The Fur Trade

What is the Fur Trade?
- The Fur Trade was started when the first Europeans came to Canada.
- Both the First Nations and Europeans had items that the other did not have.
- Trading took place because there was no money back in that time.

What Started the Fur Trade?
- People all over Europe wanted furs from the new world.
- The most popular item was the beaver hat. Beavers had been hunted, almost to extinction in Europe and Russia.
- Everyone wanted a beaver hat, so that caused more people to go over to the new world to get beaver fur. The hat was not actually made of fur; it was made of felt.

Relationship Between First Nations and Europeans
- The First Nations taught the Europeans how to...
  - Hunt and fish for food.
  - Look for berries that could nourish them when food was scarce.
  - Supply pemmican and wild rice.
  - Make medicine from plants.
  - Trap animals.
  - Survive in the northern wilderness.

Roles of the French Fur Trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Nations Trappers</th>
<th>First Nations Guides</th>
<th>Coureurs de Bois</th>
<th>Voyageurs</th>
<th>Merchants</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Trapped animals in the winter and prepared furs.  
- In the spring, they would transport the furs to trading posts on the St. Lawrence River, where they traded with items from Europe, such as tools, knives, guns and kettles. | Relied on from the European explorers.  
- Acted as translators and mediators.  
- Supplied explorers with important information about new territories and the people who lived there. | French settlers who became independent fur traders.  
- Traveled west and north into the interior of the country, trading directly with First Nation trappers. | Government of New France granted licenses to traders to stop independent trade of the Coureurs de Bois.  
- Interested in beaver pelts, as well as wolf, ermine, and fox.  
- Sent furs back to Europe in return for money. They charged high price for pelts as they were a great demand. | First Nations women prepared the furs for trade, made food, and sewed clothing and moccasins.  
- Chopped firewood and tended fires.  
- Made items that were crucial to the survival of the fur traders, such as snowshoes and fish nets.  
- Acted as mediators and translators between Europeans and First Nations.  
- Prepared pemmican. |
The English Fur Trade

- Prince Rupert sent two ships out from England in 1668. The Nonsuch was able to make the journey from England to Rupert River in 118 days.
- When spring arrived, approximately 300 Cree traders came to the ship with beaver pelts.
- On May 2, 1670, “the Governor and Company of Adventures of England trading into Hudson’s Bay,” as Prince Rupert and his partners were known, were given a royal charter by King Charles. The charter granted the company a monopoly, or exclusive right, to trade in the lands drained by the waters that flowed into Hudson Bay. The company would come to be known as the Hudson’s Bay Company.
- Prince Rupert became the first governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company.

There is a good reason the beaver is on one side of the Canadian nickel. The beaver is a reminder of Canada’s early economic history, when the currency of the day was the beaver pelt. The chart (below), found in early documents relating to the Hudson’s Bay Company, outlines how many beaver pelts were needed to trade for certain items in 1670.

The STANDARD how the Company’s Goods must be barter’d in the Southern Part of the Bay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Trade Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>One with the other 10 good Skins; that is, Winter Beaver; 12 Skins for the biggest sort, 10 for the mean, and 8 for the smallest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powder</td>
<td>A Beaver for half a Pound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shot</td>
<td>A Beaver for four Pounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatchets</td>
<td>A Beaver for a great and little Hatchet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knives</td>
<td>A Beaver for 6 great Knives, or 8 Jack Knives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beads</td>
<td>A Beaver for half a Pound of Beads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laced Coats</td>
<td>Six Beavers for one good Laced [laced] Coat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Coats</td>
<td>Five Beaver Skins for one Red Plain Coat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>A Beaver for one Pound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kettles</td>
<td>A Beaver for one Pound of Kettle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking-Glasses and Combs.</td>
<td>Two Skins.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Hudson’s Bay Company

- The company built their posts on the shores of the Hudson Bay.
- They convinced First Nation trappers to bring their furs to the posts.
- Within 30 years, the company had built posts at the mouths of many rivers flowing into Hudson Bay; with York Factory (built in 1684) became the company’s main post.
- The company was owned by shareholders who lived in Britain.
- The governor of Rupert’s Land represented the company in North America.
- Factors were responsible for the day-to-day dealings at the fur trade posts (factories) and for the clerks and traders who lived there.
- Many of the men came from the Orkney Islands off the northern coast of Scotland, as they were strong, hardy, and good boatmen.
  - They did daily routines such as chores, gathering wood, and hunting food to add to supplies that came once a year from England.
  - The constructed posts’ buildings.
  - They traded with First Nation trappers who came to the fort twice a year.
- Early Hudson’s Bay Company employees faced constant threats by the French who wanted to take over their forts. It was a constant rivalry between the French and the English.

The North West Company

- The French fur trade ended in 1763 due to the Seven Years’ War.
  - The French lost their power and had to abandon the land they had once claimed. The British took over their territory.
- Scottish merchants began immigrating to Montreal in the middle of the 18th century, and they wanted a profit from the fur trade as well.
- French-Canadian voyageurs were prepared and sent into new fur-trading territories.
- The Hudson’s Bay Company would have the First Nations’ trappers come up north for trading, whereas the Montreal merchants sent people to the heart of the fur lands and saved the trappers a trip to Hudson Bay.
- By the late 1760s, the Hudson’s Bay Company’s monopoly was weakening as the Montreal merchants pushed farther and farther into the Northwest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Montreal Merchants Obstacles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. They had far greater distances to travel, because they could not use Hudson Bay as way to ship furs to Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. They had a lot less money than the Hudson’s Bay Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fierce competition among themselves kept them from being strong enough to take on the Hudson’s Bay Company.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- In 1776, some of the merchants joined together as partners. Many of these men did not really like or even trust one another, but they realized that by working together, they could become rich.
  - Most of the directors in the North West Company were men who had been west and traded furs; they knew how to handle a canoe and carry their own load.
- *In 1779, they officially became the North West Company.
  - For 40 years, they challenged the Hudson’s Bay Company.
- The North West Company started building forts, and then the Hudson’s Bay Company would build one nearby.
  - The North West Company had the upper hand in every area except one, Hudson Bay. By not having access to the bay, the Nor’ westers could not ship their furs to Europe through it. They had to travel a long distance to Montreal and ship their furs from there to Europe.
- Voyageurs of the North West Company came from the area that Jacques Cartier had originally called Canada.

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**A day in the life of a Nor’Wester**

From early summer to freeze-up in the fall, North West Company voyageurs moved furs and trade goods over thousands of kilometres of waterways. Each day before sunrise, they loaded their canoes and set off.

Every hour or so, for a few minutes, the men stopped to smoke a pipe. A distance could be measured by the number of pipe breaks. For example, the time it took to travel the length of a 24-kilometre lake might be measured as three pipes, representing about three hours of travel. When conditions were good, the voyageurs paddled up to 130 kilometres in a day.

After about three or four hours of paddling, the voyageurs stopped for breakfast, which was often leftovers from the previous night’s dinner. The voyageurs also carried rawhide parflesches filled with pemmican. The voyageurs snacked on pemmican throughout the day.

Whenever the voyageurs had to make a portage, they carried their loads across a stretch of land, then returned to carry the canoes. Sometimes, they had to run the rapids. With the roar of the rapids filling the air, they emptied their loads from the canoes. One or two paddlers rode the lightened canoe through the rushing water, while the others carried the supplies along the riverbank.

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*Rubaboo is a word that comes from the sound pemmican soup makes when it is cooking. The Cree people call it aluapoo.*
Figure 8.17  Voyageur of North West Company with canoe. The canot de maitre was a large birch bark canoe up to 12 metres long and paddled by 8 to 12 voyageurs. Smaller canoes held 4 to 6 men.

Figure 8.18  Hudson’s Bay Company trader and York boat. Based on the Orkney fishing boat, the York boat was used mainly on lakes and major rivers. Sometimes it could be fitted with a sail. It could not be carried on portages, but was rolled over logs. It had a crew of 6 to 8 men.

Figure 8.25  FUR TRADE ROUTES. The North West Company and Hudson’s Bay Company used different routes to explore their fur-trade territories. Between them, they covered the breadth of the country. Many of their posts became permanent settlements that still exist today.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>The fur trade in British Columbia centered around the sea otter. The North West Company traded out of Fort Astoria. The main post of the Hudson’s Bay Company was Fort Vancouver. Both forts were on the Columbia River. In 1849, the Hudson’s Bay Company moved its Pacific operations from Fort Vancouver to Fort Victoria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Athabasca Region</td>
<td>The region around Lake Athabasca and north along the Mackenzie River was a rich fur-trading area. The furs were thick and top quality due to the cold climate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bottom of the Bay and Hudson Bay</td>
<td>The Bottom of the Bay, now called James Bay, was home to some of the earliest Hudson’s Bay Company trading posts, such as Moose Factory and Fort Albany. The Hudson’s Bay Company’s first inland post, Cumberland House, was built in 1774.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The King’s Post</td>
<td>King’s Domain was a region west of Labrador and north of the St. Lawrence River that covered a vast area that extended to the watershed of Hudson Bay. The king of France granted fur-trading rights to private companies, who built trading posts known as the King’s Posts. In 1842, the posts were taken over by the Hudson’s Bay Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labrador</td>
<td>The Hudson’s Bay Company began trading in Labrador in the 1830s. Inuit and Montagnais trappers brought furs to more than 20 posts established by the company. The best furs came from Esquimaux Bay. The “EB” mark on the fur was a sign of very high quality at fur auctions in London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Lakes and The Pays D’en Haut</td>
<td>Around 1640, many First Nations people escaped from the Iroquois and moved towards the Great Lakes. The French followed, and established posts such as Fort Frontenac and Fort Michilimackinac.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Forks</td>
<td>Where the Assiniboine River and Red River meet was a key location, because all of the east-west canoe routes passes through it. It was the northernmost point where the bison came, making it an important food depot for the fur-trade brigades. The land around The Forks became home to the Metis. In 1821, the North West Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company merged as one company, and many fur traders retired to Red River, the settlement at The Forks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main Fur Trade Posts: The date after the fort’s name indicates the year the fort was built.

**Vocabulary**

Look up the following words and write down what they mean.

**Felt** –

**Charter** –

**Monopoly** –

**Shareholders** –

**Factors** –