

Fur, Fins, Creature Features: Can You Draw an Animal Based on Lewis' and Clark's Descriptions?

When Thomas Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark on their journey across America, he asked them to describe the animals, plants, and people they met along the way. If they traveled in 2015 instead of 1805, they might have created a travel blog filled with pictures or even an Instagram account including live videos of their encounters. Unfortunately, the only technology they had was pen and ink. Sometimes, their descriptions of animals were short and incomplete. Sometimes, they were detailed. Your task today is to draw the animal that they are describing and then see how close your picture is to real life. Good luck!

Captain Lewis—July 8, 1805

“the men also brought me a living ground squirrel which is something larger than those of the U' States or those of that kind which are also common here. this is a much handsomer animal. like the other it's principal colour is a redish brown but is marked longitudinally with a much greater number of black or dark bron stripes; the spaces between which is marked by ranges of pure white circular spots, about the size of a brister blue shot. these colours imbrace the head neck back and sides; the tail is flat, or the long hair projecting horizontally from two sides of it only gives it that appearance. the belly and breast are of much lighter brown or nearly white. this is an inhabitant of the open plain altogether, wher it burrows and resides; nor is it like the other found among cliffs of rocks or in the woodlands. their burrows sometimes like those of the mole run horizontally near the surface of the ground for a considerable distance, but those in which they reside or take refuge strike much deeper in the earth “

Draw the ground squirrel here:

Keep in Mind

The Journals of Lewis and Clark are a primary source. While we have typed their words in a common font, we have not changed their spelling or corrected their punctuation. When Lewis and Clark went to school, spelling and punctuation were not yet standardized so their journals sometimes look like they were written by small children who spell words by sound.

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Captain Clark-February 25, 1806

"I purchased of the Clatsops this morning about half a bushel of Small fish which they had caught about 40 miles up the Columbia in their scooping nets. as this is an uncommon fish to me and one which no one of the party has ever Seen. on the next page I have drawn the likeness of them as large as life; it's as perfect as I can make it with my pen and will serve to give a general idea of the fish. the rays of the fins are boney but not Sharp tho' Somewhat pointed. the Small fin on the back next to the tail has no rays of bone being a thin membranous pellicle. the fins next to the gills have eleven rays each. those of the abdomen have Eight each, those of the pinna ani are 20 and 2 half formed in front. that of the back has eleven rays. all the fins are of a white colour. the back is of a blueish duskey colour and that of the lower part of the Sides and belly is of a Silvery white. no Spots on any part. the first of the gills next behind the eye is of a blueish cast, and the second of a light gold colour nearly white. the puple of the eye is black and the iris of a silver white. the under jaw exceeds the upper; and the mouth opens to great extent, folding like that of the Herring. it has no teeth. the abdomen is obtuse and Smooth; in this differing from the herring, Shad, anchovey &c. of the Malacopterygious Order and Class Clupea, to which however I think it more nearly allyed than to any other altho' it has not their accute and Serrate abdomen and the under jaw exceeding the upper. the scales of this little fish are So small and thin that without manute inspection you would Suppose they had none. they are filled with roes of a pure white Colour and have Scercely any perceptable alimentary duct. I found them best when cooked in Indian Stile, which is by roasting a number of them together on a wooden spit without any previous preparation whatever. they are so fat that they require no additional sauce, and I think them Superior to any fish I ever tasted,"

Draw the fish here.

Keep in Mind

Captain Clark uses a lot of scientific terms in his description. Here are a few definitions:

Pellicle thin skin, cuticle, membrane, or film.

Pinna ani Latin term referring to the anal fin

Use Google or dictionary.com to help and remember that words may be misspelled.

Want to check your work?

The Latin names for the two creatures described by the captains:

Spermophilus tridecemlineatus

Thaleichthys pacificus

Google them to compare pictures.

We'd love to see your drawings!

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THE OUTSIDE IS IN US ALL.