

TRADE ROUTES AND TRAPLINES

PRE-TEACH/PRE-ACTIVITY

Trapping for fur is one of the oldest economic activities; however, its popularity and frequency has declined over the past 150 years. Because of its rich cultural ties, it is important to continue to teach Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth about trapping, to strengthen their knowledge and connection to the land. Discuss with your class the Indigenous perspective of conservation and stewardship, and the difference between hunting with these values and without them. Explain to students that traplines are a series of traps that are set along key paths to catch animals. The routes and locations of traplines are very important and passed from generation to generation.

Ensure that students are aware that trade has happened for centuries between Indigenous groups. It allowed access to different resources for Indigenous Peoples. As a class, complete some preliminary research to find evidence of long-distance trading and central meeting points. Discuss with students the important reasons for trade to occur across such great distances. Use this as an opportunity to ensure students know how to read maps to understand the long distances that Indigenous people would travel to trade.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Students will locate trading posts across Canada.
- Students will learn about the importance of trade routes and traplines to Indigenous Peoples.
- Students will relate trade routes and traplines to their own lives through personal story.
- Students will learn about how trade routes differed across the country.

TRADE ROUTES AND TRAPLINES

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

FIRST NATIONS

Trade existed in the Americas long before the arrival of Europeans — it did not start with the fur trade. In fact, Indigenous Peoples had extensive trade networks, over land and water, often relying on waterways for transporting goods. Chinook jargon, or Chinook wawa, was adopted as a pidgin trade language among trading nations in the Pacific Northwest. Chinook was then taken up by Europeans traders, during which time it was simplified, and continued to be used for trade, lasting into the early 20th century. It had been used as a common tongue among working people in towns with industries like canning, fishing and logging.

— from: “Chinook Jargon - The First Language of Trade” <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/chinook-jargon-first-language-trade>

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TRADE ROUTES AND TRAPLINES

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

MÉTIS

“Canada was built on the fur trade, which supplied European demand for pelts from animals such as the beaver (*Castor canadensis*) to make hats. In Michif, the word for beaver is ‘aen kaastor.’ At the start of the fur trade, the First Nations did most of the trapping. However, the Métis, who are sometimes considered “children of the fur trade,” became skilled hunters and trappers as well. The Métis began making a living as trappers by the end of the 1700s. They sold furs to three fur trade companies: Hudson’s Bay Company, the North West Company and the American Fur Company. Dealing with competing fur trade companies was profitable for Métis trappers because they could sell their furs to the highest bidder. However, these profits began to diminish in 1821 when HBC and the NWC merged, operating as a new entity under the retained HBC name.

HBC’s new-found monopoly on the fur trade meant lower fur prices. Furthermore, in Europe, less expensive silk hats became more popular during the 1830s, causing beaver prices to continue to drop. Prices also dropped for the furs of other animals, and many Métis trappers who had become reliant on the fur trade had to do other things to support their families.

Métis women were integral to the fur trade. They were sought after as marriage partners for fur trade managers because of their kinship ties to local First Nations and Métis. Some English Métis women, known as ‘Country Born,’ married high-ranking officials and became members of the ‘Red River aristocracy.’ Métis women were likely to marry fur trade labourers such as French-Canadian voyageurs. Their work was vitally important as they provided food such as garden produce, berries, fish and game to the fur trade posts. They also made and sold hand-worked items such as sashes and quilts.

Voyageurs were the main labour force of the Montreal-based fur trade system. They manned and paddled large fur trade canoes from Montreal to Fort William (now

part of Thunder Bay, Ont.), then to what are now northern Alberta and the southern Northwest Territories and into present-day Oregon. Few roads made by people existed, making the rivers the best way of connecting communities. The voyageurs used the river systems to haul furs and goods for trading purposes.

From the 1770s until the 1821 merger, most voyageurs were French-Canadians from Lower Canada (now the southern portion of Quebec) and to a lesser extent Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) and Algonquins (Anishinaabeg). After the fur trade merger, the majority of boatmen working in the fur trade were Métis. Carrying on the voyageur way of life, they manned transport canoes and York boats in the northern parts of the present-day

Prairie provinces. They also unloaded freight canoes and York boats. Louis Riel counted on Métis boatmen, particularly the Portage La Loche brigade, as the muscle needed to support his provisional government during the Red River Resistance in 1869-70.

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Métis boatmen worked for several months at a time, often enduring a great deal of hardship. In some places, the river had too many rapids, or it was too narrow for boats to travel upon. Métis boatmen would then carry, or portage, their boats on their backs until they reached another lake or river. Those who were not carrying boats hauled heavy packs of trade goods on their backs. These bundles often weighed as much as 90 kilograms. This heavy weight was held in place by a strap or tumpline around their heads. They often carried their boats and heavy packs for several kilometres through tangled underbrush, over slippery rocks, and through clouds of blackflies. Today, the Métis honour their ancestors by holding “Métis Voyageur Games” at events across the Métis Homeland such as the Back to Batoche festival. These events test the strength, accuracy and endurance of the participants.

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After the 1821 merger of HBC and the NWC, many Métis fur trade workers became free traders, independent hunters, and trappers. The bison hunts took on an increased importance as demand for bison robes and hides — the leather was used to make industrial belts — became more prominent from the 1840s until the great herds of bison began disappearing in the 1870s. Some of the Métis served as fur trade provisioners and as hunters, providing processed bison meat or pemmican to the fur trade workers.

Many sons of HBC traders also became fur trade employees, serving in a variety of positions such as clerks,

postmen and factors. They were less likely to be involved in labouring positions such as manning York boats.

Today, Métis in the northern parts of the Prairie provinces and in Northwest Territories continue to trap. The Métis continue to honour the traditions of their fur trade ancestors by holding annual 'King Trapper' events."

— *from "Fur Trade" in the Métis volume of the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*



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Foundational knowledge and perspectives

INUIT

“For Inuit, sea ice is critical infrastructure and is a central part of culture, community and livelihood. Ice is an extension of the Land — its existence is imperative for Inuit to travel and access crucial areas, as well as being a platform to the ocean and its resources. Sea ice connects Inuit, allowing for travel between communities and the four Inuit regions that make up Inuit Nunangat. The ice also allows Inuit to access harvesting areas (both on land and water) at different times of the year, depending on the seasonal patterns of the species and the condition of the sea ice. Furthermore, sea ice connects Inuit to historical and culturally significant areas, including cabins, seasonal camps, traplines and harvesting areas.”

—from *“Sea Ice”* by Joey Angnatok and Rodd Laing, in the *Inuit volume of the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*

“Extensive Inuit trade networks stretching from the Bering Strait to Hudson Bay, and beyond to western Greenland, existed thousands of years prior to the arrival of European explorers in Canada’s north.

Among the most commonly traded items were iron and copper, which were cold-hammered into objects like knives, harpoon tips and jewellery, and soapstone, which could be used to make lamps and pots. Much of the iron originated from three large fragments of a meteorite fall near Cape York which were named ‘the woman’, ‘the dog’ and ‘the tent’ by local Inuit. The copper came from deposits mainly on Banks and Victoria Islands and the soapstone was collected from eastern sections of the Canadian Shield. The Inuit commonly had to travel great distances to be able to trade among groups, often to trading centers such as the place known as Akilineq,

which was located at the mouth of the Thelon River in Nunavut. However the resulting trade routes stretched across all Northern regions contributing to the relative uniformity of Inuit material culture across geographically distinct areas.

Inuit contact with European explorers happened as early as the 1500s, and by the late 1700s trade practices between both parties were well established. European traders obtained whale blubber, baleen, seal furs, walrus skins, and whalebone from coastal Inuit, and wolf skins, caribou furs, snowshoes, and dogs from inland Inuit, in exchange for metal tools, clothing, weapons and exotic foods. After the late 1800s, with increasing Inuit and European population numbers and increasing demand for Arctic resources overseas, the over-exploitation of certain species

such as whales (*Balaena mysticetus*), musk ox (*Ovibos moschatus*) and caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) drastically reduced the abundance of animal populations. This reduction in country food, and an eventual collapse in demand for Arctic resources led to the need for emergency food relief programs to be initiated by the Canadian Government for the Inuit.”

“ This combination of limited traditional food ways and costly processed food has significantly impacted and drastically diminished northern Indigenous culture and lifeways in a short amount of time.

—from *The Copper Inuit Soapstone Trade*

by David Morrison, *History of the American Museum of Natural History Meteorite Collection* by Denton Ebel, *Encyclopedia of the Arctic* edited by Mark Nuttall, *Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs*

“Many plants and animals that once provided the Indigenous people of the North with nourishment are now considered unsafe or in decline because of irresponsible development. Since [Indigenous Peoples]

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TRADE ROUTES AND TRAPLINES

Foundational knowledge and perspectives

INUIT

can no longer survive solely on our traditional ways of life, many remote northern residents must rely on barges to supply costly processed food, but the barges are becoming less and less reliable due to increasingly low water levels. This combination of limited traditional food ways and costly processed food has significantly impacted and drastically diminished northern Indigenous culture and lifeways in a short amount of time.”

—from “Climate” by Catherine Lafferty, in the First Nations volume of the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada



TRADE ROUTES AND TRAPLINES

Points of inquiry and activation related to the Giant Floor Map



- **Divide students into small groups, and give each group a Hudson's Bay Company Map card.** Ask students to examine the map and to locate where various trading posts were located. Since there are many to choose from, place a pylon on your local community and explore the trading posts that existed near your community. Ask students: Who made this map? What is the purpose of this map? Whose perspective is not included on this map? What do you notice about the location of trading posts (located on major waterways)? Why did trading posts exist? What was traded? What patterns and trends can students observe between the trading posts and the locations of present-day Indigenous communities?
- **Have students choose a spot on the map.** Discuss the particular survival skills based on the specific challenges (weather, animal migration, etc.) their chosen spot would present. Discuss the survival skills related to the types of food caught.
- **Divide students up into small groups and have groups select a different type of animal found in Canada and research their distribution.** Examples could include: polar bear, Canada goose, moose, deer, beaver, salmon, seal, caribou, etc. Have students research the distribution of this animal using handheld devices or previous research and use the ropes provided to map it out. Next, have students research how their animal is connected to Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Is it hunted by them? Does it have a spiritual meaning? Explain to students that for many Indigenous Peoples the animals that are hunted and that provide them with food are part of the nature and land that they honour and respect. As a result, when an animal is captured, all parts of its body are used. Have students investigate which Indigenous Peoples hunt or trap their selected animal and, if possible, the various ways the Indigenous group uses the animal.

TRADE ROUTES AND TRAPLINES

Age appropriate application and experiential learning

ELEMENTARY

K-6

- **Relate the practice of hunting and trapping to students' lives.** Discuss why Indigenous Peoples hunt and trap and why these practices are still important today. Have students connect these practices to the traditions in their lives.
- **Reach out to a local Indigenous group/community** and ask an Elder to come in and discuss local trade and trapping traditions.
- **Have students role-play the trade routes** and simulate trade to show their knowledge of the importance of these activities. Ask students how they traded and what was used to make a successful trade (money, language, handshake). Ask students to try to make a trade without speaking the same language. How did this trade differ? Was it fair?
- **Ask students to describe how animals supply the food chain** and fulfill other human needs (e.g., tools, clothing). When discussing this relationship, mention the conservation techniques of Indigenous Peoples of “Don’t take it all,” “Don’t trap while new life is being born” and being mindful of leaving some to regenerate.

INTERMEDIATE

7-9

- **Have students research and compare water routes** used in the fur trade to current routes between destinations, for example, using the book *Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada/ Then and Now* by E. Morse (available online at parkscanadahistory.com/publications/fur-trade-canoe-routes.pdf).
- **Have students do the same activity with cart trails**, for example, using information from the Manitoba Historical Society as a starting point (mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/redrivercart.shtml).
- **Have students research traditional trapping route maps**, outline popular routes with ropes, discuss what land features they see and what types of animals they are likely to find there.
- **Invite a local Indigenous organization/community** to your class to learn about local traditions and the importance of trapping and trading.
- **Discuss how trapping has changed over the decades** and how the balance between supply and demand vs. environmental impact has changed. What are the differences between trapping solely for survival and trapping purely for trading purposes?

TRADE ROUTES AND TRAPLINES

Age appropriate application and experiential learning

SECONDARY

10-12

- **Have students examine** the location and proximity of First Nations and Métis communities, particularly those along rivers or waterways. Discuss patterns and trends that they see.
- **Discuss place names** in the north as they relate to places that Inuit have identified as good places for hunting and discuss why these have been identified. Use the Inuit Place Names cards to assist with this activity.
- **Have students research traditional tanning techniques** to learn more about trapping.
- **Discuss the concept of value and markets** with your class. How do things get value, and who decides what that value is? Be sure to focus on respect for animals and spirits, as well as the difference between value to a community and value to an individual.
- **Research how the fur trade companies manipulated trade** to their advantage, for instance, keeping people tied to the post through credit, paying less than market prices for furs, etc.
- **Ask students to research the use of ceremony in trade** between Indigenous Peoples and European fur traders as an important means to cement trade and establish family relationships.
- **Watch *Angry Inuk*** (nfb.ca/film/angry_inuk/) and discuss the seal hunt.
- **Have students research trade routes and traplines in their area** and compare them with those from different areas. How does topography and climate come into play? See this online map of traplines in British Columbia as an example: maps.gov.bc.ca/ess/hm/imap4m/?catalogLayers=2983,2984&scale=1600000.0¢er=-13985665.8672,6638406.25173

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DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING

- **Students will acknowledge** that trading did not just happen between Europeans and Indigenous people; it occurred prior to European contact.
- **Ask students to compare and contrast** traditional trading systems with their own trading systems such as hockey cards or Pokémon cards. How are they similar and different?
- **Create collages** of the different animals that were trapped in your local community and across the country. Discuss why different animals are shown in different presentations.



LEARNING TO ACTION

- **Have students look at how they can help to raise awareness** of the important traditions and current applications of traplines and trading for Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups in Canada.
- **Reach out to a local Indigenous organization/community** and arrange for them to share more knowledge about the land surrounding your community. If your community is close to or on a famous trading post, trapline or trading route, create a community map (online or by hand) and share it with your school and community.