mississippi, sir, but I don’t know the Meesori,” my man said.

“It’s off the Mississippi, headin’ northwest.”



"North, you say. Ah. It'll be cold up that river. Won't bother this one, though." He patted me firmly on the back.

Lewis stood and looked around. He found a piece of wood that had broken off a crate. He showed it to me, then threw it.

"Go," he said.

I wanted to go. I wanted to do whatever this man asked. But I belonged to another. I looked at my man.

"Go on," he said.

I ran for the stick and returned it to Lewis.

"How much?" Lewis asked.

"Twenty dollars. And a bargain at that."

Lewis looked down at me. I lifted my head proudly.

"Won't find a better dog than this. Perfect for your trip," my man said, trying to convince Lewis.

It wasn't necessary. Lewis wanted me. I could tell. He had liked me the minute he saw me. The feeling was mutual. Lewis paid my man twenty dollars.

"Does he have a name?" Lewis asked.

"I been callin' him Seaman, but you can name him anything you like."

"Come, Seaman," Lewis called.

As we walked away, my rope in his hand, he put his other hand on my head. After that, he didn't need a rope. I would follow this man to the ends of the Earth.

...the dog was of the newfoundland breed one that I prized much for his docility and qualifications generally for my journey....

Meriwether Lewis November 16, 1803



Squirrels

I caught fish off the docks. I chased animals in the woods. But hunting came alive for me on the river—the Ohio, Lewis called it.

I have always loved the water, so the day we boarded the boat and pushed out onto the Ohio River was just about the happiest day of my life. Lewis was excited, too. I could tell by the way he walked. And his voice was louder than usual.

The men were also excited. I could hear it in their voices. They didn't complain when they loaded the boat. Lewis was telling them what to load and how to load it. Anyway, that afternoon, Lewis and I and some men started down the river.

I rode in the back of the boat. It was the highest place and gave me the best view. From there I could scan both banks and the water with just a glance. The first two weeks I couldn't get enough of it. There were animals I had not seen before. Smells I had not smelled. My skin tingled with excitement.



The river was low, and the men had to pole much of the way. When they weren't poling, they were digging channels for our boat or hiring oxen to pull the boat from the shore.

We were only a couple of weeks down the river when I had my first great day of hunting. The river wasn't quite as shallow and the current not too strong, so the crew rowed along leisurely.

I was lying on the back deck of the boat. I had just scanned the shore—nothing of interest, just a few beaver and a deer. I decided to close my eyes for a nap. I blinked a few times and was ready to lay my head on my paws when something on the water up ahead caught my eye.

I stuck my nose in the air and sniffed. I recognized the **scent** immediately. Squirrel.

A squirrel on water? That was unusual. I had seen plenty of squirrels, but I had never seen one swim. There was something else strange. The smell of squirrel was especially strong. I had never known one squirrel to project so powerful a scent.

I stood to take a look. Right away I spotted a squirrel off the starboard side. He was swimming across the river. Another squirrel followed close behind. Without a second thought, I leaned over the side of the boat to get a better look.

I saw another squirrel. And another. I could not believe my eyes; hundreds of squirrels were crossing the river. The water up ahead was almost black with them. Every muscle in my body tightened to full alert.

Lewis was on the other side of the boat, talking to two of the men. I turned to him and barked.

"What is it?" he asked.

It is impossible to describe the urge I felt. It was as strong as anything I had ever known. I had to get those squirrels.

I barked again. Lewis scanned the water ahead.

"Look at that," he said to the men. "Squirrels crossing the river. Now why would they do that?"

"Food?" one man suggested.

Lewis paused for a moment. "There are hickory nuts on both banks."

"**Migrating?**" suggested the other.

Lewis nodded. "Maybe. Or perhaps they're—"

I barked again. They were wasting time wondering why the squirrels were crossing. It didn't matter. The squirrels were there. Hundreds of them, right in front of us. Sometimes men spend too much time thinking. They miss the fun of life.



"They'd make a fine supper," the first man suggested with a smile.

Lewis nodded. He looked at me. "Let's see what you can do, Seaman. Go on. Fetch us a squirrel."

That's what I was waiting for. I sprang off the boat and hit the water swimming. I was going to get every squirrel in that river for Lewis. My webbed feet made it easy. I reached the first squirrel in just minutes.

When it saw me, its eyes bulged with fear. It tried to steer its sleek, fat body away. In one swift move I grabbed it by the neck and killed it. I carried it back to the boat. Lewis leaned over the side and took it from me.

"Good dog. Fetch another," he said.

The crew had stopped rowing, and the boat drifted slowly toward the mass of squirrels.

"Look at Captain Lewis's dog!" yelled one of the rowers.

I turned and started swimming again. I could hear the men cheering me on. In two strokes I was on another squirrel.

"Good dog!" Lewis yelled. "Go!"

"Go," the crew echoed. "Go, Seaman, go!"

I went. And went. Over and over, I went. I went until I was exhausted. I don't know how long it lasted. Maybe one hour. Maybe four.

All I know is that when I finished, there was a pile of squirrels in the boat. Lewis and the crew were laughing and cheering. All the rest of the day the men were patting me and saying, "Good dog" and "Good boy" and "We'll be eatin' good tonight." The admiration of the crew was great, but the look of pride on Lewis's face was better than all the men's praise added together.

That night the men fried the squirrels, and we ate well.

In the three years that followed, I hunted almost every day. But the squirrels on the Ohio were my favorite.

... observed a number of squirrels swimming the Ohio... they appear to be making to the south;... I made my dog take as many each day as I had occasion for, they wer fat and I thought them when fryed a pleasent food... he would take the squirrel in the water kill them and swiming bring them in his mouth to the boat....

Meriwether Lewis September 11, 1803

Bear-Dog

“Indians.”

We had not been on the shore very long before I heard Lewis say the word.

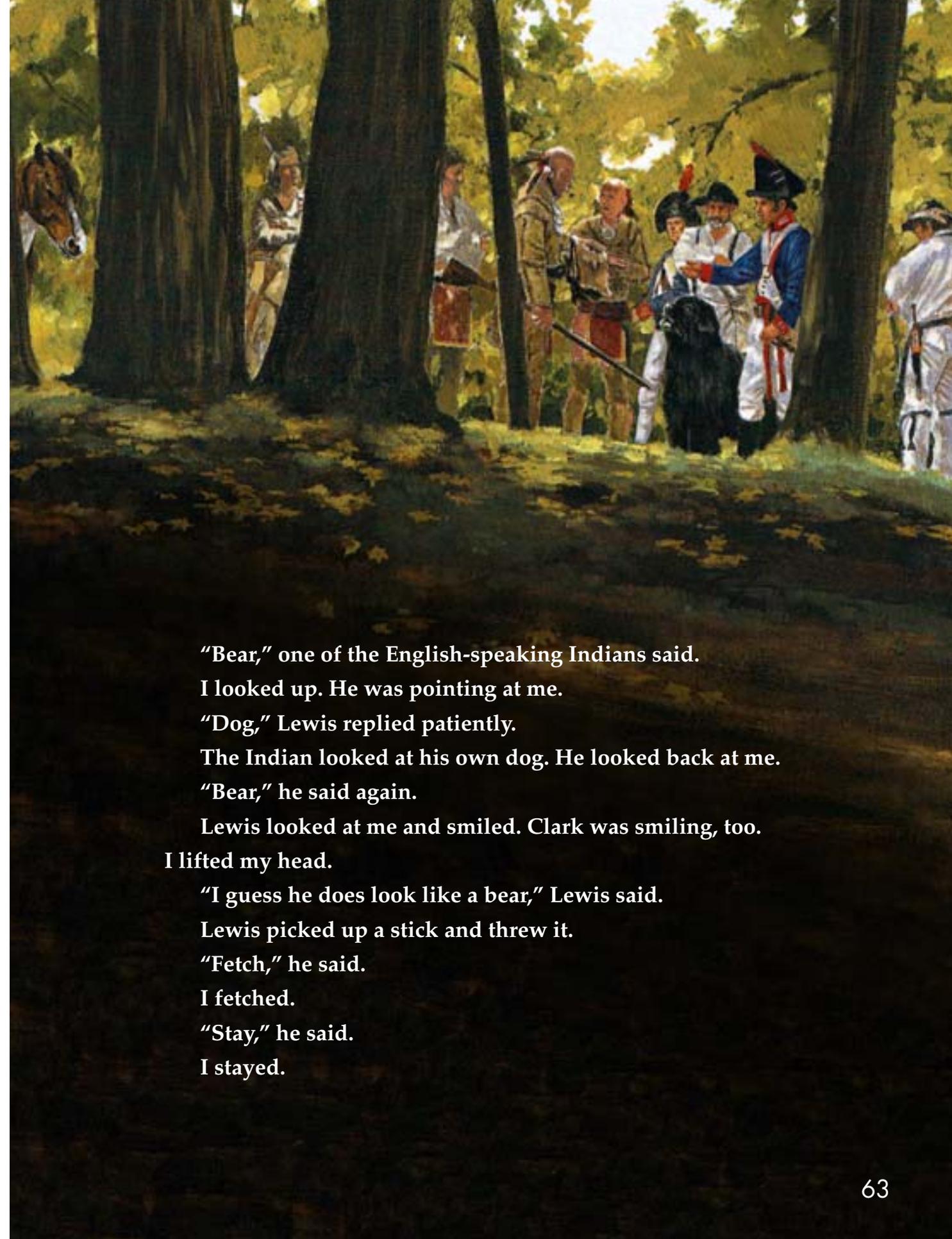
Lewis and Clark and I had crossed the river to make some observations. That’s when these Indians appeared. They were different from other people I had known—the boatmen and city folk.

I didn’t sense that Lewis or Clark were concerned, so I wasn’t. The Indians seemed friendly enough. Lewis talked to them. It wasn’t until later that I realized Lewis gave the same talk to every group of Indians we met. He talked about the “great white father” in Washington.

The Indians listened patiently as one of the English-speaking Indians translated. Lewis used hand motions to help. As he talked on, it became obvious to me that the Indians were not interested in Lewis or what he was saying. They were staring at me. Finally, Lewis realized what was going on, and he invited the Indians to take a closer look.

They gathered around. They touched me. They whispered about me. They acted like they had never seen a dog before. Then I noticed an Indian dog standing to the side. I took one look at that animal and realized why they were so interested in me.

That dog could not have been more than twenty pounds. Newfoundlands can weigh up to 150 pounds, and I’m a large Newfoundland. If that scrawny dog was the only dog they had seen, then I was a strange sight indeed.



“Bear,” one of the English-speaking Indians said.

I looked up. He was pointing at me.

“Dog,” Lewis replied patiently.

The Indian looked at his own dog. He looked back at me.

“Bear,” he said again.

Lewis looked at me and smiled. Clark was smiling, too.

I lifted my head.

“I guess he does look like a bear,” Lewis said.

Lewis picked up a stick and threw it.

“Fetch,” he said.

I fetched.

“Stay,” he said.

I stayed.

"Sit," he said.

I sat.

The Indians were impressed.

"Dog," Lewis said politely. Lewis was always nice.

The Indian who had called me "bear" turned to consult with his friends.

Finally, he turned.

"Bear-dog," he said with satisfaction.

Lewis smiled.

"Yes, I guess you could call him bear-dog."

Later, George Drouillard explained to us that the Indians don't have a separate word for *horse*. They call a horse "elk-dog." I guess it made sense for them to call me a bear-dog.

The Indian suddenly turned and walked through the crowd to his horse. He pulled out three beaver skins. He held them out to Lewis.

"For bear-dog," he said.

It wasn't often that I saw Lewis surprised. He was then.

I took a step closer to Lewis.

Lewis looked the Indian square in the eye and said, "No trade. Bear-dog special."

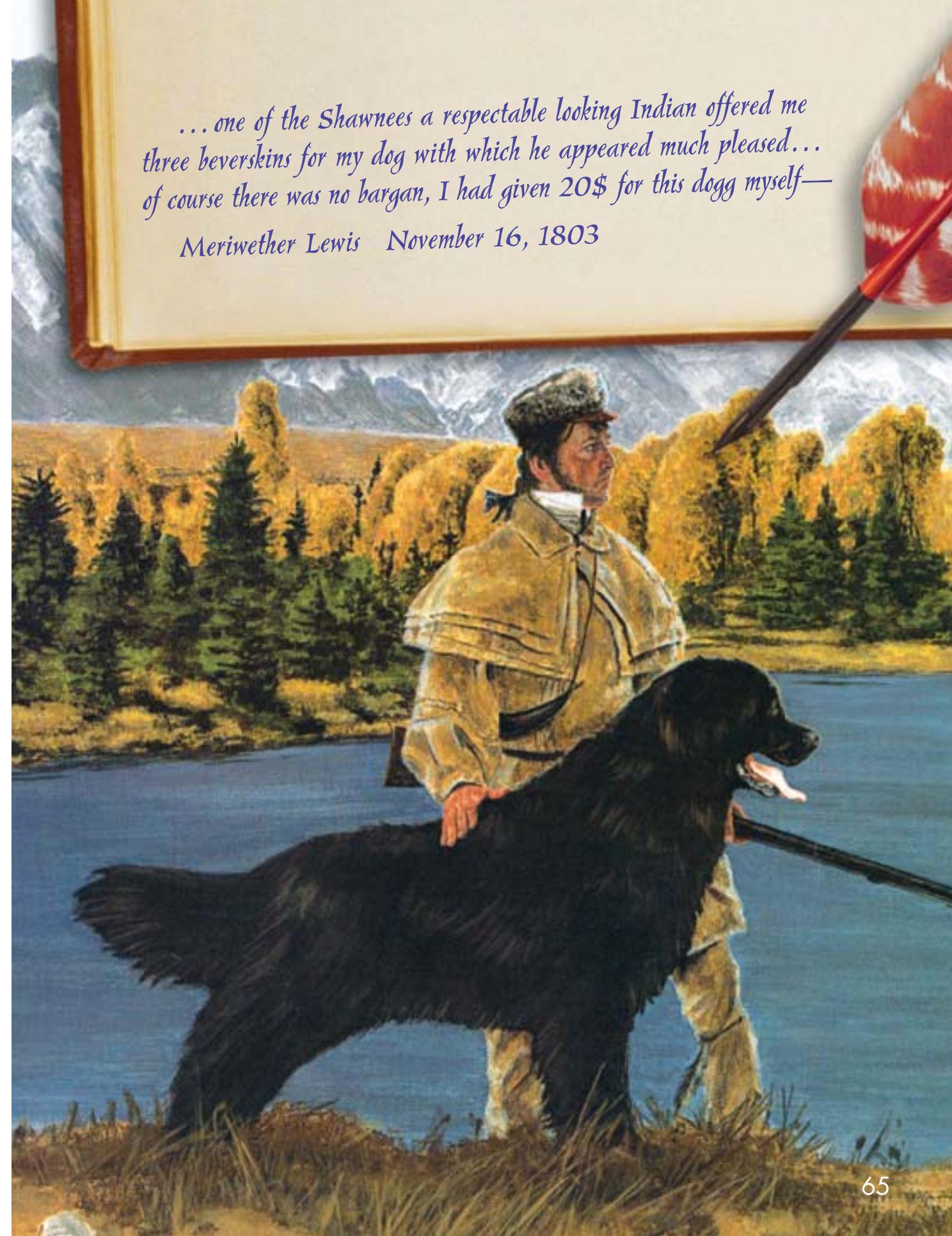
As we rode back to camp in the boat, Lewis said to me, "Three beaver skins! Can you believe that?"

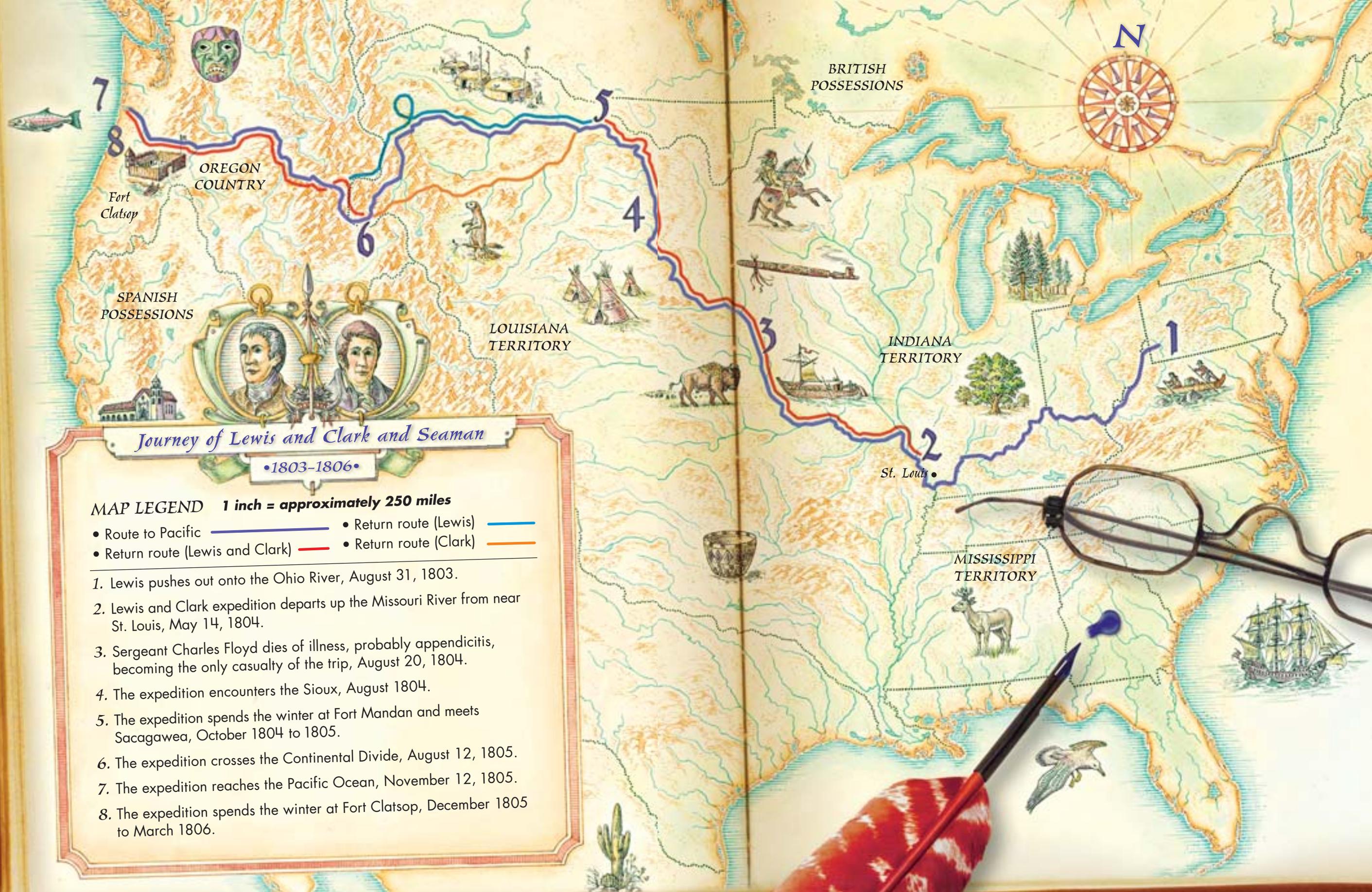
No, I could not. The idea that Lewis and I would ever separate was unthinkable. Not many dogs and men fit together like Lewis and I. If you have ever experienced it, then you know what I'm talking about. And if you haven't, well, it's hard to explain. All I can tell you is that when a dog and a man fit like Lewis and I did, nothing can separate them. Lewis said it best.

"No trade."

... one of the Shawnees a respectable looking Indian offered me three beaverskins for my dog with which he appeared much pleased... of course there was no bargain, I had given 20\$ for this dogg myself—

Meriwether Lewis November 16, 1803





OREGON COUNTRY

Fort Clatsop

SPANISH POSSESSIONS

LOUISIANA TERRITORY

BRITISH POSSESSIONS

INDIANA TERRITORY

MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY

Journey of Lewis and Clark and Seaman

•1803-1806•

MAP LEGEND 1 inch = approximately 250 miles

- Route to Pacific ———
- Return route (Lewis) ———
- Return route (Lewis and Clark) ———
- Return route (Clark) ———

1. Lewis pushes out onto the Ohio River, August 31, 1803.
2. Lewis and Clark expedition departs up the Missouri River from near St. Louis, May 14, 1804.
3. Sergeant Charles Floyd dies of illness, probably appendicitis, becoming the only casualty of the trip, August 20, 1804.
4. The expedition encounters the Sioux, August 1804.
5. The expedition spends the winter at Fort Mandan and meets Sacagawea, October 1804 to 1805.
6. The expedition crosses the Continental Divide, August 12, 1805.
7. The expedition reaches the Pacific Ocean, November 12, 1805.
8. The expedition spends the winter at Fort Clatsop, December 1805 to March 1806.