

Astoria by Peter Stark

Discussion Questions

(Mostly from the publisher)

For openers: The land and sea expeditions presented psychological as well as physical challenges. If you had to go on one, which journey would you choose?

Wison Price Hunt and Capt. Jonathan Thorn present a striking contrast in leadership styles. What did you see as their strengths and weaknesses? Peter Stark says he admires them both. Do you? Does the leadership style you choose depend on circumstances, or is it an essential quality of personality?

Why do you think Capt. Thorn had so much trouble adapting to a civilian leadership position? How common do you think this problem is among former military leaders? Have you observed that?

Rather than taking the mapped route and risking an encounter with the Blackfeet, the overland party chose to venture into unknown territory. If you were in Hunt's position, how would you have weighed these choices and their accompanying risks? Would you have chosen differently?

Hunt also faced excruciating choices about staying with ailing members of the group or continuing on without them. What factors would you have considered in making this decision? Do you think he made the right choices? Can you think of similar situations leaders of today might face?

Have you ever gone into a situation thinking you were prepared and then finding out you were completely unprepared for the dangers/consequences waiting for you?

What do you think motivated the men to sign up for this mission? Do you think risky adventures represent a "rite of passage" for young men? Can you think of anything comparable for young women?

What do you think Sacagawea would have told Marie Dorion when they met? (Assuming they did meet, as Stark speculates.) What did you think about her role in the story?

What do you think the Native American peoples who encountered Hunt thought of him and his starving party stumbling through? If you were in their place, would you have helped the travelers?

If Astor's colony and trade empire had succeeded as envisioned, do you think there might be a separate country on the West Coast today?

What did you think of John Jacob Astor? He imagined a West Coast empire centered on the Pacific Ocean. Would you call him an advocate of globalism? Was he a visionary? What do visionaries see that others don't? What business leaders, politicians or thinkers today would you call visionaries? Does vision come with a cost to those who carry it out?

Have you ever visited Astoria? What was it like?

Do you see any parallels between the journeys to establish Astoria and possible future journeys to establish colonies on other planets?

What questions do you have for Peter Stark?

