



# Wild Illinois History

## Trading Rendezvous

### Concepts:

The fur trade was an important part of the economy for various cultures in the region.

### Objectives: Students will be able to:

- ❑ Explain the premise of fur trading in the region during the fur trade era (1700s to early 1800s).
- ❑ List examples of furs that were traded during the fur trade.
- ❑ Discuss ways that trading impacted various cultures in the region.
- ❑ Discuss the advantages and difficulties of an economy based on trade between people of different cultures.

**Standards:** 16.C.2c; 16.D2b; 16.E.2c

### Materials:

- ❑ Print and cut out name tags and trading cards on assorted color paper
- ❑ *Note:* it will be helpful to print the name tags and corresponding trade cards for each group on matching colored paper.
- ❑ Print out Guide Sheets to distribute to trading groups

### Space:

- ❑ A classroom or open space

### Key points:

- ❑ Prior to European contact, Native Americans, such as the Potawatomi, the Sauk, the Kickapoo and the Illinois were largely self-sufficient, primarily hunting and using only those animals needed for food, clothing and shelter.
- ❑ European and American fur companies obtained furs in trade from Native Americans who were skilled at trapping and hunting wild animals.
- ❑ Trade and value of furs was based on supply and demand.

### Educator Background:

Societies have economic systems for producing, distributing and obtaining goods and services. Prior to European contact, native people in Illinois were largely self-sufficient, although an extensive trade network with Indians from other regions existed. Traders and missionaries began to settle among the Illinois people drawn by the wealth of natural resources and the quest for furs, a commodity that had been seriously depleted by over-hunting in Europe. The formerly self-sufficient economy of the Native Americans became increasingly dependent upon trade with Europeans.

The fur trade dominated the region during the period of the early 1700s to the early 1800s. Various trade companies, such as Hudson's Bay Company, the North West Company and the American Fur Company employed men, known as voyageurs to travel the Great Lakes and adjoining rivers in great canoes, some as large as 34 feet long. The voyageurs transported trade goods to Native American villages. A clerk from the fur company traveled with them and conducted the trade. In exchange for furs, Indian people received beads, silver and cloth, as well as muskets, blankets and cooking pots.

Following trades, the voyageurs paddled their canoes loaded with furs back to trading posts where pelts were sorted and graded. Most of the furs were then transported in large sailing ships to Europe, where they were made into coats, men's top hats and other clothing.

For many years, the top fashion statement for men in Europe and in the cities of the United States was a beaver top hat, made from the felted underfur of the beaver. Consequently, the beaver provided a prime source of income for fur companies, and was the pelt upon which most trade transactions were based. In this activity a beaver is worth one *plus* (pronounced plo). Although the value of furs varied based on supply and demand, the beaver remained "king" of the economy for many years.

The French and British had a belief system about such things as material wealth and land ownership that was in contrast with the native people. Bartering with fur traders from the European companies changed the traditional economy and technology of the Illinois and other native groups in the area.

Prior to European contact, Native Americans wore clothing made exclusively of skins and furs. They slept on furs. They gathered only those animals needed to supply food, clothing and shelter. During the fur trade era, Native Americans were introduced to cloth, blankets, silver, muskets, axes and tin kettles intensifying the drive for trapping animals as they adopted the new technologies.

### **Procedure**

In some seasons, usually spring and fall, several Native American groups and voyageur brigades would gather for an extended rendezvous to conduct trade at places like Fort de Chartres. This activity reenacts a simplified version of a rendezvous.

Explain the background of the trading rendezvous: a gathering of many people from different cultures to trade.

Divide the class into FIVE groups: Two groups of voyageurs, plus the Potawatomi, the Sauk and the Illinois. These Indian groups are representative of Indian people located in Illinois in the mid-1700s. Have the students wear the name tags for their group for the "rendezvous." This will help them identify each other.

Spread the groups out into various parts of the room. Distribute trading cards and Guide Sheets to the proper groups. The Guide Sheets provide directions on what each group has to trade, and what they should try to obtain.

Although the Guide Sheets have information about the approximate value of trade items, the actual value in trading activity depends upon supply and demand. Groups do not need to share the stated value of their trade items with other groups with whom they are trading.

Voyageur brigades should spread out their wares (trading cards) on the ground/floor/blanket in front of them. Voyageur brigades stay seated near their displays. Voyageur groups do not trade with each other. Native American groups are free to roam (carrying their trading cards) between the voyageur brigades to see what trades might be to their best advantage.

Give the groups a few minutes to read their Guide Sheets to learn about themselves, and what items they should try to obtain in trade. Groups should not tell each other of their trading goal, so as not to bias the trading. Circulate to each group before trading to be sure each group knows what they are to do.

Let the trading begin! Allow at least 15 minutes for trading. As groups make a trade, they should exchange cards. For example, if the Potawatomi trade for a blanket, they need to give 3 beaver cards (or whatever is the agreed upon value) to the Voyageurs. In exchange, the Voyageurs give their blanket card to the Potawatomi.

Following the trading, have the students gather back together to discuss their trades.

### **Follow Up Discussion Questions:**

Did groups get the items they were trying to obtain?

Did anyone think any of the trades were unfair? Too high or too low?

In the 1700s, what difficulties would each of the groups have had during the trading, and how would that impact the trading? (e.g. They would not speak the same languages. They would have traveled many days to reach the rendezvous. They would have spent many months trapping and preparing pelts.)

The values of the trade items provided on the Guide Sheets are based loosely on references from the late 1700s from various trading posts in the Great Lakes region. Comparing the values of some of the items, are there any values that surprised you? (e.g. 20 knives had the same value as a yard of ribbon or one beaver.)

Before the Indian people came into contact with the Europeans, they hunted animals for food and clothing. How do you think trading may have changed the reasons that Native Americans hunted for animals?

By the mid 1800s, the beaver population was depleted so severely that many trading companies disbanded. What do you think was the impact on the Indian people?

## Guide Sheet

### **Voyageur Brigade 1**

#### **Who you are:**

You are a group of voyageurs from the North West Company. Spread out your trading cards on a table or on the floor in front of your group.

#### **Try to get:**

As many furs as possible to bring back to your headquarters.

*Trade items you have to start with:*

*Value:*

1 spool of sewing thread	1 plus (pronounced ploo)
10 silver ear decorations	1 plus
1 small blanket	3 plus
1 cotton shirt	3 plus
2 yards red cloth	6 plus
1 gun (musket)	10 plus
1 tin kettle	3 plus
1 hank of blue beads	4 plus
20 knives	1 plus for all
5 fish hooks	1 plus

#### **Remember:**

- 1 beaver = 1 plus
- 10 muskrats = 1 plus
- 1 otter = 2 plus
- 1 skunk or 1 deer = 1/2 plus

## **Guide Sheet**

### **Voyageur Brigade 2**

#### **Who you are:**

You are a group of voyageurs from Hudson's Bay Company. Spread out your trading cards on a table or on the floor in front of your group.

#### **Try to get:**

Furs to bring back to your trading post.

You are also in need of dried food since you lost yours in a storm on Lake Michigan.

An Indian guide would also be helpful since you are new to the area.

#### *Trade items you have to start with:*

#### *Value:*

1 hank of small beads	1 plus (pronounced ploo)
25 sewing needles	1 plus for all
1 large blanket	4 plus
1 ax	2 plus
10 clay pipes	1 plus for all
2 yards of colored cloth	1 plus
1 large brass kettle	7 plus
6 fire steels to start fires	1 plus for all
1 yard ribbon	1 plus
1 beaver trap	2 plus

#### **Remember:**

1 beaver = 1 plus

10 muskrats = 1 plus

1 otter = 2 plus

1 skunk or 1 deer = 1/2 plus

## **Guide Sheet**

### **Potowatomi Indians**

#### **Who you are:**

You are excellent hunters and trappers.

#### **Try to get:**

Things to help you hunt animals.

Ribbons, cloth and sewing needles for making the colorful clothing you wear.

*Trade items you have to start with:*

*Value:*

5 beaver pelts

1 plus each (pronounced ploo)

10 muskrat pelts

1 plus for all

2 skunk pelts

1 plus for all

1 otter pelt

2 plus

2 deer pelts

1 plus for all

#### **Remember:**

1 beaver = 1 plus

10 muskrats = 1 plus

1 otter = 2 plus

1 skunk or 1 deer = 1/2 plus

## **Guide Sheet**

### **Illinois Indians**

#### **Who you are:**

You travel the area and know it well, especially the rivers and creeks. You are good at fishing.

#### **Try to get:**

Things that will help keep you warm, such as blankets or shirts.

Things that will help you fish.

Silver to wear.

#### *Trade items you have to start with:*

2 beaver pelts

100 dry white fish

1 otter pelt

Guide service on the rivers

2 deer pelts

#### *Value:*

1 plus each (pronounced ploo)

6 plus

2 plus

11 plus

1 plus for all

#### **Remember:**

1 beaver = 1 plus

10 muskrats = 1 plus

1 otter = 2 plus

1 skunk or 1 deer = 1/2 plus

## **Guide Sheet**

### **Sauk Indians**

#### **Who you are:**

You are good hunters and also good at growing corn and gathering wild foods.

#### **Try to get:**

Things to help you skin and clean the animals you trap.

Items to help you cook.

#### *Trade items you have to start with:*

50 pounds of dried corn

50 pounds of wild rice

2 beaver pelts

2 skunk pelts

1 otter pelt

#### *Value:*

3 plus (pronounced ploo)

3 plus

1 plus each

1 plus for all

2 plus

#### **Remember:**

1 beaver = 1 plus

10 muskrats = 1 plus

1 otter = 2 plus

1 skunk or 1 deer = 1/2 plus

**Attachments:**

Name badge sheets

Trading card sheets

**References:**

Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History. Helen Hornbeck Tanner

Museum Link: The Illinois. [www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat\\_amer/post/htmls](http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat_amer/post/htmls)

**1 Spool of  
Sewing  
Thread**

**voyageur brigade 1**

**10 Silver  
Ear  
Decorations**

**voyageur brigade 1**

**1 Small  
Blanket**

**voyageur brigade 1**

**1 Cotton  
Shirt**

**voyageur brigade 1**

**2 Yards  
Red Cloth**

**voyageur brigade 1**

**1 Gun  
(Musket)**

**voyageur brigade 1**

**1 Tin  
Kettle**

**voyageur brigade 1**

**1 Hank  
Blue Beeds**

**voyageur brigade 1**

# 20 Knives

voyageur brigade 1

# 5 Fish Hooks

voyageur brigade 1

1 Hank of  
Small  
Beads

voyageur brigade 2

25 Sewing  
Needles

voyageur brigade 2

1 Large  
Blanket

voyageur brigade 2

1 Ax

voyageur brigade 2

10 Clay  
Pipes

voyageur brigade 2

2 Yards  
of Colored  
Cloth

voyageur brigade 2

1 Large  
Brass  
Kettle

voyageur brigade 2

6 Fire  
Steels  
to  
start fires

voyageur brigade 2

1 Yard  
of  
Ribbon

voyageur brigade 2

1 Beaver  
Trap

voyageur brigade 2

**1 Beaver  
Pelt**

Potawatomi Indian

**10 Muskrat  
Pelts**

Potawatomi Indian

**1 Otter  
Pelt**

Potawatomi Indian

**2 Deer  
Pelts**

Potawatomi Indian

# 2 Skunk Pelts

Potawatomi Indian

I Beaver  
Pelt

Illinois Indian

I Beaver  
Pelt

Illinois Indian

100  
Dry  
White Fish

Illinois Indian

I Otter  
Pelt

Illinois Indian

# Guide Service on the River

Illinois Indian

# 2 Deer Pelts

Illinois Indian

**50 Pounds  
of  
Dried  
Corn**

Sauk Indian

**50 Pounds  
of  
Wild Rice**

Sauk Indian

**1 Beaver  
Pelt**

Sauk Indian

**1 Beaver  
Pelt**

Sauk Indian

**1 Otter  
Pelt**

Sauk Indian

**2 Skunk  
Pelts**

Sauk Indian

**Voyageur  
Brigade 1**

**Voyageur  
Brigade 1**

**Voyageur  
Brigade 1**

**Voyageur  
Brigade 1**

Voyageur  
Brigade 2

Voyageur  
Brigade 2

Voyageur  
Brigade 2

Voyageur  
Brigade 2

Illinois  
Indian

Illinois  
Indian

Illinois  
Indian

Illinois  
Indian

**Potawatomi  
Indian**

**Potawatomi  
Indian**

**Potawatomi  
Indian**

**Potawatomi  
Indian**

Sauk  
Indian

Sauk  
Indian

Sauk  
Indian

Sauk  
Indian

Sauk  
Indian

Potawatomi  
Indian

Voyageur  
Brigade 2

Illinois  
Indian