

Classroom Activity—The Fur Trade

Price of Goods

Objective: Students will use their math skills to answer the questions about the price of trade goods and furs during the Fur Trade. They will learn about the unit of trade: the Made Beaver.

Materials:

Fur Trade – Price of Goods sheet

Fur Trade Goods Questions sheet

Backstory:

The Fur Trade in North America began with the earliest contacts between American Indians and European settlers. During this period, furs, particularly beaver furs for hats, were fashionable. High demand resulted in the near extinction of Europe's beaver population forcing traders to come to what is now the U.S. and Canada for pelts. American Indian nations traded pelts with Europeans in exchange for goods, such as metal tools, jewelry and adornments, ready-made fabric, and cooking utensils, which were more durable, efficient, and easier to use.

Activity:

- Review the *Price of Goods* sheet.
- Have students answer the questions on the *Fur Trade Goods* sheet.
- Review the answers together, especially number 10.

Fur Trade - Price of Goods

Around 1800, trade goods were sold at trading posts at the following standard prices set by the Hudson Bay Company. Beaver was the currency of trade and one "Made Beaver" was a first-rate quality skin from an adult beaver.

Item	# Made Beaver Fur	Item	# Made Beaver Fur
¾ lb. colored beads	1	1 pair shoes	1
1 brass kettle	1	1 musket	10-12
1 lb. lead	1	1 pistol	4
2 lbs. sugar	1	8 knives	1
1 lb. thread	1	12 needles	1
2 yards cloth	1	1 hatchet	1
1 blanket	1	8 hawk bells	1
2 combs	1	2 net lines	1
2 red feathers	1	2 powderhorns	1
20 fishhooks	1	6 plain rings	1
4 fire steels	1	3 stone rings	1
4 spoons	1	2 sashes	1
2 shirts	1	6 thimbles	1

Because the prices of all trade goods were set in values of Made Beaver (MB), other animal pelts, such as squirrel, otter, and moose, were quoted in their made beaver equivalents. See the chart below for examples.

# Made Beaver	Fur Equivalent	# Made Beaver	Fur Equivalent
1	3 Marten	1	2 Wolverines
1	1 Fox	1	1 or 2 Otters
1	1 Moose	1	10 lbs. Goose Feathers
2	1 Black bear	1	2 Beaver skins (small)
1	2 Deerskins	1	1 or 2 Lynx
1	10 Muskrats	1	10-15 Squirrels

Fur Trade Goods

Name: _____

Long ago during the Fur Trade, American Indians could go to a trading post to trade the furs they trapped for goods they needed. Use the *Price of Goods* worksheet to answer the following questions.

1.) How many furs would you need to buy 6 combs, 4 shirts, and 1 pair of shoes? _____

2.) How many pounds of sugar could you buy with 6 furs? _____

3.) You need 12 needles, 8 spoons, 3 stone rings, and $\frac{3}{4}$ pound of beads. Do you have enough with 5 furs? _____

4.) You have 4 Deerskins and 2 Made Beavers. How many knives can you buy?

5.) How many blankets could you buy with 5 Black Bear pelts? _____

6.) You have 2 fox furs, 2 moose pelts, 9 Marten furs, and 2 Made Beaver furs. Do you have enough to buy a musket? _____

7.) You need 10 yards of fabric to make 2 dresses. How many furs do you need? _____

8.) How many fishhooks could you buy with 2 otter pelts? _____

9.) It is almost Winter, and you need to buy 4 new blankets. How many Wolverine furs do you need? _____

10.) You are ready to settle move West to start a trading post of your own. You have 90 furs to purchase supplies. What would you buy? Explain your thinking!
