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

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Explorers, Traders & Merchants: Tracking the Cultural and Social Impacts of the Global Commodity Trade

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# Table of Contents

**Explorers, Traders & Merchants:**
**Tracking the Cultural and Social Impacts of the Global Commodity Trade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 1: Chocolate Is Introduced to the Europeans</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2: Chocolate across the Atlantic: Europe</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3: Large-Scale Cacao Production</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4: Cacao Today: Chocolate, Chocolate Everywhere</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 2</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caviar: From Elite Treat to Marketing Magic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 1: A Common Russian Delicacy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2: Crisis in the Caspian</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3: The Rise and Fall of the Atlantic Sturgeon Trade.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4: The Marketing and Politics of a Banned Luxury</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate: From New World Currency to Global Addiction</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Chocolate Is Introduced to the Europeans</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 1: Chocolate in Mesoamerica: Food of the Gods</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2: Chocolate across the Atlantic: Europe</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3: Large-Scale Cacao Production</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4: Cacao Today: Chocolate, Chocolate Everywhere</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 1</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 2</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fur: From Mark of Nobility to Synthetic Chic</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 1: The Prestige of Fur</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2: The Siberian “Soft Gold” Rush</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3: Russian Alaska</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4: Necessity or Luxury?</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 1</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 2</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo: From the Devil’s Dye to Denim</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 1: Indigo Arrives in Europe by Sea Trade</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2: Indigo Plantations in the New World</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3: Back to India</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4: Denim and the Invention of Synthetic Indigo</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 1</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizer 2</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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)
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
<th>OBJECTS</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 image raise in your mind? List two.

1.

2.

How might you go about finding answers to your questions?
TEA
From Medicinal Magic to Economic Powerhouse
**Introduction: Tea**

Tea is a bush grown for a hot drink made from its leaves. Asia is by far the biggest producer supplying 80–90% of all tea, mainly from India, China, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. India is the largest individual tea-producing country, growing nearly 30% of the world’s tea. Tea was introduced to East Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century. It has become an important crop there, particularly in the highlands of Kenya. The U.S. population is drinking its fair share of the brew: in 1994, Americans drank 2.25 billion gallons of tea.

**Source 1: “Tea Map of the World” from classic encyclopedia about tea, 1935**

![Tea Map of the World](image)

Comprehension Exercises:

1. Compare the two maps. What kind of information is provided on each map? How do they differ?
2. What do the maps tell you about the importance of tea around the world? Which places grow tea? Which places drink it? Do the maps indicate any changes in where tea is produced between 1935 and 1992?
3. Where is tea not an important drink? Does the map provide a reason why tea is not popular in certain places? Identify historical events and cultural rituals associated with tea on the first map.
SECTION 1: THE ORIGINS OF TEA

The origin of tea is not clear. One kind of tea plant is believed to be native to China, while another is believed to come from the warmer parts of Assam (in northeastern India) and Burma. ‘Wild’ tea plants can be found growing in forests, but these may be remnants from past farming. Burma and then China are thought to be the first places where tea was drunk. Later, its use spread to surrounding areas in Asia before European contact. Tea became popular with Europeans after traders and explorers arrived in China in the seventeenth century.

Source 1: Retelling of Chinese legend of the discovery of tea

According to Chinese legend, tea was first discovered by the Emperor Shen Nung—a scholar and herbalist who, for the sake of hygiene, drank only boiled water. It is said that one day, in the year 2737 B.C., when Shen Nung was resting under a wild tea tree, a slight breeze stirred the branches and caused a few leaves to drift gently down into the simmering water that he was preparing. He found the resulting brew deliciously refreshing and revitalizing, and so, tea was “discovered.”

It is impossible to know if Shen Nung really existed or whether he is simply a myth of ancient China. Certainly, China was not joined as an empire until the third century B.C. and it is therefore unlikely that an emperor existed as far back as 2737 B.C. But, whatever the origins of the beverage, it is an accepted fact among scholars that tea was indeed popular in China all those years ago. There is, however, no written reference to tea until the third century B.C., when a famous Chinese doctor recommended it for increasing concentration and alertness.


Source 2: Engraving of Chinese Emperor Shen Nung, 1607–09

### Source 3: Retelling of another Chinese legend of the discovery of tea

According to another legend, tea was discovered by a poor woodcutter who was chopping trees in the hills when he saw several monkeys plucking leaves off a tree and chewing them. He tasted some of the leaves, liked it and brought some back to the village. He told others of his discovery and soon, everyone was adding leaves from the tree to their drinks.

From ancient times to today, tea has been an indispensable part of the life of a Chinese. A Chinese saying identifies the seven basic daily necessities as fuel, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, and tea. The custom of drinking tea is deeply ingrained in almost all Chinese and has been for over a thousand years. During the mid-Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), a man named Lu Yu entered the Buddhist monkhood early in life but returned when older, to secular life. He was later best known for summarizing the knowledge and experience of his predecessors and contemporaries into the first compendium in the world on tea—the Tea Classic (Cha Jing). This work helped to popularize the art of tea drinking all across China, making avid tea drinkers of everyone from emperor and minister to street hawker and soldier. Even neighboring countries—Korea, Japan and Southeast Asia came to adopt the tea drinking custom.


### Source 4: Recounting of an Indian myth about the origin of tea

In India, it is believed that it was Daruma, an Indian monk who resided in China, who discovered tea in the sixth century CE. In order to prevent himself from falling asleep while meditating, the monk tore off his eyelids. The first tea plant grew in the place where his eyelids fell to the ground. When the monk tasted it, he was granted enlightenment. His followers were the first drinkers of tea and in India.


### Comprehension Exercises:

1. What are the differences in the stories about the origin of tea? What do they have in common? Explain your answer citing the documents.
2. Which account seems the most likely origin of tea? Explain your answer.
3. What do these stories tell you about the importance of tea in the cultures they come from? Explain your answer citing the documents.
SECTION 2: TEA IN TIBET AND THE HIMALAYAS

The drinking of tea in Tibet goes back to the 7th century. The first record of tea being imported into Tibet is found in the Chinese annals of the Tang dynasty. From the late eleventh to early fifteenth century, tea was bartered by the Chinese government for Tibetan warhorses. Five main grades of tea were historically available in Tibet. The nobility and prosperous merchants drank the two best grades, which were largely pure tea. Most people drank the third and fourths grades, which were mixtures of tea and chopped twigs of bushes and small trees. The lowest grade, called “wood tea” due to its being largely if not wholly chopped twigs, was drunk by the poor. The importance of tea in Tibet led to its use as a form of money. Tea could be bartered against practically anything, and workmen and servants were even paid with tea.

Source 1: Photograph of tea porters near Tibetan border, 1908


Source 2: Traditional Tibetan song sung while churning butter tea

Although not the only way tea is drunk in Tibet, butter tea is the most popular form. Butter and salt are added and the mixture is churned with a long plunger until it is blended. Repetitive work of this kind is usually accompanied by song in Tibet.

From the Chinese Country comes the tea flower beautiful.
From the northern plain comes the small white salt.
From the Tibetan country comes the yak butter like gold.
The birthplace and dwelling place are not the same.
But they all meet together in the little belted churn.

Tea in Tibet and the Himalayas

Source 3: Wooden Tibetan tea bowl

Source 4: Silver-gilt Tibetan tea pot and drinking bowl

Comprehension Exercises:

1. What role does tea play in the lives of Tibetans? Explain your answer citing the documents.

2. How can the drinking of tea indicate differences in classes of people or social relationships? Which grade of tea did the porters in the photograph in Source 1 most likely drink? Which kinds of people most likely used the wooden tea bowl in Source 3 and the tea pot and drinking bowl in Source 4? Explain your answer citing the documents.
Source 5: A Japanese traveler describes butter tea in Tibet, 1909

To make the best butter-tea, the tea is first boiled for half a day, till it gets dark brown. After being skimmed, it is shaken several times in the cylinder with some fresh yak butter and salt. This makes the best tea…Teapots, or jars, are made of clay in the shape of ordinary Japanese tea pots. I could not at first drink the tea, when I saw that it looked like thick oil. It is usually mixed with what is called tsu and baked flour. The tsu is a hardened mixture of cheese, butter and white sugar. The Tibetan puts this substance into his tea.


Source 6: A British traveler describes tea drinking in Tibet, 1940

We rushed around visiting and drinking Tibetan tea. Any good Tibetan drinks fifty or sixty cups of tea every day of his life. The leaves are boiled for several hours, then the tea is poured into a section of hollow bamboo, where it is churned up with a plunger, together with a handful of salt, a pinch of soda, and a good lump of butter. The result is a purplish liquid of unusual taste for tea, but as soup excellent. The moment you put the cup down, even if you have only taken a sip, it is filled up by a servant who stands ready with a silver or earthenware teapot. Custom demands that one drinks at least twice, but however much one has, the cup is always left full. To eat, we were offered dried apricots, sweets, and biscuits.


Source 7: Description of Tibetan tea bowls in a Chinese newspaper, 2004

Although jade and porcelain bowls are now common in Tibetan households, Tibetans still like to drink their buttered tea from wooden bowls. Wooden bowls are in fact an inseparable part of Tibetan life. When serving buttered tea, Tibetans always place two wooden bowls on the main tea table in the sitting room, a big one and a small one.

The big one is for the father and the small one for the mother. In well-to-do families, each wooden bowl has a silver lid, on which are carved patterns symbolizing good luck. In even wealthier families, every wooden bowl is inlaid with silver and carved with patterns, with only a spot the width of a finger left in the centre of the bowl to show its wooden base. Each bowl has a lid and a tray as well, both made of silver. The lid is shaped like a tower and inlaid with silver and gold, on the top of which is a red agate serving as a handle.


**Comprehension Exercises:**

3. According to these early twentieth century travel accounts, how well established was tea drinking in Tibet? Explain your answer citing the documents.

4. According to these foreign accounts, how important was tea in the lives of average Tibetans? Explain your answer citing the documents.
Victory in the French and Indian War was expensive for the British. At the end of the war in 1763, King George III and his government began to tax the American colonies to gain back their war costs. The Crown’s attempt to tax tea spurred the colonists to action and laid the groundwork for the American Revolution. Tea was a staple of colonial life—it was assumed that the colonists would rather pay the tax than deny themselves the pleasure of a cup of tea. But the colonists were not fooled. When the East India Company sent shipments of tea to Philadelphia and New York the ships were not allowed to land. In Boston, the arrival of three tea ships ignited a furious reaction. The crisis came to a head on December 16, 1773 when a group of 200 men disguised as Indians assembled on the wharf, descended upon the three ships, and dumped their cargos of tea into the harbor waters. It took the men three hours to throw 340 chests of tea overboard.

Source 1: The Boston Tea Party, 1773
*A hand-colored print showing the “Boston Boys” in Native American dress, throwing chests of tea into the Charles River.*

"Boston Harbor a Teapot Tonight"

**Source 2: Song sung by members of the Boston Tea Party**

*James Warren and Paul Revere were prominent members of the opposition to British taxes.*

Our Warrens here, and brave Revere,  
with hands to do and words to cheer for liberty and laws;  
our countries ‘braves’ and true defenders  
shall ne’er be left by the North Enders  
fighting freedom’s cause!  
Then rally, boys, and hasten on  
to meet our chiefs at the Green Dragon!


**Source 3: George Hewes’s account of participation in the Boston Tea Party, 1834**

It was now evening, and I immediately dressed myself in the costume of an Indian, equipped with a small hatchet, which I and my associates denominated the tomahawk, with which, and a club, after having painted my face and hands with coal dust in the shop of a blacksmith, I repaired to Griffin’s wharf, where the ships lay that contained the tea. When I first appeared in the street after being thus disguised, I fell in with many who were dressed, equipped and painted as I was, and who fell in with me and marched in order to the place of our destination.


**Source 4: Newspaper article from the Boston Gazette, December 20, 1773**

A number of brave & resolute men, determined to do all in their power to save their country from the ruin which their enemies had plotted, in less than four hours, emptied every chest of tea on board the three ships commanded by the captains Hall, Bruce, and Coffin, amounting to 342 chests, into the sea!! without the least damage done to the ships or any other property. The matters and owners are well pleas’d that their ships are thus clear’d; and the people are almost universally congratulating each other on this happy event.


**Comprehension Exercises:**

1. How did colonists react to the British tax on tea? Explain your answer citing the documents.
2. How was the Boston Tea Party portrayed by participants and fellow colonists? Explain your answer citing the documents?
Source 5: Pledge made by women of Boston, 1773

We the daughters of those patriots who have, and do now appear for the public interest, and in that principally regard their posterity, as such do with pleasure engage with them in denying ourselves the drinking of foreign tea, in hopes to frustrate a plan that tends to deprive a whole community of all that is valuable to life.


Source 6: Encyclopedia entry on the women’s protest, Edenton, North Carolina, 1774

In response to the Tea Act of 1773, North Carolina resolved to boycott all British tea and cloth. On October 25, 1774, Mrs. Penelope Barker organized, at the home of Mrs. Elizabeth King, fifty-one women in Edenton, North Carolina. Together they formed an alliance wholeheartedly supporting the American cause against “taxation without representation.”

In response to the Tea Act of 1773, the Provincial Deputies of North Carolina resolved to boycott all British tea and cloth received after September 10, 1774. The women of Edenton signed an agreement saying they were “determined to give memorable proof of their patriotism” and could not be “indifferent on any occasion that appears nearly to affect the peace and happiness of our country … it is a duty that we owe, not only to our near and dear connections … but to ourselves.”

The custom of drinking tea was a long-standing social English tradition. Social gatherings were defined by the amount and quality of tea provided. Boycotting a substance that was consumed on a daily basis, and that was so highly regarded in society, demonstrated the colonists strong disapproval of the 1773 Tea Act. The Boston Tea Party, in December 1773, resulted in Parliament passing the “Intolerable Acts.” It was proof of the Crown’s absolute authority. Following the example of their Boston patriots, the women of Edenton boldly protested Britain’s what they considered unjust laws.

News of the Edenton Tea Party quickly reached Britain. During the 1770s, political resistance was common. But an organized women’s movement was not. So, the Edenton Tea Party shocked the Western world. From England, in January 1775, Arthur Iredell wrote his brother, James Iredell, describing England’s reaction to the Edenton Tea Party. According to Arthur Iredell, the incident was not taken seriously because it was led by women. He sarcastically remarked, “The only security on our side … is the probability that there are but few places in America which possess so much female artillery as Edenton.”

Source 7: British Cartoon making fun of the Edenton ladies’ Tea Party,” 1775


Comprehension Exercises:

3. Compare roles of men and women. How are women portrayed in the different sources? How are men portrayed? What are the differences? What are the similarities? Explain your answer citing the documents.
**Section 4: Tea Production and Trade**

Tea grows best on hillsides. The bushes are carefully trimmed back and plucked to keep them at the correct density, and to encourage the growth of new leaf-bearing shoots which are produced every 7–21 days. These shoots are ‘plucked’ by hand and put into baskets carried on pickers’ backs. Experienced pickers can gather up to 35 kg (approximately 75 pounds) of leaves each day. The harvested leaves then go through two drying stages to stop the fermentation process and remove moisture so that the tea will not spoil during transit.

**Source 1: Engraving showing the production of tea in Assam, India, 1850**

Source 2: Elephant train on its way to tea estate in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 1890s


Source 3: Description of tea pluckers from colonial newspaper, India, 1887

To pluck, the nail of the thumb must be applied to the top of the forefinger, and the stalk or leaf cut through. However, in practice, it will be found that pluckers, if not properly looked after, will nip the stalk or leaf between the thumb and slightly curved forefinger, and with a sharp pinching twist take off the stalk clean through by hooking the forefinger round the stalk and with an upward motion tearing off leaves and axis. It will be obvious to the reader that if such a vile lazy practice be allowed, the loss of new growth on the tea plant would simply be enormous.

*Tea Cyclopaedia. Collated from the Indian Tea Gazette* (Calcutta, 1887), 116.

Source 4: Description of plantation overseer from tea plantation owner’s journal, Assam, India, 1884

He parades up and down between the rows of tea bushes armed with a small stick...in and out amongst the pluckers, yelling at the top of his voice...deriding or swearing at them...always inciting them to make haste and move faster.


Comprehension Exercises:

1. Describe the work of picking tea? Does it seem like hard work or easy work? Explain your answer citing the documents.

2. Describe the relationships between the people that own and manage tea plantations and those who work on the plantations. Explain your answer citing the documents.
Source 5: Contemporary photograph of women working on a tea plantation


Source 6: Song sung by women laborers on tea plantation, North Bengal, India, 1990s

Here are the new workers, give them the pruning knife,
Cut, cut the bush exactly to measure.
Here are the new workers, give them the pruning knife
Cut, cut the bush exactly to measure.

Here is he waist stick, here is the finger stick,
Cut, cut the bush exactly to measure.
Cut up or cut down, the [boss] will take your pay,
Cut, cut the bush, exactly to measure

Colonial authorities and entrepreneurs established the first tea estates in India in the nineteenth century. The estates were worlds unto themselves, remote colonies-within-a-colony with no nearby settlements. Plantation owners provided housing and provisions, and managers lived on-site, in picturesque bungalows overlooking impossibly rolling vistas covered with the profitable crop. They took tea from silver trays offered by white-uniformed Indian butlers.

After independence, in 1947, new labor laws required estates to provide schools, housing, and medical clinics. Though this improved the prospects for workers’ children, it didn’t make a life of plucking tea much easier: even today, the hours are endless, the slopes steep, the sun blinding. Workers spend at least nine hours a day, six days a week traversing these hills. For this they earn a base pay of less than two dollars a day, which puts them at the top end of agricultural laborers in India. A class of Indian managers has moved seamlessly into the bungalows vacated by the British, giving these estates the feel of a land out of time—a forgotten eddy of history.


Comprehension Exercises:

3. Has the work on plantations that grow and process tea changed from colonial times to the present day? If yes, how so? Explain your answer citing the documents.
GRAPHIC ORGANIZER I

Fill in the following chart for each stop along tea’s route from its origins to the world’s cup. How did tea 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 tea found?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) The Origins of Tea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Tea in Tibet and the Himalayas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) “Boston Harbor a Teapot Tonight”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Tea Production and Trade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Graphic Organizer 2**

*Fill in the following chart for each stop along tea’s route from its origins to the world’s cup.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>To what extent has tea been harmful or beneficial?</th>
<th>How were people’s lives affected by tea?</th>
<th>What role did tea play in people’s lives?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1) The Origins of Tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(4) Tea Production and Trade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

168
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.

Hemispheres fulfills its mission through: coordination of pre-service and in-service training and resource workshops for educators; promotion of outreach resources and activities via exhibits at appropriate state- and nation-wide educator conferences; participation in public outreach events as organized by the consortium as well as by other organizations; and consultation on appropriate methods for implementing world studies content in school, business, and community initiatives.

For more information, visit the Hemispheres Web site at:
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