Explorers, Traders & Merchants
Tracking the Cultural and Social Impacts of the Global Commodity Trade
A Curriculum Unit for Grades 9 – 12
EXPLORERS, TRADERS & Merchants

TRACKING THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE GLOBAL COMMODITY TRADE

Primary Researchers:

Natalie Arsenault, Outreach Director
Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies

Christopher Rose, Assistant Director
Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Allegra Azulay, Outreach Coordinator
Center for Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies

Rachel Meyer, Outreach Coordinator
South Asia Institute

Hemispheres
The International Outreach Consortium
at the University of Texas at Austin

http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/hemispheres/
hemispheres@austin.utexas.edu
# Table of Contents

**Explorers, Traders & Merchants:**
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## Table of Contents

- Introduction .................................................................................. vii
- Standards Alignment ...................................................................... ix
- National Geography Standards Alignment .................................... xi
- Blank World Map .......................................................................... xiii
- Image Analysis Worksheet .............................................................. xv

### Caviar: From Elite Treat to Marketing Magic .................................. 1
- Introduction .................................................................................... 2
- Section 1: A Common Russian Delicacy ........................................ 3
- Section 2: Crisis in the Caspian ...................................................... 7
- Section 3: The Rise and Fall of the Atlantic Sturgeon Trade .......... 14
- Section 4: The Marketing and Politics of a Banned Luxury ............ 20
- Graphic Organizer 1 ........................................................................ 25
- Graphic Organizer 2 ........................................................................ 26

### Chocolate: From New World Currency to Global Addiction .......... 27
- Introduction: Chocolate Is Introduced to the Europeans ............... 28
- Section 1: Chocolate in Mesoamerica: Food of the Gods ............... 29
- Section 2: Chocolate across the Atlantic: Europe ......................... 33
- Section 3: Large-Scale Cacao Production ....................................... 37
- Section 4: Cacao Today: Chocolate, Chocolate Everywhere .......... 40
- Graphic Organizer 1 ........................................................................ 42
- Graphic Organizer 2 ........................................................................ 43

### Fur: From Mark of Nobility to Synthetic Chic ............................... 45
- Introduction .................................................................................... 46
- Section 1: The Prestige of Fur ....................................................... 47
- Section 2: The Siberian "Soft Gold" Rush ....................................... 50
- Section 3: Russian Alaska ............................................................ 58
- Section 4: Necessity or Luxury? ..................................................... 61
- Graphic Organizer 1 ........................................................................ 66
- Graphic Organizer 2 ........................................................................ 67

### Indigo: From the Devil's Dye to Denim ........................................ 69
- Introduction .................................................................................... 70
- Section 1: Indigo Arrives in Europe by Sea Trade ....................... 71
- Section 2: Indigo Plantations in the New World ......................... 75
- Section 3: Back to India ............................................................... 81
- Section 4: Denim and the Invention of Synthetic Indigo .............. 88
- Graphic Organizer 1 ........................................................................ 93
- Graphic Organizer 2 ........................................................................ 94
Table of Contents

Rice: From the Gift of the Gods to the San Francisco Treat ................................. 95
   Introduction ........................................................................................................... 96
   Section 1: The Origins of Rice ............................................................................. 97
   Section 2: From Staple Food to High Cuisine ................................................... 100
   Section 3: Rice Comes to the New World ......................................................... 107
   Section 4: Feeding a Hungry Planet ................................................................. 110
   Graphic Organizer 1 ............................................................................................ 113
   Graphic Organizer 2 ............................................................................................ 114

Rubber: From First Ball Game to Modern Transportation ................................. 115
   Introduction ........................................................................................................... 116
   Section 1: Early Rubber: Mesoamerican Ball Game ........................................... 117
   Section 2: Rubber Takes Off ................................................................................ 120
   Section 3: Rubber and the Development of the Amazon ..................................... 122
   Section 4: Stolen!: Rubber Leaves Brazil Behind ............................................... 125
   Graphic Organizer 1 ............................................................................................. 128
   Graphic Organizer 2 ............................................................................................. 129

Salt: From Edible Rock to Worth its Weight in Gold ........................................... 131
   Introduction: The War Between the Salts ......................................................... 132
   Section 1: The Incredible Edible Rock .............................................................. 133
   Section 2: Mummies and Herring and Ham (Oh My!) ........................................ 137
   Section 3: Worth its Weight in Gold ................................................................... 140
   Section 4: Good Salt, Bad Salt ............................................................................ 144
   Graphic Organizer 1 ............................................................................................. 148
   Graphic Organizer 2 ............................................................................................. 149

Tea: From Medicinal Magic to Economic Powerhouse ................................. 151
   Introduction ........................................................................................................... 152
   Section 1: The Origins of Tea .............................................................................. 154
   Section 2: Tea in Tibet and the Himalayas ......................................................... 156
   Section 3: “Boston Harbor a Teapot Tonight” .................................................... 159
   Section 4: Tea Production and Trade ................................................................. 163
   Graphic Organizer 1 ............................................................................................. 167
   Graphic Organizer 2 ............................................................................................. 168
INTRODUCTION

Explorers, Traders & Merchants: Tracking the Cultural and Social Impacts of the Global Commodity Trade is based in part on the 2003 Hemispheres Summer Teachers’ Institute “Explorers, Traders & Merchants: Tracking Cultural Contact through Food.” That four-day workshop examined aspects of cultural contact that have left trace evidence on the food that we eat. In seeking to expand the workshop’s scope as we developed this unit, we have moved beyond looking only at foodstuffs and incorporated a number of other commodities that have had significant global impact.

This unit examines eight global commodities from their points of origin and the social, cultural, political, and economic changes they have wrought along their way. Each case study encompasses four “stops” along the commodity’s journey: its initial discovery and/or access; its progress from local good to international trade; the ramifications of large-scale production; and the drama of its boom-and-bust cycles through the years.

We have sought to address the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and National Geography Standards that cover spatial and cultural diffusion. This unit draws on primary source readings, images, and maps so that students can both track and assess commodities as they have traveled the world. Each case study is laid out in a Document-Based Question (DBQ) format so that students can cite, interpret, and evaluate sources; consider point of view; and use historical evidence to develop and support a thesis.

In addition to responding to specific questions about each commodity, students can compare commodities by placing the following set of questions and their answers into a graphic organizer:

1. What role did _____ play in people’s lives?
2. How were people’s lives affected by _____?
3. To what extent has _____ been harmful or beneficial to society?

Each case study may also be used as a mapping activity in which students can trace on a world map each commodity’s journey from origin to global impact. Toward that end, a blank world map is included on page xiii for you and your students to use.

We have also sought to include images among the primary source documents included in the DBQs. To help your students analyze these images as documents, we have included an image analysis worksheet, which can be found on page xv.

It is our hope that with Explorers, Traders & Merchants students will be able to better appreciate the long-term effects of intercultural contact and population movements by relating them to the presence of various commodities that they see and use every day.

We welcome feedback and comments on the unit and your experience using it in the classroom. Please do not hesitate to contact us at hemispheres@austin.utexas.edu.
Standards Alignment

This unit is designed to address the following standards in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS):

Culture
18) The student understands the ways in which cultures change and maintain continuity.
   The student is expected to:
   A) describe the impact of general processes such as migration, war, trade, independent inventions, and diffusion of ideas and motivations on cultural change.
   (113.34 World Geography Studies)

Economics
12) The student understands the economic importance of, and issues related to, the location and management of key natural resources.
   The student is expected to:
   A) compare global trade patterns at different periods of time and develop hypotheses to explain changes that have occurred in world trade and the implications of these changes;
   B) analyze how the creation and distribution of resources affects the location and patterns of movement of products, capital, and people.
   (113.34 World Geography Studies)

Geography
6) The student understands the types and patterns of settlement, the factors that affect where people settle, and processes of settlement development over time.
   The student is expected to:
   B) explain the processes that have caused cities to grow such as location along transportation routes, availability of resources that have attracted settlers and economic activities, and continued access to other cities and resources.
   (113.34 World Geography Studies)

History
1) The student understands how geographic contexts (the geography of places in the past) and processes of spatial exchange (diffusion) influenced events in the past and helped to shape the present.
   The student is expected to:
   B) trace the spatial diffusion of a phenomenon and describe its effects on regions of contact such as the spread of bubonic plague, the diffusion and exchange of foods between the New and Old Worlds, or the diffusion of American slang.
   (113.34 World Geography Studies)

5) The student understands causes and effects of European expansion beginning in the 16th century.
   The student is expected to:
   A) identify causes of European expansion beginning in the 16th century; and
   B) explain the political, economic, cultural, and technological influences of European expansion on both Europeans and non-Europeans, beginning in the 16th century.
   (113.33 World History Studies)
Standards Alignment

National Geography Standards Alignment

This unit addresses the following standards in the National Geography Standards:

Standard 5: Places and Regions: That People Create Regions to Interpret Earth’s Complexity
   By the end of the eighth grade, the student knows and understands:
   3. The connections among regions

   By the end of the eighth grade, the student knows and understands:
   3. The types and historical patterns of human migration
   4. The effects of migration on the characteristics of places

Standard 11: Human Systems: The Patterns and Networks of Economic Interdependence on Earth’s Surface
   By the end of the eighth grade, the student knows and understands:
   2. The basis for global interdependence
   3. Reasons for the spatial patterns of economic activities
   4. How changes in technology, transportation, and communication affect the location of economic activities

Standard 16: Environment and Society: The Changes that Occur in the Meaning, Use, Distribution, and Importance of Resources
   By the end of the eighth grade, the student knows and understands:
   1. The worldwide distribution and use of resources
   2. Why people have different viewpoints regarding resource use
IMAGE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Select and analyze an image from this case study using the Image Analysis Worksheet. Compare your findings with those of your classmates.

A. Observations
Study the image for 2 minutes. First, consider any written information that accompanies the image (including title, date, source, comments). Next, form an overall impression of the image and then examine individual items in the image. Divide the image into four sections and study each to see what new details become visible. Use the chart below to write down your observations. List people, objects, and activities in the image.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
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B. Deductions
Based on your observations above, list three things you might deduce from this image.

1. 

2. 

3. 

C. Questions
What questions does this images raise in your mind? List two.

1. 

2. 

How might you go about finding answers to your questions?
Fur
From Mark of Nobility
to Synthetic Chic
INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, animals have been used by man as a source of food, clothing, and shelter. Bone tools, tents made from hides, and warm clothing are just some of the many ways that man has utilized the resources around him. In colder regions, fur is necessary for survival. Correspondingly, the fur of animals from northern areas tends to be thicker and warmer than the fur of animals from southern, warmer areas, and so it is more highly sought. In addition, several northern animals change their color in the winter to white to blend in with their snowy surroundings. Thus the white fur of animals such as ermine and arctic fox can only be found in certain areas, such as Siberia.

In cold, sparsely populated areas of northern Russia where animals were plentiful, trapping was a traditional activity and fur clothing was common. Closer to towns and cities where land had been cleared and animals were more scarce, fur became a luxury item. A network of trade developed, bringing pelts from remote areas where members of native tribes trapped the animals, through a series of traders in small outposts or towns to Russia’s major cities. At each stage the price increased as traders added their profit, so by the time a supply of fur was received in Moscow, the finest pelts could command a small fortune.
Section 1: The Prestige of Fur

Source 1: Portrait of Catherine the Great, before 1773
In this portrait of Catherine the Great, the Empress is depicted upon her throne. In her right hand Catherine is holding a bejeweled scepter which she has just picked up from a red pillow decorated with gold embroidery and gold tassels. Two other symbols of royalty, a crown and an orb, rest on the pillow.

Her narrow-waisted silken gown with golden double-headed eagles embroidered on its skirt is partially concealed by an ermine mantle made of four thousand ermine skins and brocade covered with similar embroidered black and red double-headed eagles.

Alexei Petrovich Antropov, Portrait of Catherine II.
Source 2: Description of robes worn by members of the British nobility, 1856

The ermine is produced in most countries, but the best is from Russia, Sweden, and Norway, and is killed in winter when the fur is pure white (except the tail, with its jet black tip), it being in that season in its greatest perfection; in summer and spring it is gray, and of little or no value. The ermine is the royal fur of Russia, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy, etc.

In England at the coronation of the sovereign, the minever, as the ermine is styled in heraldic language, is used, being powdered, that is studded with black spots. The spots or powdered bars on the minever capes of the peers [nobles] and peeresses being in rows, and the number of rows or bars denoting their various degrees of rank; the sovereign alone and the blood royal having the minever of the coronation robes powdered all over, a black spot being inserted in about every square inch of the cur, crimson velvet being used on that occasion. The crown is also adorned with a band of minever, with a single row of spots. … The black spots are made of the black Astracan lamb.

On state occasions in the House of Lords, the peers are arrayed in their robes of state, of scarlet cloth and gold lace, with bars or rows of pure minever, more or less according to their degrees of rank, the sovereign alone wearing the royal minever powdered all over. The judges in their robes of office are clad in scarlet and pure ermine. The ermine, with the tail of the animal inserted therein, is used as articles of dress for ladies in every variety of shape and form, according to the dictates of fashion, and also as cloak linings. The minever can only be worn on state occasions by those who by their rank are entitled to its use, but as an article of fashion for ladies’ wear there is no prohibition in force. In the reign of Edward III [1327–1377], furs of ermine were strictly forbidden to be worn by any but the royal family, and its general use is prohibited in Austria at the present time. In mercantile transactions, the ermine is always sold by the timber, which consists of forty skins.


Comprehension Exercises:
1. What was Catherine the Great trying to convey by having her portrait painted?
2. What important symbols did she chose to include to represent her authority?
3. How did kings and queens distinguish themselves from other nobles who also wore ermine?
4. In addition to the fact that ermine could denote rank among British nobility, it could also be used in ladies’ fashions. What can you guess about the cost of ladies’ dresses trimmed with ermine?
The Prestige of Fur

Source 3: Excerpt from Nikolai Gogol’s “The Overcoat,” 1842

Akakiy Akakievitch, the main character of Nikolai Gogol’s short story “The Overcoat,” is a poor Russian clerk in St. Petersburg. His cloth coat becomes so threadbare that he must have a new coat made, so he goes to the tailor, Petrovitch. After much bargaining and then six months of scrimping and saving, at last he can afford to order the coat.

On the first possible day, he went shopping in company with Petrovitch. They bought some very good cloth, and at a reasonable rate too, for they had been considering the matter for six months, and rarely let a month pass without their visiting the shops to inquire prices. Petrovitch himself said that no better cloth could be had. For lining, they selected a cotton stuff, but so firm and thick that Petrovitch declared it to be better than silk, and even prettier and more glossy. They did not buy the marten fur [for the collar], because it was, in fact, dear [expensive], but in its stead, they picked out the very best of cat-skin which could be found in the shop, and which might, indeed, be taken for marten at a distance.

Once Akakiy Akakievitch has his fine new coat, one of his co-workers invites him to a party in a fancy neighborhood.

This much is certain, that the official lived in the best part of the city; and therefore it must have been anything but near to Akakiy Akakievitch’s residence. Akakiy Akakievitch was first obliged to traverse a kind of wilderness of deserted, dimly-lighted streets; but in proportion as he approached the official’s quarter of the city, the streets became more lively, more populous, and more brilliantly illuminated. Pedestrians began to appear; handsomely dressed ladies were more frequently encountered; the men had otter skin collars to their coats; peasant waggoners, with their grate-like sledges stuck over with brass-headed nails, became rarer; whilst on the other hand, more and more drivers in red velvet caps, lacquered sledges and bear-skin coats began to appear, and carriages with rich hammer-cloths flew swiftly through the streets, their wheels scrunching the snow. Akakiy Akakievitch gazed upon all this as upon a novel sight. He had not been in the streets during the evening for years.

Comprehension Exercises:

5. What kind of fur does Akakiy Akakievitch get for the collar of his new coat?
6. How does this compare with the fur on the coats of men in the “best part of the city”?
7. Based on your interpretation of the reading, how did fur reflect the social standing of a person in Russian society? How important was fur in the lives of average Russians?
The quest for more and varied sources of fur played an important role in Russia’s eastward expansion to the Pacific Ocean. In the 1500s, the Tsar of Russia ruled a large European territory. To the east, across the Ural Mountains, the vast expanse now known as Siberia was controlled by “Khans,” descendants of the rulers of the Golden Horde. These Khans loosely ruled areas where numerous native tribes, both settled and nomadic, lived.

In the mid-1500s, in an effort to expand Russia’s territory, Tsar Ivan IV granted the Stroganov family the right to control trade across the Urals and to explore new lands. The Stroganovs set up outposts east of the Urals where they traded European goods to the natives in exchange for furs. While most exchanges were peaceful, relations with the native populations and the Khan were not always smooth, and in the 1580s the Stroganov family enlisted the aid of a band of Cossacks to protect their interests. Cossacks were loosely knit military groups with a mixed Slavic heritage.

These Cossacks, led by Yermak Timofeev, confronted the armies of the Khan of Sibir in 1581-82. With their superior weapons, they defeated the Khan’s forces and opened Siberia to further exploration and exploitation. Bands of Cossacks built forts at strategic points as they plunged further into the wilderness. Tiumen was the first Russian town built in Siberia, in 1586. Forts were garrisoned and tribute (yasak), primarily sable pelts, was demanded of the natives. Refusal to pay tribute was cruelly punished, and family members were often taken as hostages to ensure that no one resisted. Promyshlenniki (tradesmen) also exploited the fur resources above and beyond the government quotas until the animal population was decimated.

Just as the “gold rush” in America led prospectors west to California in the mid-1800s, so, too, did Russian frontiersmen spread east across Siberia in the 1600s in search of the “soft gold” of fur. As forts were established, tradesmen and peasants followed, slowly colonizing the sparsely populated territory. Orthodox priests followed as well, and churches sprang up in the wilderness. Most new towns were situated on riverbanks, as rivers were the most reliable routes of transportation in that inhospitable land. By 1632, Cossack forces had built a fort on the Lena River, and by 1649, had established a fort on the Pacific coast at Okhotsk, collecting furs for Moscow along the way.

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1 The Golden Horde was the collective name of the groups of rulers who divided the Mongolian Empire after the death of Genghis Khan. At its peak the Golden Horde’s territory included most of European Russia from the Urals to the Carpathian Mountains, extending east deep into Siberia. On the south the Horde’s lands bordered on the Black Sea, the Caucasus Mountains, and the territories of the Mongol Dynasty known as the Il-Khans.
Source 1: Land charter granted by Tsar Ivan IV to the Stroganov family, 1558

I, Tsar and Grand Prince of All Russia Ivan Vasilevich, have bestowed my favor upon Grigorii, son of Anika Stroganov, [and] have allowed him to found a settlement in that uninhabited region eighty-eight versty below Perm the Great along the Kama River … on the state forest land downstream on both banks of the Kama to the Chusovaia River, wherever there is a strong and safe place; and I have ordered him to place cannon and harquebuses in the settlement, and to install cannoneers, harquebusiers, and gate sentries for protection against the [Tatars] and against other hordes, and to cut down the forest near that settlement along the rivers and around the lakes and up to the sources [of the rivers], and to plow the land around that settlement, and to establish homesteads, and to invite into that settlement such men as are not listed in the registry books and who do not bear the tiaglo.\(^1\)

If any men should come to that settlement from our state or from other lands with money or with goods, to buy salt or fish or other goods, these men shall be free to sell their goods here and to buy from them without any imposts.

If any salt deposits should be found in this region, he shall establish salterns there and boil salt. And they may catch fish in the rivers and lakes of this region without paying a tax. And if silver or copper or lead deposits should be found anywhere, Grigorii shall straightway report to our treasurers about these deposits, and he shall not work these deposits himself without our knowledge.

I have granted him [these] privileges for twenty years.

\(^1\) Tiaglo was a tax on townsmen registered in, and bound to, a particular town.


Comprehension Exercises:
1. How did the arrival of Russian traders change the landscape of the territory beyond the Urals?
2. What sort of economic benefits to Russia did the Tsar anticipate from opening the new lands?
3. Why were fur pelts not mentioned as one of the items that the Tsar required from Grigorii Stroganov?
Source 2: Map of Tartary labelling areas of native population, 1706

Guillaume de L'Isle, Carte de Tatarie.
Source 3: Description of Siberian fur trade

Siberian luxury fur, particularly sable, was the most prominent item Kazan’ received from Tiumen’. Tiumen in turn obtained its fur supplies from its Voguly and Ostiaki tributaries on the Ob’ river. Cordial relations, which included the exchange of grain and weapons for sable, were maintained between these tribes and Tiumen’. The sable, ermine, fox and other luxury pelts the Ugric tribes sold came into their possession not only through their own hunting, but also through their trade with their own northern Samoed neighbors, the Nentsy. Some of the Ostiaki tribes in particular traded with the Nentsy at specified outposts, exchanging dried fish, fish oil, and deer for sable pelts.


Comprehension Exercises:

9. Compare Source 2 to a modern map of Russia. With the aid of a modern map, find the towns and nationalities mentioned in Sources 1 and 3, including: Tiumen, Yakutsk, the rivers Ob and Lena, the nationalities Voguly, Samoed, Nentsy.

10. Siberia often has the reputation of being a “vast wasteland” because of its severe climate. How might these circumstances help or hinder those traveling across Siberia?

11. From observing the map, does it appear that the land was unpopulated in the 1700s?
Source 4: The Cossacks

The word “Cossack” is derived from the Turkic term kazak that means “free man” or “adventurer.” They consisted of semi-independent Tartar groups—a Turkic-speaking people who lived in west-central Russia—or peasants escaping serfdom in Poland and Russia. The Cossacks united in the 15th century as a self-governing warrior organization that was loyal only to the Russian Czar. They settled in six different areas: the Don, the Greben in Caucasia, the Yaik, near the Ural River, the Volga, the Dnieper and the Zaporozhian, west of the Dnieper. The Cossacks accepted anyone who was considered a worthy warrior, but the new members had to believe in Christ. It is believed that most were of Slavic descent. …

One of the greatest triumphs in Cossack history was the annexation of Siberia. A merchant family, the Stroganovs, settled people in various territories, including Siberia, and expanded the fur and lumber trades. In the mid-1550s, Tartar leader Kuchum Khan took over the area in Siberia. The Stroganovs wanted to protect their lands and trade from the Tartars and called upon the Cossacks and their leader Yermak Timofeyevich. In September 1581, Timofeyevich led 840 troops to wrest the Siberian city of Sibir from Tartar control. With the use of firearms, the Cossacks easily defeated Kuchum’s forces. The Cossacks lost a subsequent 1584 battle against Kuchum, but despite the loss, Siberia came under complete control of the Russian Empire in 1586.

Source 5: Print from the *Remezov Chronicle* (pub. 1700) depicting the conquest of Siberia by Yermak's Cossacks in 1582


**Comprehension Exercises:**

12. Using both of these documents, what do you know about the Cossacks?

13. Based on what you know of the history of Siberia, what do you think is taking place in the drawing from the *Remezov Chronicle*?
Source 6: Description of early Russian relations with the native Siberians

Originally, the collection of fur tribute as well as profits from trade were controlled from Moscow. It was unlawful to exterminate or abuse the pacified “unbaptized” tribes, as they were useful fur producers. The voyevodas [local governors] were instructed to collect a certain amount of furs and send most of it back to Moscow, where even a few sable or ermine pelts were worth a small fortune on the European market. Soon, however, greedy voyevodas began to extort more furs from the natives than was the proper government quota; the extra was kept and smuggled into Europe to be traded at a handsome profit. Voyevodas fought over the right to take extra tribute from the natives. They also accepted bribes from ambitious Cossacks and other service men who also wanted a share in the illegal fur collection.

Natives who rebelled against this arbitrary treatment were treated harshly; sometimes members from the family of a tribal chief were taken to the Russian fort as hostages to insure that the furs demanded would be brought in every season. These hostages were often subjected to all sorts of abuses, as were the native women in general. Many Cossacks took native women from their villages back to the fort as common law wives. This economic exploitation of the hunters and sexual exploitation of the women caused many native tribes to become destitute.


Source 7: Description of the peculiarities of sable hunting in the Vitim River basin, ca. 1740

The Vitim River basin was the source of Siberia’s best (blackest and glossiest) sable pelts. The account’s author, Stepan Petrovich Krasheninnikov (1711–1755), served Vitus Bering’s Second Kamchatka Expedition (1733–1742) as a student naturalist.

To anyone who has not participated in a sable hunt and has frequented none but inhabited places, it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe all of the noteworthy circumstances of the catching of sables, for they do not live near settlements but in remote places, on high mountains, and in dense forests; they flee from people, so that in many places where they were once numerous not a trace of them is found on account of human settlement. Before the land of Siberia had been brought under Russian rule, and only pagans [non-Orthodox natives] controlled it, sables abounded throughout Siberia and especially along the Lena River, as confirmed by longtime residents there; particularly in the pine forest that begins at the mouth of the Olyokma River and continues 20 miles down the Lena to the Agara [Namana?] River were so many sables bagged at the beginning of Russian control that consequently this area to this day is called a rich floodplain. But now both here and all along the Lena River there is already no sable hunting whatsoever, and this can be said of all of Siberia’s inhabited places.

Comprehension Exercises:
14. What was the main form of travel for the Cossack explorers?
15. How did the Cossacks ensure that their demands were met?
16. What is happening in Source 8?
17. What does Source 9 say about the role of fur in the lives of Siberian natives?
18. How much power did the Moscow government have to control local situations like the treatment of natives?
19. What activities and conditions caused the decline in sable pelts by 1740?
SECTION 3: RUSSIAN ALASKA

In 1741, Vitus Bering “discovered” the Aleutian Islands and the coast of Alaska. The discovery, too, of the Pacific sea otter, whose fur became even more prized for its beauty than the sable, led to a new rush of exploitation. Hunting outposts were established in Alaska and natives were pressed into service. In 1784, the first permanent Russian settlement was founded on Kodiak Island.

However, fur hunters were faced with a new challenge—sea-based hunting rather than land-based hunting. The Russians quickly realized that they could increase their productivity (and thus their profits) by enlisting the aid of the native populations, who were already adept at hunting otters. In many cases, the locals were pressed into service through the taking of family members as hostages.

Among the many difficulties the Russians faced in their expansion to Alaska was the adequate provisioning of the outposts. In 1812, Russia took the bold step of establishing a permanent fort on the coast of California, Fort Ross, just 80 miles north of the Spanish settlement of San Francisco. The Russians hoped to grow crops and support livestock in the milder climate of California so as to provide a reliable source of food for their Alaskan forts. Despite these efforts, as the sea otter population declined due to overhunting, maintaining these far-flung outposts became too costly. In 1841, Fort Ross was sold to a Swiss-German merchant, John Sutter, and in 1867, Alaska itself was sold to the United States.
Source 1: Botanist and zoologist George Wilhelm Steller describing sea otters in his journal, 1741–1742

The skin, which lies loose on the flesh as in dogs and shakes everywhere while the animal is running, is so far superior in length, beauty, blackness, and gloss of hair to the river otters’ pelts that these can scarcely be compared with it. The best pelts are sold in Kamchatka for 20 rubles, in Iakutsk for 30, in Irkutsk for 40, and at the Chinese border, in exchange for their wares, for from 80 to 100 rubles.


Source 2: Explorer Ferdinand Von Wrangell describing hunting, 1835

Of all hunts, the sea otter hunt requires the most experience, skill, and patience. Fur seals, sea lions, and walruses, despite their strength and size, are caught more easily and more quickly.


Source 3: Excerpt from a register of goods exported from the Aleutian Islands, 1803–1805

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Value per unit (rubles)</th>
<th>Total value (rubles)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19,171</td>
<td>Sea Otter, female and young</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1,437,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,106</td>
<td>Nursling otter</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19,252</td>
<td>Sea otter tails</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>96,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,985</td>
<td>River otter</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>87,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,764</td>
<td>Otter</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>60,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,872</td>
<td>Black fox</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>77,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,534</td>
<td>Grey fox</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>49,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,953</td>
<td>Red fox</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,230</td>
<td>Sable</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>813</td>
<td>Lynx</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6,504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Wolf</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>470</td>
<td>Mink</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>372</td>
<td>Black bear</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Red bear</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,752</td>
<td>Arctic fox</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>279,944</td>
<td>Seal</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>419,916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2,332,785</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Source 4: Military salary in 1806 (yearly pay in rubles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Salary (rubles)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colonel</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensign [2nd Lieutenant]</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private of Infantry</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private of Calvary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private of Artillery</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robert Ker Porter, *Traveling Sketches in Russia and Sweden: During the Years 1805, 1806, 1807, 1808* (Philadelphia: Hopkins and Earle, 1809), 136–137.

### Comprehension Exercises:

1. What traits make sea otters difficult or easy to hunt?
2. What was the most valuable fur exported by the Russian-American Company in 1805?
3. What fur was collected the most?
4. Considering the salary of an average Russian soldier in 1806, how valuable were individual fur pelts?
5. What elements might be involved in the value of a pelt?
6. How important was the fur trade to the Russian government?
SECTION 4: NECESSITY OR LUXURY?

It is estimated that between 500,000 and 1,000,000 otters were killed between 1741 and 1911, by which time only approximately 2,000 sea otters remained. In a 1911 treaty between Russia, Japan, Great Britain, and the United States, sea otters were finally protected under Article V of the Fur Seal Treaty. Sea otter populations have rebounded since that time, but not to pre-hunt levels.

Source 1: Nineteenth-century naturalist Edward Nelson on the sea otter population in the Aleutian Islands

When Bering and his party first explored the Aleutian Islands, they found the Sea Otters so numerous that the Aleuts wore long mantles made of their skins and a scrap of old iron was enough to secure the finest skin. In 1840 Veniaminov wrote that the Sea Otters in these islands are distinguished above everything on account of their great value and small numbers. There was a time when they were killed in thousands, now only by hundreds. There are plenty of places where before there were great numbers of Sea Otters; now not one is to be seen or found. The reason for this is most evident; every year hunted without rest they have fled to places unknown and without danger.

When the Fur Seal Islands were discovered the sea otters there were very numerous, and two sailors killed five thousand there the first year. The next year less than one thousand were killed, and from the end of the next six years to the present day the Sea Otter has been unknown there. From the Aleutian Islands south to Oregon the Russians found these otters so numerous that they were obtained in numbers running from two to three thousand kills per year. This great increase in the catch during the later years is entirely due to the greater vigor with which the animal has been hunted, and the introduction of fine long-range rifles. Good rifles now replace to a great extent, the primitive spears.

There is little doubt that in the course of a few years under the present regulations and mode of hunting, this valuable animal will be exterminated, and in place of affording the Aleuts a livelihood will leave them dependent upon the Government.


Source 2: Fur Seal Treaty between the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and Japan, 1911

ARTICLE V.
Each of the High Contracting Parties agrees that it will not permit its citizens or subjects or their vessels to kill, capture or pursue beyond the distance of three miles from the shorn line of its territories sea otters in any part of the waters mentioned in Article I of this Convention.


Comprehension Exercises:
1. How did the fur industry affect the native population of the Aleutian Islands?
2. Why were so many countries involved in the 1911 Fur Seal Treaty?
Necessity or Luxury?

Sources 3 and 4: Advertisements for fur coats from American magazines, 1920s


Source 5: Excerpt from an article, “How To Select Your Furs,” 1924

Unless one is certain of her own knowledge of furs, she should patronize only that shop whose reputation is one of reliability and whose guarantee is always to “stand behind all goods sold.” This is more essential in the purchase of furs than of any other article of apparel, for there are too many easy ways of passing off furs which are really inferior.

The mode and temperament of today have often been spoken of as barbaric. This is suggested by the weird and pagan ornaments women love to wear, and probably by the eagerness with which we have seized upon jazz as a music and as a novelty in dancing. Perhaps another evidence of a barbaric complex may be found in the almost passionate abandon with which women are draping their slim bodies in the skins of animals, by which we mean furs.

The common and cheaper furs are often treated in manufacturing so that they resemble rarer and costlier ones ... Assembling is done with marvelous skill so as to produce uniform depth and pleasing color effects. Clippings and cuttings are used for various purposes so as to lower the price of scarfs or garments and yet give the effect of the more expensive. The twentieth century will go down in the History of Costume with this description, “An unprecedented and lavish use of furs characterized this era.” After all, it is but a “throw back” to a stone-age period.

One’s choice in furs should be decided by their suitability for certain occasions. The same good taste that would prevent one from wearing a chiffon gown for mountain climbing or a tailored suit to a formal dance should be relied upon. Nothing is more flattering than fur if one knows how to choose it airtight. Not only must it bring out the “hidden beauty,” but it should suit and emphasize the woman’s individuality as well.

Necessity or Luxury?

Source 6: From Modern Mechanix and Inventions magazine, 1932

Furriers pay rabbit growers in United States over $30,000,000 a year for pelts, from which are made fur coats selling from $300 to $5,000 each. This article tells you how you set up in rabbit raising as a backyard pastime and reap the biggest profits from smallest outlay of cash.

by H. H. DUNN

MARY PALMER, who teaches school for $1,500 a year at San Diego, California, came out of the winter of 1930–31, with the determination to have a fur coat for the next winter.

“If I start saving now, and go in debt a little in the fall, I can get myself one of those $300 coats for a Christmas present,” she told her father.

“If you will give me an hour of your time every day, from now until next October,” replied her father, “I will give you a fur coat that you cannot buy for five times $300 and it will cost not more than $30, probably half that amount.”

As a matter of fact, for this is a true story, Mary’s father produced the fur coat on the date promised, and Mary sold it for $650 to a furrier, who, in turn, sold it for $1575. Then Mary’s father gave her another just like it. The total cost of the coats to Mr. Palmer was less than $15 each, and, with their trimmings, they represented an actual outlay of not more than $35 each.

This is how the coats were produced from the back half of the city lot on which stands the Palmer home: In the spring of 1930, Mr. Palmer bought three rabbits, rather small, weighing only six or seven pounds each, with short, thick, rather light brown fur, of the density and “pile” of good plush. This particular variety of domestic rabbit is called Castor Rex, and it is bred in solid colors of brown, black, white, blue and the so-called “red” of rabbit fanciers, in reality a rather dark roan.

Mr. Palmer chose the brown variety because of the difficulty he had had in clipping and dyeing the pelts of white rabbits, which now furnish 86 varieties of fur—from “ermine” to “seal”—to the trade of this country.


Comprehension Exercises:

3. How is fur perceived in America—as a luxury or a necessity?

4. How is the “egalitarian” society of America reflected in the American attitude toward fur? How is this different from the attitude in Europe?

5. Based on your perceptions, how have attitudes toward fur changed in our time?
Necessity or Luxury?

Fake Fur vs. Real Fur
Because of the high cost of real fur, in 1929 the first “faux fur” was created. Made from the shorn fur of the alpaca (i.e., the animal was not killed, but the hair was cut off), it was attached to a backing to create the semblance of an animal hide. In the 1940s, a different kind of fake fur was created from synthetic (man-made) polymers. This improved the quality of fake fur by imitating more closely the colors, feel, and warmth of natural fur. However, the availability of fake fur did not immediately affect the international fur industry. It did make “fur” products available to the general population, as the cost of a faux fur garment is significantly lower than that of real fur. It has also stirred up controversy.

Source 7: Canada Online Blog “Fake Fur for the Mounties?” 2003

The Canadian Mounties are testing synthetic alternatives to muskrat in an attempt to find a substitute for their winter caps. CanWest News Service reports that the RCMP is under pressure from anti-fur activists to find a more suitable material for its winter headgear. The flap-eared muskrat cap has been standard issue since 1933, and an RCMP spokesman said they won’t give it up until they find something as durable and resistant to winter wind and weather.


Many fur or fur-trimmed jackets sold in the United States as having “faux fur”—or not labeled at all—are actually made, at least in part, from dog fur, the Humane Society of the United States said at a Capitol Hill news conference Wednesday.

Out of 25 jackets that it tested, the group said, 24 were incorrectly labeled. In many cases, it said, tests showed the fur came from raccoon dogs, fox-like nocturnal residents of Asian and northern European forests that bear a remarkable resemblance to raccoons.

Raccoon dogs are part of the canine family.


Source 9: Press release from the International Fur Trade Federation, 2007

Global Fur Sales Up for Eighth Straight Year

Newly released global sales figures show that fashion-savvy consumers invested a massive US$13.49 billion in fur for their wardrobes in 2006.

The latest data, covering retail sales of full fur garments, trim and accessories for the 2005/06 season, shows a 5.6% increase on the previous year’s results, reports the International Fur Trade Federation.

Comprehension Exercises:

6. Why was fake fur originally created? What are some ethical and financial factors that might have inspired its creation?

7. What impact has the fake fur industry had on fur sales?

8. What do you think the future of the fur industry might be? Would you expect sales to go up or down? Justify your answer citing evidence from the documents in this case study.
**Graphic Organizer I**

Fill in the following chart for each stop along fur’s progress from Siberia to world luxury item. **How did it move from one stop to the next?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How was it used?</th>
<th>When did it arrive?</th>
<th>With whom did it arrive?</th>
<th>Where is fur found?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1) The Prestige of Fur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2) The Siberian “Soft Gold” Rush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Russian Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Luxury or Necessity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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66
**Graphic Organizer 2**

*Fill in the following chart for each stop along fur’s progress from Siberia to world luxury item.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent has fur been harmful or beneficial?</th>
<th>How were people’s lives affected by fur?</th>
<th>What role did fur play in people’s lives?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1) The Prestige of Fur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2) The Siberian “Soft Gold” Rush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Russian Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Luxury or Necessity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About Hemispheres

Created in 1996, Hemispheres is the international outreach consortium at the University of Texas at Austin. Hemispheres utilizes University resources to promote and assist with world studies education for K–12 and postsecondary schools, businesses, civic and non-profit organizations, the media, governmental agencies, and the general public.

Comprised of UT’s four federally funded National Resource Centers (NRCs) dedicated to the study and teaching of Latin America; the Middle East; Russia, East Europe & Eurasia; and South Asia, Hemispheres offers a variety of free and low-cost services to these groups and more. Each center coordinates its own outreach programming, including management of its lending library, speakers bureau, public lectures, and conferences, all of which are reinforced by collaborative promotion of our resources to an ever-widening audience in the educational community and beyond.

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http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/hemispheres/
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Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies
Natalie Arsenault, Outreach Director
(512) 232–2404
(512) 471–3090 FAX
The University of Texas at Austin
SRH 1.310
1 University Station D0800
Austin, TX 78712
E-mail: n.arsenault@mail.utexas.edu

Center for Middle Eastern Studies
Christopher Rose, Assistant Director
(512) 471–3582
(512) 471–7834 FAX
The University of Texas at Austin
WMB 6.102
1 University Station F9400
Austin, TX 78712
E-mail: crose@utexas.edu

Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies
Allegra Azulay, Outreach Coordinator
(512) 471–7782
(512) 471–3368 FAX
The University of Texas at Austin
GRG 106
1 University Station A1600
Austin, TX 78712
E-mail: aazulay@mail.utexas.edu

South Asia Institute
Rachel Meyer, Outreach Coordinator
(512) 475–6038
(512) 471–1169 FAX
The University of Texas at Austin
WCH 4.134
1 University Station G9300
Austin, TX 78712
E-mail: outreach@uts.cc.utexas.edu

http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/hemispheres/
hemispheres@austin.utexas.edu