

The Silk Route: 7000 Miles of History USA by John S. Major. Harper Collins Publishers, 1995. ISBN 0-06-443468-0

Literature Annotation: This beautifully illustrated book traces the history and purpose of the legendary trade route between China and Byzantium during the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-906)

Grade Level: 4-5

Economic Concepts: interdependence, trade, scarcity, economic wants

Maryland State Curriculum

Economics Standard: Students will develop economic reasoning to understand the historical development and current status of economic principles, institutions, and processes needed to be effective citizens, consumers, and workers participating in local communities, the nation, and the world.

- 4.A.1** Explain that people must make choices because resources are limited relative to economic wants for goods and services.
- 4.A.1.a** Identify the opportunity cost of economic decisions.
- 4.A.4.b** Describe how specialization results in the interdependence of people.

College and Career Ready Standards: Reading Information

- RI.4.1** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- RI.4.2** Determine the main idea of a text.
- RI.4.3** Explain events in an historical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.
- RI.4.4** Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words in a text.

Objectives: Students will...

- identify the Silk Road and the locations associated with it
- describe how the demand for some goods in Europe led to the search for a water route to the Indies

Vocabulary:

Caravels: ships which held a large amount of cargo and were fast and

The Indies: European term for the islands and mainland of Southeast Asia, India, and coastal China

Teacher Background

Europe and the Far East were involved in trading goods as early as the second century, B.C., along a pathway that later was named the Silk Road. In China, threads from certain silkworms were developed into fine cloth. This silk cloth became popular among the elite classes and courts in Europe. Other goods produced in China included tea, paper, porcelain, copper articles, and salt. Along with the silk cloth, gold, metal, and other products were transported westward from China over rugged and dangerous mountain passes and deserts to be sold in Europe.

Materials

The Nystrom Atlas of Our Country's History. Chicago: Nystrom 2004. ISBN: 0-7825-0872-3

Tea Bag

Baggie of Peppercorns

Resource 1: *Trades Made in Baghdad* (cut apart and mounted on index cards)

Resource 2: Assessment: *The Silk Road*

Wall Map of the World

Motivation

Start with this riddle. Say:

I have something hidden that would have been extremely valuable to people living in Europe in the time before Christopher Columbus. Along with some other goods, these items were so valuable that traders would risk their lives to travel from Europe to the Indies over a trade route that crossed mountains and deserts and was very dangerous. Can you guess what I have hidden? (Allow time for guesses.)

Display the baggie of black peppercorns and the tea bag. Say:

Imagine risking your life for tea and spices. Let's find out more about this dangerous trade route and why traders would risk their lives traveling along this route.

Read *The Silk Route* to the class.

Development

1. Have the students preview and read part B "Treasures of the Indies" on page 12 of *Nystrom Atlas of Our Country*. Ask:
 - *What treasured resources and goods were available in the Indies? (gold, silver, precious stones, ivory, porcelain, perfumes, spices, cotton, and silk)*
 - *Identify three of these goods that you think people most wanted and number them from 1-3 in order of most wanted to least. If they could only have one good, what would be their opportunity cost? (The #2 item on the list.)*

- *There were not enough of these treasured resources and goods in Europe to satisfy the wants of the people. What economics vocabulary term is used to describe the situation when there are not enough resources to satisfy economic wants? (scarcity)*
 - *How did the Europeans attempt to get more of these scarce resources and goods? (Traders went across a route called the Silk Road to get more of these goods.)*
2. Have the students read “What were Europeans searching for?” as well as Parts A and B on atlas p. 12.
 3. Have the students refer to part C “Trade Routes to the Indies,” on atlas page 13 to find the Silk Road. Locate these places on the atlas map: the Indies, China, India, Persia, Baghdad, and Europe.
 4. Distribute the cards cut from Resource 1 “Trades Made in Baghdad” to several students, who represent traders who traveled the Silk Road. Have the students start from different parts of the room and walk to meet in the center of the room. The center of the room represents Baghdad, which was the once the greatest city of the Islamic world and a hub of world trade. Have the students read aloud from their trading cards, starting with the trader from China.
 - Ask, *Why was trading so successful in Baghdad?* (Trading works when all parties are able to benefit by getting resources, goods, or services that they want from the other traders. The traders in Baghdad were able to exchange goods that they specialized in making for goods that they wanted to take back and sell to other people; therefore the result was “interdependence.”)
 - Explain that the Ottoman Empire became very powerful in this part of the world in the 1400s. Have students locate the Ottoman conquests on the map in the atlas, and the dotted line that shows where their warriors closed the Silk Road trade route to the European traders. Ask: *How would the closing of the trade route affect the availability of precious resources and goods in Europe?* (There were now fewer resources and goods. The demand for them was high, but the supply was smaller. Even if the Europeans could get these resources and goods, the price would be high because less was available compared to what Europeans wanted.)
 5. Have the students examine “To the Indies by Sea” map and caption at the bottom of Atlas p.13. Ask:
 - *How did the European traders attempt to solve their problem?* (European countries sent explorers to look for water routes to the Indies.)

Assessment: Have students complete Resource 2.

ANSWER KEY:

1. the Indies, Silk Road
2. porcelain, silk and tea
3. scarce, economic wants
4. water, trade

Trades Made in Baghdad

TRADER #1

I have come from China and the Indies. I have traveled thousands of miles across a dangerous land route known as the "Silk Road" to Baghdad. Along the way and at the trading center of Baghdad, I have traded precious goods such as porcelain, spices, silk, and tea from China and the Indies.

TRADER #2

I am an Arab merchant. I have traveled from the island of Zanzibar on the eastern coast of Africa to bring gold, ivory, and slaves to the market in Baghdad.

TRADER #3

I am also an Arab merchant. I sailed from ports in the Persian Gulf and collected goods to trade. To get to the city of Baghdad, I have sailed up the Tigris River from the port city of Basra. I am bringing precious goods such as spices and printed cloth from India, pearls from the Persian Gulf, and precious stones from Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka.)

Name: _____

Assessment: The Silk Road**Directions:** Use the word bank below to help you to complete the following sentences:

1. European traders traveled to _____ along a land trade route known as the _____.
2. Travelers from China and the Indies brought goods such as _____
_____ that could be sold in Europe.
3. Many of the _____ resources and goods from the Indies could not be produced at all in Europe. When the Ottoman Empire closed the trading routes, the people in Europe could not satisfy their
_____ for resources and goods from the Indies.
4. European traders looked for a _____ route to the Indies so that between Europe and the Indies could continue.

WORD BANK

economic wants	the Indies	Silk Road	porcelain, silk, and tea
water	land	trade	scarce