

Teacher's Guide: **Trade in the Ancient World – Evidence from a Shipwreck**

Overview: Students trace the objects found in a shipwreck back to their origins, and then see where else these objects were found.

This can give them an idea about how people traded to get the things they wanted at a particular time in history. It can also offer perspective on the role of trade today.

Grade: 6-7

Related Discipline: History

GLCE: 6G4.2.1

Time: 10-20 minutes

Preparation: Review the clickable map to anticipate questions that students might ask, like “Why did they choose to buy pottery from a distant country rather than making it themselves?” Students should realize that people in a particular place may lack the resources (the right kind of clay, tin for glaze, etc.), or the energy, technology, time, or skill to make something for themselves.

Setup: One time-tested setup is to have students record the origins of some of their possessions. For example, my closet has 16 shirts of various kinds in it, and they were made in 11 different countries.

Another approach is to compare two stores by looking at the origins of their stocks of the same basic item – shirts are a good choice, but many other products have distinctive patterns of origin.

Procedure: The worksheet is self-explanatory, but teachers should think of several ways to diagnose class readiness and provide assistance in finding places.

You can have each student do the entire worksheet, but that takes a lot of time for a relatively small point. A better tactic is to have all students do questions 1 and 2, then some do questions 3 and 4, others do question 5, and the third group does question 6. Reserve question 7 for enrichment.

Then all students can address question 8, based on their findings for their particular product.

Answers: You can collect maps and inspect them, or have students check each other's work.

Caution: as with any mapping activity, there is room for individual interpretation.

Debrief: During the debrief discussion, emphasize that ancient peoples traded widely long before Columbus tried to sail to Asia by going west around the world. The question about pirates can help them focus on the most strategic parts of the trade network. This, in turn, leads to a more serious question – what countries were likely to gain riches by controlling key chokepoints in trade? That question underlies a surprisingly large fraction of all conflicts in recorded human history!!

Vocabulary: distance route trade export import luxury chokepoint

Extension: Look at trade networks at different times in history. Students can get information from a variety of internet sources as well as William Bernstein's outstanding book, *A Splendid Exchange* – your library could get a reference copy of Krahl, ed. *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds* – the photos tell an amazing story of 9th century technology, art, and wealth.

It is especially important to make the connection between trade networks and the relative prosperity of different “civilizations.” During Roman times, places like Spain (copper), Cornwall (tin), Yemen (frankincense), India (spices), and China (silk) were sources of rare and valued commodities, and cities like Alexandria, Byzantium, Petra, and Tarsus were especially important trade centers. At the time of the shipwreck in this activity, cities like Baghdad, Mecca, Malacca, Palembang, and Canton gained wealth as trade centers. Places like Guinea (gold), Samarra (pottery), China (silk and ceramics), and Indonesia (spices) were sources of key commodities. Later, European countries traded with their colonies. In the present day, trade often starts in places like Arabia (oil), Brazil (tropical wood), Chile (food), and countries like China, Germany, Korea, Thailand, and Bangladesh (manufactured goods). Key trading centers and chokepoints in the world today include Dubai, Panama, Hong Kong, Rotterdam, Singapore, and New York City.