

Cultural and Ecological Impacts of the Fur Trade 1765-1840

LESSON: RUSSIA MOVES INTO ALASKA AND DOWN THE FUR COAST

For grades 8-14

by David A. Bainbridge

The eastward expansion of the Russian empire was driven by the search for wealth from furs and political expansion to get more resources. The sale of these furs to China brought in record profits and taxes for the Russian government. Sustained yield was not a consideration. The people of the First Nations were exploited, killed, and too often treated as less than human—but serfs in Russia were not treated well either.

This lesson can be applied to Geography, Biology, History, Math standards.

Questions to Explore

What impact did the initial fur trade have on the people of the Fur Coast? Catastrophe, population declines often 90%

What impact did the fur trade have on the ecosystems of the Fur Coast? Catastrophe, extinction of the Steller Sa Cow and almost extinction of the sea otter\

Where were the fur resources found? From the Bering Sea to far down Baja California

What options did the Russian American Company have to get the fur resources to market?

❖ Across the North Pacific and thousands of miles up streams and overland to Kiakhta and in to China or west on to Moscow.

❖ The very long sea route to Kronstadt and the markets of Western Russian and Europe.

The cost and time involved in getting trade goods to Alaska and to return furs to Kiakhta and Russia were far greater than getting them to Canton (closed to the Russians but open to others).

What was the cost differential for American, British and Russian ships?

Have the students compare the trips, each starting from New Archangel (Sitka) using Google Earth. They might be asked to construct maps or picture books to show the routes and make notations on features along the routes, e.g., on land, mountains and rivers and by sea, land areas and ocean currents, and development today.

For sailing, note possible routes and stopping points (e.g., Hawaii) enroute. Note the approximate distances and length of time the route(s) would take check the distance with Google Earth.

For class purposes assume vessels traveled 100 miles a day while overland was 10 miles day. For the land route, travel to Okhotsk (by the dangerous and often deadly North Pacific ocean), then to Yakutsk, Irkutsk, and finally Kiakhta or to Moscow. Note the potential hazards along this route. Assume that on land the travelers are able to go 10 miles a day. Would it be better in winter or summer?

What hazards might be faced by the ocean routes? Land routes?

How did these challenges affect the competitive situation with the ships from America or England?

Did these challenges lead to the establishment of Fort Ross in California?

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Environment

The Fur War volume 1 and 2

Google Earth <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/maps/> and also: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/wildworld/terrestrial.html>

What were the two major types of fur?

Sea Otter:

Fur seal

What ecological problems were triggered by the removal of beaver, otter and fur seals?

Research questions

How were the captain and crew paid?

What was the highest price paid for sea otter pelts in Kiakhta?

Relations between the Russians and Alaska's Native groups varied considerably. There were inter-marriages resulting in Kreol children. How were they treated? There were also massacres and mistreatment at appalling levels.

How were the Aleuts and Koniag, Alutiiq, Sugpiaq used in hunting sea otters and fur seals?

Did they work as individuals or groups?

How far did they travel in their baidarkas in the great sea otter hunting fleets from Kodiak Island?

When were the native hunters and baidarkas first taken on sailing ships to Baja California to harvest sea otters?

Were they sometimes left on remote islands?

When and why did the native sea otter hunters massacre the men on San Nicolas Island?

What risks did the sea otter hunters face?

How were other members of the families involved?

From 1742 through 1798, the Russians explored and exploited vast areas of coastal Alaska. In 1799 the Russian American Company was established to better manage the people and harvest — and to enrich Natalia Shelikov and the other oligarchs who lobbied for the change.

ASSIGNMENTS

Have students prepare a research paper on a topic from this lesson

Have teams of students prepare a power point on one of the key issues they have discovered.

This should be

Gibson, James R. 1992. *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841*. Toronto: McGill-Queens.

Makarova, Raisa V. (Translated and Edited by Richard A. Pierce and Alton S. Donnelly.) 1975.

Russians on the Pacific: 1743-1799. Kingston, Ontario: The Limestone Press. Pierce, Richard A. (Ed.). 1990.

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RESEARCH PAPER

From 750-850 words, not counting the words in references – include a word count at the beginning of your paper. Your paper will describe an issue raised in the Russian fur trade on the Fur Coast. It could be on economics, culture, or ecology.

Preparing your papers – citations and references are critical! The web, Fur War vol. 1 & 2, books, newspaper articles, and magazine articles can help get you started. Use scholarly books or edu websites as primary source materials. Use APA format. For citation format and research advice look at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html

PLEASE REMEMBER: Page numbers! Spell check! Grammar check! Minimum 6 citations with complete references per paper, no more than 2 from internet sources. TALK TO INSTRUCTOR ABOUT YOUR TOPIC AND SOURCES.

GRADING CRITERIA

Innovation and thoughtfulness	10
Analysis/understanding	20
Structure and order, focus	20
Grammar	10
Style-is it engaging, readable	20
Citations correctly used	10
Quality of citations and searches	10
Total score possible	100 points
<i>No page numbers</i>	<i>-10</i>
<i>No word count</i>	<i>-10</i>
<i>Deductions for spelling errors</i>	<i>-5 points for each word</i>
<i>Deductions for wrong words</i>	<i>-5 points for each word</i>
<i>Word count too few, or too many</i>	<i>up to -10</i>
<i>Citation/reference mismatch</i>	<i>-5 points for each</i>
<i>Deductions for incorrect margins</i>	<i>-5</i>
<i>Inappropriate topic (doesn't answer question asked)</i>	<i>up to -30</i>

This assignment can be corrected and resubmitted for regrading. Plagiarism, inappropriate copying of web page or other paper without attribution will lead to no points for paper, no rewrite!

PPT PRESENTATION BY TEAM (alternatively PREPARE WEBSITE)

Presenting ideas is critical in academic, business and community life. Expect to talk for about 5 minutes. Use PowerPoint or Keynote or.... Turn in your talk printed six slides per page and have it on a thumb drive or your phone for presentation in class. Your time as presenter is valuable - make sure it counts.

Use visuals! We only remember about 10 percent of what we read, 20 percent of what we hear, 30 percent of what we see, but 50 percent of what we hear and see. Overheads, slides,

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videos, computer projections, or paper tablet or flip charts all work. Presenters using visuals are perceived as: more professional, credible, interesting and persuasive. Studies have found that meetings were (28%) shorter, and the side using visuals won 2/3 of debates (either pro or con). Consensus was reached in 79% of groups using visuals v/s only 58% of controls.

Power-points (keynote on Mac) have become the norm in most situations. Keep it simple, streaming video and music may be appropriate for some uses – but are not needed for this class. Before any important presentation check out the room, lighting, computer system compatibility, and where the bathrooms are. Be ready for critical presentations with handouts, powerpoint slides to answer most likely questions, and perhaps a set of overhead projector transparencies— just in case.

A typical talk outline

- Introduction,
- Key points
- Conclusion
- Simplify graphs and tables
- Maps: pick the appropriate scale and present the needed information in a user friendly way.
 - Limit text
 - **Use large text**
- 6-7 lines per page is better
- Only 6 to 7 words per line

GRADING CRITERIA

1) Analysis/understanding	20
2) Structure and order, focus	20
3) Graphics, font, images	20
4) Style-is it engaging, readable	20
5) Voice and presentation style, pacing, on time	20