

Transatlantic Trade

Duration

One or two class sessions of approximately 40 minutes each

Resources

1. Teacher's Commentary



2. Student Handout



3. Multiple-Choice Homework



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Objectives of Lesson

- To identify the causes and effects of transatlantic trade over time
- To read a historical source with speaker, audience, and context in mind
- To practice the multiple-choice question format

College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- Topic 2.4: Transatlantic Trade (p. 57)
- Learning Objective 1.D: “Explain causes and effects of transatlantic trade over time.” (p. 57)

Student Activities

- Close reading of a historical source (either in class or for homework)
- Class discussion of the causes and effects of transatlantic trade
- Practice for multiple-choice questions

How to Use This Lesson Plan

This lesson is focused on materials related to transatlantic trade in the early American colonies. It includes a variety of different historical documents in order to help students become more familiar with the time period.

The central component of this lesson is a paired reading of excerpts from the contract the Pilgrims signed with the Merchant Adventurers of the London Company in order to receive funding for their journey in 1620 and from William Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation*. These two documents demonstrate the contrast between the economic goals of the people who funded exploration in the Americas

and the reality of trying to live in the new European colonial economies. By reading these two documents side by side, students will develop their critical reading skills through a focus on audience, speaker, and intent.

We have provided a teacher commentary with annotations and discussion questions for both documents. While the goal of this exercise is not explicitly to prepare for paired passage exercises on short-answer response questions, you may want to start students thinking about how two documents related to the same topic can show agreement and disagreement. There are several annotations on the teacher commentary that could help you design class exercises more explicitly focused on comparison and contrast skills.

The accompanying student handout includes both of the passages without the annotations. Because students often struggle with seventeenth century texts, each document is followed by some of discussion questions in the teacher commentary to aid comprehension. You can choose whether to assign those questions as group work, individual work, or as homework.

You can conclude with a multiple-choice assignment to help students practice analyzing the causes and effects of transatlantic trade over time.



An artistic rendering of Mayflower arriving in Plymouth Harbor.

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Transatlantic Trade

Historical Background

In order to afford passage to the Americas, the Pilgrims turned to the Merchant Adventurers, a joint-stock company, who offered to provide the initial funding for the journey as long as the Pilgrims agreed to their terms. The Merchant Adventurers initially invested 1,200 to 1,600 British pounds, which is the equivalent of \$416,000 to \$550,000. This contract stipulates how the Pilgrims were supposed to repay that vast sum. They were required to work for the profit of the joint-stock company for seven years, with all profit made during that time sent directly back to England to repay their debts. The Merchant Adventurers further stipulated that their profit-making enterprises should be divided among fishing, farming, and making goods for sale. In return, every Pilgrim who was over the age of sixteen at the time of the voyage would be accounted a single share of the profits when they were dispersed after seven years.

Passage 1

Contract between the Merchant Adventurers of the London Company and the Pilgrims, 1620

1. The adventurers and planters do agree, that every person that goeth, being sixteen yers old and upward, be rated at ten pounds, and that ten pounds be accounted a single share.
2. That he that goeth in person, and furnisheth himself out with ten pounds, either in money or other provisions, be accounted as having twenty points in stock, and in the division shall receive a double share.
3. The persons transported and the adventurers shall continue their joint stock and partnership the space of **seven years**, except some unexpected impediments do cause the whole Company to agree otherwise; during which time all profits and benefits that are gotten by trade, traffic, trucking, working, fishing, or any other means, or any other person or persons, shall remain still in the common stock until the division.
4. That at their coming they shall choose out such a number of fit persons as may furnish their ships and boats for fishing upon the sea; employing the rest in their several faculties upon the land, as building houses, tilling and planting the ground, and thus making such commodities as shall be most useful for the Colony.

Commentary

1 Questions for Discussion

Joint-stock companies were financial schemes that dispersed profits by dividing up the final profits based on the initial share of a person's investment.

1. Who is the audience for this contract?
2. Why does the audience matter?
3. Are these terms fair? Why or why not?

2 Questions for Discussion

European colonial economies were focused on producing a profit for their investors. Many of the initial charters and contracts, such as this one, stipulated years of service among the colonists. As the Atlantic economy developed, however, labor by the colonists was often replaced with the labor of enslaved Africans.

1. Why would someone agree to give up seven years of their life?
2. Was the use of indentured servitude a sustainable model?

As a supplemental activity, you may consider assigning a discussion-based activity that asks students to consider how and why indentured servitude by white colonists was replaced by slave labor. An exercise focused on this question would help students develop their AP® Historical Thinking Skill 5: Making Connections in preparation for the exam.

- ③ The colonists were expected to send "all profits" back to the Merchant Adventurers.
- ④ Colonies were expected to produce finished goods in addition to the raw materials that they were required to send back home.

Historical Background

When the Pilgrims settled in Plymouth they faced a very difficult conditions. Over half of the initial Pilgrims died within the first few months of arrival, as did half of the ship's initial crew. The Merchant Adventurers who provided the initial funding for the voyage did not send enough provisions for the new settlement, but still expected the Pilgrims to immediately begin payment of their debt. As a result, the settlers struggled through a harsh winter with barely enough foodstuffs to survive. By the time Spring came, the remaining colonists were willing to take on new social roles in order to stay alive. This passage from William Bradford's History of *Plymouth Plantation* records the early years of the colonies from the perspective of the governor.

Passage 2

William Bradford, History of Plymouth Plantation, 1623

All this while no supply was heard of, neither knew they when they might expect any. So they began to think how they might raise as much corn as they could, and obtain a better crop than they had done, that they might not still thus languish in misery. At length, after much debate of things, the Governor (with the advice of the chiefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corn every man for his own particular, and in that regard trust to themselves; in all other thing to go on in the general way as before. And so assigned to every family a parcel of land, according to the proportion of their number, for that end, only for present use (but made no division for inheritance) and ranged all boys and youth under some family. This had very good success, for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been by any means the Governor or any other could use, and saved him a great deal of trouble, and gave far better content. The women now went willingly into the field, and took their little ones with them to set corn; which before would allege weakness and inability; whom to have compelled would have been thought great tyranny and oppression.

The experience that was had in this common course and condition, tried sundry years and that amongst godly and sober men, may well evince the vanity of that conceit of Plato's and other ancients applauded by some of later times; and that the taking away of property and bringing in community into a commonwealth would make them happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God. For this community (so far as it was) was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort. For the young men, that were most able and fit for labor and service, did repine that they should spend their time and strength to work for other men's wives and children without any recompense.

Commentary

1 Questions for Discussion

Many colonists expected to be regularly re-supplied by the financial companies that provided their initial funding. However, these re-supply shipments rarely made their way to the Americas due to a combination of expense, European wars, and difficult sea passages. The colonists were very much on their own in the new world.

1. Whose point of view expressed here?

2. How does that affect the meaning of the historical document?

② Corn, or maize, was an indigenous crop in the Americas that was new to European settlers. Like tomatoes, potatoes, and tobacco, colonists sent New World crops back to Europe as part of the emerging Atlantic economy.

3 Questions for Discussion

1. How does this passage show a cultural change in gender values among the settlers?

2. How is that cultural change related to transatlantic trade?

④ This section may be difficult for students. You may want to remind them that colonists were expected to live communally in order to repay their debts.

Plato, and other ancient philosophers, argued that living communally would be enjoyable for everyone.

Most of the colonists, however, complained bitterly about having to work for the common good.

As a supplemental activity to help students understand this conflict, you can pose some discussion questions designed to make this more relatable. For example, what do you think of group projects when people don't contribute evenly? Should everyone share in the final grade, even if they don't work?

The strong, or man of parts, had no more in division of victuals and clothes than he that was weak and not able to do a quarter the other could; this was thought injustice. The aged and graver men to be ranked and equalized in labors and victuals, clothes etc., with the meaner and younger sort, thought it some indignity and disrespect unto them. And for men's wives to be commanded to do service for other men, as dressing their meat, washing their clothes, etc., they deemed it a kind of slavery, neither could many husbands well brook it. Upon the point all being to have alike, and all to do alike, they thought themselves in the like condition, and one as good as another; and so, if it did not cut off those relations that God hath set amongst men, yet it did at least much diminish and take off the mutual respects that should be preserved amongst them. And would have been worse if they had been men of another condition. Let none object this is men's corruption, and nothing to the course itself. I answer, seeing all men have this corruption in them, God in His wisdom saw another course fitter for them.

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5 Questions for Discussion

1. How did the emphasis on producing profit lead to divisions among colonists?
2. Do these ideas connect to any American ideologies seen in later time periods?
3. How? Why?

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- 6 When the colonists were required to act communally, this led to friction and a lack of respect among the settlers. You may want to spend some discussing why this was tied to the Atlantic economy as a whole. The Atlantic economy required profits, and profits in capitalist systems are inevitably rooted in a sense of individualism. It may be helpful to link the results of the communal experiment at Plymouth with other failed American utopian experiments, such as Brook Farm, the Oneida colony, or the Shakers.

Transatlantic Trade

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Discussion Questions

1. Who is the audience for this contract? Why does the audience matter?

Write or type your response in this area.

2. Are the terms of this contract fair? Why or why not?

Write or type your response in this area.

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Write or type in this area.

3. Why would someone agree to give up seven years of their life?

Write or type your response in this area.

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4. Was this a sustainable economic model? Why or why not?

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William Bradford, History of Plymouth Plantation, 1623

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Discussion Questions

1. What is the point of view expressed here? Why does that matter?

Write or type your response in this area.

2. How does this passage show a cultural change in gender values among the settlers? How is that cultural change related to transatlantic trade?

Write or type your response in this area.

3. How did the emphasis on producing profit lead to divisions among colonists? Do these ideas connect to any American ideologies seen in later time periods? How? Why?

Write or type your response in this area.

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Transatlantic Trade

Questions 1–3 refer to the passage below.

“We were told that two ministers and an Indian had been lately here—probably it was the Presbyterian Brainerd, and his interpreter Tatami. He had assembled the Delawares in Shikellmy’s house, and (as Shikellmy’s people told us) informed them that on Sundays they should assemble as the whites do, and pray as they do. Hence he would build a house for that purpose, and stay with them two years. That the Governor had given him orders to that effect, and he would be glad to see the Indians hearken to him. To this Shikellmy said: “We are Indians, and don’t wish to be transformed into white men. The English are our Brethren, but we never promised to become what they are. As little as we desire the preacher to become Indian, so little ought he to desire the Indians to become preachers. He should not build a house there, they don’t want one.” They departed for Philadelphia the next day.”

Bishop A. G. Spangenberg, “Journal of a Journey to Onandaga,” 1745.

1. Which of the following contributed most directly to the situation described in the excerpt?
 - (A) Conflicts between colonists and the British government over the right of the colonists to participate in trade with non-Christians
 - (B) The drafting of colonial documents requiring colonists to forcibly convert American Indians to Christianity
 - (C) Debates over how colonists should expand into lands and territories controlled by American Indians
 - (D) Increasing contact between American Indians and colonists as a result of trade connections
2. The excerpt best illustrates which of the following?
 - (A) The range of relationships between colonists and American Indians
 - (B) The forceful conversion of American Indian populations
 - (C) The spread of the First Great Awakening
 - (D) The increase in tension between colonists and American Indians
3. Which of the following earlier developments was most similar to that described in the excerpt?
 - (A) The trade relationship between James Smith and Powhatan
 - (B) The encomienda system under the Spanish
 - (C) The relationship between Christopher Columbus and people of the Bahamas
 - (D) The armed conflicts of the Pequot war