

Cultural and Ecological Impacts of the Fur Trade 1765-1840

LESSON PLAN: THE ECONOMICS OF BEAVER PELTS

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The traders and workers involved in the Fur War sometimes made great profits, others went into debt or died. Competitors sometimes worked together and other times tried to destroy each others companies. Russia, England, Spain. Mexico and the US tried to corner the market for sea otters, seals, beaver, and other fur bearing animals and to lay claim to the Fur Lands.

They discovered many of the First Nations already had large trading networks and were skilled at bargaining. Trade linked individuals, families, and communities in the West. Many of the Europeans and native men, like the Iroquois from the East, and kanakas from Hawaii took local wives and their children became important players and workers.

The beaver was the dominant fur for the interior fur trade.

Objectives

Students will:

- ❖ Understand what made beaver fur so desirable
- ❖ Identify key points in the economics of trade for beaver and prepare a timeline of critical events
- ❖ Understand the exchange of ideas and beliefs between First Nations and Europeans during the fur trade
- ❖ Discover the reasons that England was trying to create a fur desert
- ❖ Explore roles within the fur trade and challenges people faced by developing a trade network within the classroom

Learners

This lesson is designed for fifth grade or up. Students will explore the roles of trader and the First Nations trapper and consumer. A trade network will be established based on the NW coast.

Materials

- ❖ Chapter 2 Fur Trade Economics
- ❖ Chapter 2 Tenacity

First Nations —1/2 class with beaver pelts (with large and small at different values)— distributed unevenly between students - some have 10 or 20, others just 5. “Husband and wife” have to agree on what is wanted.

Trading post—1/2 class. Products for traders— 1/4 class Boson based US trader 1/4 class HBC British traders. Traders are given printed pages of their limited supplies to cut out and what they cost to get to the trading post. They have few guns and coats, plenty of axes and kettles.

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Suggested opening prices

	<u>Initial price in made beaver</u>
Trade Guns	20
Winter coat	6
Axes	1
Gallon kettle	1

The trade starts with 5 minutes for “married couples” to decide how to spend their beaver. The trading posts are set up and open for business with signs prepared to identify the outpost and country. Students try to buy what they want. They bargain for lower prices while traders try to raise prices....

Students discuss the challenge of competition with limited resources...

Students explore the reasons behind the competitive advantage the US had in the beaver fur trade

Students explore the reasons for conflict that developed between the traders and First Nations during the early 1800s.

Students explore the local history of beaver trapping and use

Students describe the First Nations in their local region long ago (precontact) and today and identify tribes on a map with territory outlines (Google search)

Create timeline for the beaver trade