

# Native American Trade Routes and the Barter Economy

## About these activities

The activities that follow are intended to supplement topics addressed in Chapter 2 of the Montana Historical Society's Montana history textbook, *Montana: Stories of the Land*. If you do not have copies of the textbook, you can download a pdf version of the chapter from the *Montana: Stories of the Land* website: <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/StoriesOfTheLand/Part1/Chapter2>.

## Grade level

7th–9th grade

## Time needed

Two to four class periods

## ■ Stage 1: Desired Results

### Established Goals

Essential Understandings regarding Montana Indians: 1, 2, 3. Montana Social Studies Content Standards: 1.1–1.3, 3.1–3.7, 4.2–4.3, 5.1–5.4, 6.4

### Understandings

Students will understand that

- ▶ Native Americans engaged in sharing and trading of basic needs via a complex and far-reaching network of land and water routes.
- ▶ cultural viewpoints, traditions, resources, and values influence what type of economy is practiced within a society.
- ▶ physical as well as natural features (for example, rivers, mountains, flora, fauna) determine and direct the movement and interaction of diverse cultural groups.

## Essential Questions

- ▶ To what extent did Montana tribes engage in bartering with other tribes? Among themselves?
- ▶ Is an economy necessary to a culture and, if so, why?
- ▶ How do physical and natural features affect the economy of a culture?
- ▶ Why did native peoples engage in sharing and bartering goods and products with one another?
- ▶ How did the Native American system of trade meet the needs of the people?
- ▶ To what extent did trade items get passed from the source to distant groups?
- ▶ How is the economy practiced in pre-contact native societies different from that practiced by current society?

## Students will know

- ▶ the basic geography of Montana and North America.
- ▶ facts about pre-contact Native Americans and their approximate locations.
- ▶ the location of native resources for basic needs and barter.
- ▶ the trade routes of Native Americans.
- ▶ key economic terms: simple reciprocity, generalized reciprocity, negative reciprocity.

## Students will be able to

- ▶ use research skills to develop and label trade routes, tribal location, and resource maps.

- ▶ trace how trade items such as dentalium shells from the West Coast came to be found on the ears of a Pend d'Oreille, how copper arrowheads arrived in southwestern pueblos, and how abalone shell came to be in the beadwork of a Crow.
- ▶ recognize and define vocabulary terms in the context of pre-contact Native American trade as well as the current economy.
- ▶ distinguish the diversity between and among Montana tribes and their trading partners.
- ▶ express their discoveries orally and in writing.

## ■ Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

### Performance Tasks

- ▶ Create a pre-contact trade route map using personally designed rubber stamps to designate Native American tribes, barter goods, and resource areas. (What common misunderstandings do people today have about the complexity of Native American trading systems?)
- ▶ Simulate the bartering system practiced among Native Americans by role playing as tribes engaged in the continental chain of trade, sharing, and exchange of resources and products. (How is pre-contact trade fundamentally different from the system used by current society?)

### Other Evidence

- ▶ Oral presentation of trade map
- ▶ Chalk Talk\* written response to the Essential Questions followed by group discussion
- ▶ Using economic vocabulary in context

### Teaching Strategies

\*Chalk Talk is a technique in which the teacher writes an essential question on the board and then instructs students to silently respond by writing their comments on the same white/blackboard. The instructor must provide stu-

dents with chalk or board markers so that five to ten students are writing on the board at any one time. If there is a shortage of markers, have the students who have finished their response hand off the marker to someone who has yet to reply. *It is important that this part of the activity be done in silence.*

By clustering students at the board and having them write their answers pell-mell, a general anonymity exists as to the ownership of the answer. Students can even reply to someone else's comment. Once this has been accomplished, a full discussion can follow. Students can give voice to their opinions because they can see them on the board. Everyone answers. Everyone participates.

## ■ Activity 1: Resources and Routes (two class periods)

This activity will focus primarily on mapping pre-contact trade routes and resources among North America tribes with special emphasis on the role of Montana's Native Americans. A very broad system of barter existed in a complex type of trading network that connected Native American groups across the North American continent. Where tribal territories overlapped, seasonal gatherings often occurred, allowing the exchange of goods between groups and extended families. This system fostered the trading of such products as corn, beans, tobacco, pipestone, raw copper, obsidian, chert, hides, dried meats and fish, mollusk shells, salt, paint pigments, medicinal roots and plants, and even turquoise. Routes and trails supporting such a vast trading network were well established. High mountains, deserts, open plains, canyons, large bodies of water, and other natural barriers did not eliminate trading interaction.

Students will be challenged to map the details of such a diverse trading network while always maintaining Montana as the hub of activity. Students will be given a list of Native American

groups, their approximate location, their specific barter goods and resources, as well as general resource locations. A list of major geographic features such as important rivers, passes, streams, lakes, mountains, deserts, and coastlines will also be provided. Students will research the various barter goods and their importance to native cultures. Using wooden blocks and rubber inner tubing, the students will create rubber stamps depicting symbols of each tribal group and the various barter goods they possess. With the aid of an atlas, highway maps, the Internet, and self-made stamps, students will locate tribes, routes, geographic features, and resource areas on a large map of North America. Following this activity, students will be challenged to compare and contrast modern-day routes of travel and trade with the Native American antecedents. The activity will align with Essential Understandings 1 and 2 and with Social Studies Content Standards 1.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 6.4.

### Materials

Large map of North America (8½ x 14 or 11 x 17 inch, if possible)

Student-created map outline (poster or butcher paper is best)

Wood blocks, 2 x 1½ inches, made from ¾-inch-thick plywood)

Old rubber inner tubing

Stamp pads and ink

Scissors and rubber cement

Atlas of North America

Highway maps for Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Northern California, Wyoming, Utah, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona (These maps are free using a AAA membership. Montana Highway maps are always free from the state or local chamber of commerce. Regional maps work better than individual

maps—for example, northwestern United States, Indian Country, southwestern United States)

### Procedure

- Students will work in groups of four.
- Students will be given a list of Native American tribes/groups, their approximate location, their barter goods, resource location, and important rivers, mountains, lakes, and bays.
- Students will construct rubber stamps (using wooden blocks and inner tubing) that visually depict each tribe and the various barter goods they possess.
- With the help of an atlas, highway maps, and the Internet, students will locate tribes, resource areas, and barter goods on a large map of North America and indicate these locations using the rubber stamps. A key to the symbols must accompany the map.

### Wrap-up Discussion Questions

- 1) What conclusions can you draw about the nature of pre-contact Native American trade routes?
- 2) How do physical and natural features affect the economy of a system?
- 3) Trace a trade item. How did dentalium shells from the West Coast come to be found on the ears of a Pend d'Oreille? How did copper arrowheads come to be found in southwestern pueblos? How did abalone shell come to be found in the beadwork of a Crow?
- 4) To what extent did Montana tribes engage in bartering with other tribes? To what extent among themselves?
- 5) What aspects of the tribal trade route system seem similar to modern transportation corridors?

## ■ Activity 2: Trading Times— Native American Barter Economy Activity (two class periods)

In this activity, students will work in small groups to simulate the process in which various products from different regional tribes were bartered and disseminated. The concept of reciprocity\* will be explored as it relates to the distribution of goods and products among Native Americans. The type of reciprocity practiced among tribal people involved not the direct exchange of one thing for another of equal value but, rather, the exchange of goods based on desire, need, abundance, and esthetics. This system even included the sharing of goods or labor with another person without expecting anything in return. Such actions as the latter occurred most often within clans and extended families. Also, if a tribal member verbally admired an item or a product such as a beaded belt that belonged to another individual, tribal protocol dictated that the owner give it away to the admirer.

Students will role play various tribes—for example, Kootenai, Salish, Shoshone, Crow—and experience the trading process as they embark on an imaginary journey to gather as many trade items as possible from one another using the barter system. Clever trading and acquisition of certain “valued” goods will allow students to go further on their journey by using some recently acquired items to trade for others. The ultimate goal is to bring back as many new and needed products as possible to their home site. A wrap-up discussion will center around the dynamics of Native American barter systems and how they compare to contemporary market economies. This activity will align with Essential Understandings 1, 2, and 3 and with Social Studies Content Standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 3.4, 5.1, 5.2, and 5.4.

### Materials

Map of trade routes

Plastic, self-sealing bags (one quart)

Construction paper  
Magazines  
Glue  
Scissors  
Cloth scraps  
Chert/obsidian (if available)  
Fake or real leather scraps  
Corn, bean, and sunflower seeds  
Salt  
Shells  
Jerky  
Copper rod (miswabik-copper arrowhead; to construct the projectile point, see the instructions at <http://www.msu.edu/~oberg/copper/funfacts.html>)

### Procedure

- Before beginning the exercise, introduce the concepts of reciprocity and barter (refer to the background information provided by state archaeologist Stan Wilmoth below.)
- For the exercise, students will work in randomly selected groups of two.
- Each student will randomly select a plastic bag containing a card with a specific tribe and a list of trade goods, then find a partner with the matching tribe. (Be sure to split the available trade goods between the two bags so that each student has different items.)
- Using the materials provided, students will construct pictures or facsimiles of the goods needed to barter with other groups and place them in the plastic bag. The maximum allowed number of each item is five; the minimum is one.
- Once the bags have been prepared, students will participate in a thirty-minute timed activity in which each group tries to gather as many trade items as possible using the Native American reciprocity barter system.

The point is for each tribe to establish good relationships and potential alliances with other tribes as well as to bring back as many different trade goods as possible to their home site. By trading and gathering other items of value, groups can go further on their journey by using some of the recently acquired trade items as future barter goods.

- ▶ Each member of the group must share two items with another group without expecting something in return.
- ▶ Each member may ask for one item from another group, and it must be given without receiving anything in return.
- ▶ After the timed activity is finished, each group must identify on a map its trade routes as well as the location of tribes and trade goods encountered.

### **Wrap-up Discussion Questions**

- 1) What conclusions can you draw about the barter/trade form of economy?**
- 2) How does the Native American system meet the needs of the people?**
- 3) Why did native peoples engage in sharing and bartering goods and products with one another?**
- 4) Is an economy necessary to a culture? Why?**
- 5) To what extent did trade items get passed from the source to distant groups?**
- 6) How did your group measure success in the bartering system?**
- 7) To what extent does fairness enter into the Native American bartering system?**
- 8) How is the economy practiced in pre-contact native societies different from that practiced by current society?**

### **Background for Teachers: Some Words on Reciprocity**

*by Stan Wilmoth, State Archaeologist,  
Montana State Historic Preservation Office*

In Native American societies, most of the people that one lived with, worked with, visited, and even married were some kind of relative. You needed relatives in order to survive and prosper because there were no government institutions, such as the military or disaster relief, to protect you and your family. Because people lived in extended family groups for most of the year, most did not calculate what they gave to family nor did they specify repayment. This is known as generalized reciprocity. It is similar to giving a birthday present to a baby sister.

With friends and relatives (by marriage) living in other communities, you still wanted and needed to be generous as a way to maintain good relationships. But with such groups, the giving and receiving of gifts was remembered and tallied. This is known as balanced reciprocity. It is similar to giving a birthday present to a family friend.

In each system, gifting generosity was key to being an influential and competent provider and would ensure survival when it was needed.

If you traded with someone who was not a relative or a dependent, you could try to get a better deal. This is known as negative or unbalanced reciprocity. The farther you were from your home and family, the more you might try to make on the trading deal. For example, if you gifted your cousin a meal, you did not charge interest but you did expect him to do the same for you. However, if you knew that a stranger was trying to give less than expected for something, you would do the same. Thus, your attitude toward "trade" changed depending on where and with whom you were trading.

### **About this activity**

Jim Schulz, a high school teacher in Helena, Montana, developed this activity in 2006 with valuable input from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Preservation Office, tribal educator Tim Ryan, founder of AST Northwest, and state archaeologist Stan Wilmoth.

# Selected Native American Resource Sites: North America

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The sites used by native peoples for resources are abundant; the following are just a few primary areas of activity.

## **Obsidian**

Wyoming: Obsidian Cliffs, (Yellowstone National Park)

Oregon: Glass Buttes/Newberry Volcano

Arizona: San Francisco Peaks, (Flagstaff)

South Dakota: Black Hills

For more information, see the Northwest Research Obsidian Studies Laboratory/  
U.S. Obsidian Source Catalog, <http://www.sourcecatalog.com/index.html>

## **Turquoise**

New Mexico: Cerillos Hills (south of Santa Fe),  
Burro Mountain, Eureka District, Red Hill

For more information, see “Turquoise Jewelry,” Shirley Wiesmann, compiler,  
<http://www.southwestgems.com/mall/Turquoise-jewelry.htm>

## **Raw Copper**

Michigan: shore of Lake Superior, Isle Royale,  
Copper Range/Keweenaw Peninsula

## **Dentalium Shells**

Pacific Coast: Fort Vancouver (Washington),  
Vancouver Island (British Columbia)

## **Paint Pigments**

Red hematite: Drummond and Helena  
(Montana)

## **Pipestone**

Minnesota: Pipestone National Monument

For more information, see <http://www.nps.gov/pipe/index.htm>

## **Chert**

Montana: prehistoric chert mines at  
Drummond and Three Forks

## **Knife River Flint**

North Dakota: Dunn County

# Important Geographic Features

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## Montana

**Lake:** Flathead

**Rivers:** Missouri, Yellowstone, Musselshell, Marias, Big Hole, Bitterroot, Clark Fork

**Mountains:** Bitterroot, Mission, Big Belts, Absaroka, Anaconda Pintlers, Flathead Range, Flint Creek, Bridger, Lewis, Tobacco Root

**Passes:** Lewis and Clark, Rogers, Marias, Skalkaho, Bozeman, Lolo, Lemhi, Big Hole, Gibbons, MacDonald, Mullan

**Meeting Areas:** Deer Lodge Valley, Camas Prairie, Big Hole Valley, Flint Creek Valley, Helena Valley

## Idaho

**Lakes:** Pend Oreille, Coeur d'Alene

**Rivers:** Clark Fork, Snake, Lochsa, Clearwater

**Mountains:** Sawtooth, Coeur d'Alene

**Passes:** Lolo, Lemhi, Lost Trail, Nez Perce, Monida

## Washington

**Rivers:** Columbia, Snake

**Mountains:** Cascade

**Passes:** Snoqualmie, Stevens

**Sound:** Puget

**Meeting Area:** Yakima

## Oregon

**Rivers:** Columbia, Willamette, Klamath, Deschutes, Malheur

**Mountains:** Cascade

**Pass:** Grants

## Wyoming

**Rivers:** Wind, Yellowstone, Snake, Green, North Platte

**Mountains:** Teton, Wind River, Bull, Bighorn

**Passes:** South, Union, Togwotee

**Meeting Area:** Green River

## North Dakota

**Rivers:** Missouri, Red, Little Missouri, Knife

**Meeting Areas:** Knife River Villages

## Minnesota

**Rivers:** Mississippi, Red, Minnesota

**Resource Area:** Pipestone National Monument

## New Mexico

**Rivers:** Pecos, Rio Grande

**Resource Area:** Cerillos Hills–Cerillos Hills Historic Park

## Utah

**Lake:** Great Salt Lake

**Rivers:** Colorado, Sevier

**Mountains:** Wasatch

**Pass:** Big Mountain

## Northern California

**Rivers:** Klamath, Sacramento, San Joaquin

**Mountains:** Cascade, Sierra Nevada

**Passes:** Donner, Carson, Altamont

**Bay:** San Francisco

# Native American Tribal Groups: Desired Goods and Needs

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## **Northwest Pacific Coast (Oregon / Washington)**

<b>Snoqualmie</b>	red and black paint pigments, bison hides, chert, obsidian, bitterroot, jewelry, pipestone, copper, feathers
<b>Chinook</b>	red and black paint pigments, bison hides, chert, obsidian, bitterroot, jewelry, pipestone, copper, feathers

## **Great Basin Plateau (Eastern Washington / Eastern Oregon / Southern Idaho)**

<b>Yakima</b>	bitterroot, obsidian, chert, red and black paint pigments, bison hides, jewelry
<b>Shoshone / Bannock</b>	woven mats, blankets, cedar baskets, dentalium shells, medicinal herbs, obsidian, bitterroot, tobacco, pottery, jewelry, copper, salt, pipestone

## **Intermontane (Northern Idaho / Western Montana)**

<b>Kootenai / Pend d'Oreille / Salish</b>	woven mats, blankets, cedar baskets, dentalium shells, white camas, medicinal herbs, obsidian, flint, jewelry, salt, pipestone
<b>Nez Perce</b>	bitterroot, red and black paint pigments, bison hides, chert, flint, obsidian, salt, pipestone, cedar mats, feathers

## **Plains Region (Eastern Montana / North Dakota)**

<b>Crow</b>	corn, beans, gourd squash, sunflower seeds, jewelry, bitterroot, salt, biscuitroot, shells, woven blankets, baskets, turquoise, copper, pipestone
<b>Mandan / Hidatsa</b>	porcupine quillwork, furs, chert, obsidian, dried salmon, cinnabar, baskets, pottery, turquoise, copper, salt

## **Southwest Region (New Mexico / Arizona / Texas)**

<b>Jumano (Pueblo)</b>	bison hides, medicinal herbs, copper, shells, obsidian, flint, salt, pigments
<b>Navajo</b>	bison hides, chert, obsidian, copper, mollusk shells, pigments, salt, quills, feathers, jewelry

## **California—Intermountain Region (Central and Northern California)**

<b>Ute</b>	bison hides, dried salmon, pigments, copper, chert, flint, baskets, blankets, jewelry, corn, beans
<b>Miwok</b>	obsidian, chert, flint, bison hides, pottery, corn, beans, squash, tobacco, pipestone, paint pigments

## **Northeastern Region (Michigan / Wisconsin)**

<b>Ojibwa</b>	bison hides, shells, turquoise, jewelry, flint, chert, obsidian, pipestone, corn, beans, salt, medicinal herbs
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# Native American Tribal Groups: Selected Goods and Products for Barter

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## **Northwest Pacific Coast (Oregon / Washington)**

<b>Snoqualmie</b>	woven mats, woven blankets, cedar baskets, mollusk shells, medicinal herbs
<b>Chinook</b>	dentalium shells, cedar mats, baskets, dried salmon, woodpecker skins

## **Great Basin Plateau (Eastern Washington / Eastern Oregon / Southern Idaho)**

<b>Yakima</b>	white camas, obsidian, dried salmon, dried steelhead trout
<b>Shoshone / Bannock</b>	dried salmon, biscuitroot, white camas, bison hides, porcupine quillwork, dried meat (bison)

## **Intermontane (Northern Idaho / Western Montana)**

<b>Kootenai / Pend d'Oreille / Salish</b>	bitterroot, camas, red and black paint pigments, bison hides, elk hides, dried salmon, dried berries, chert, porcupine quillwork, furs
<b>Nez Perce</b>	dried salmon, balsamroot, biscuitroot, bison hides, elk hides

## **Plains Region (Eastern Montana, North Dakota)**

<b>Crow</b>	bison hides, dried meat (bison), tobacco, dried buffaloberries, antelope dewclaws, porcupine quillwork, furs
<b>Mandan / Hidatsa</b>	corn, beans, gourd squash, sunflower seeds, jewelry

## **Southwest Region (New Mexico / Arizona / Texas)**

<b>Jumano (Pueblo)</b>	corn, beans, squash, cotton cloth, pottery, turquoise, jewelry, feathers
<b>Navajo</b>	medicinal plants, ceremonial plants, woven goods, turquoise, corn, beans

## **California—Intermountain Region (Central and Northern California)**

<b>Ute</b>	salt, medicinal plants, roots, berries, squash, dried meat
<b>Miwok</b>	ohlone mussels, abalone shells, salt, cinnabar, dried abalone, olivella shells, pine nuts, rabbit skin blankets

## **Northeastern Region (Michigan / Wisconsin)**

<b>Ojibwa</b>	corn, squash, raw copper, fish oil, pipestone
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