



SILK ROAD ACTIVITY

Is the Silk Road an example of globalization?

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Students will explore the “Silk Road” trade networks through museum resources and a reenactment of exchange along the route.

If you are planning to use this as part of a visit to The Field Museum, see the field trip guide on page 6.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since ancient times, China was a key player in vast networks that crossed much of the world. These connections endured despite shifting political relationships and the rise and fall of dynasties. The phrase “Silk Road” is misleading. Instead of a single road as the name implies, a vast network of shifting routes used by soldiers, pilgrims, migrants, and merchants linked China with lands to the south and west.

At the height of Silk Road trade, the 3rd through 10th centuries AD, merchants had to have travel passes for each stage along the road. These passes listed goods being carried and described the people and animals in each caravan. The passes confirmed that caravans tended to be small and traded goods along short, interconnected circuits, often with local guides.

Silk was used as a form of currency. Much of its value was that it was not produced outside of China. Chinese emperors closely guarded the secrets of silk-making. The Chinese government used bolts of silk to buy horses from nomads, to pay troops garrisoned around the Taklamakan Desert, and accepted bolts of silk as payment of taxes.

An amazing diversity of goods changed hands along the Silk Road—silk, spices, chemicals, leather, metals, glass, gems, and paper are just a few examples. But scholars are even more amazed at the religious diversity of Silk Road oasis communities: Buddhism, Manichaeism,



Image: The two-humped Bactrian camel carried goods for caravans on the roads around the Taklamakan Desert. Tomb Figures, Tang Dynasty (AD 618-906), China, probably Shaanxi Province. © The Field Museum, Cat. No. 118030, 118035

Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity all thrived in the first millennium AD. Also remarkable is the variety of Silk Road languages. So far, scholars have identified 28 languages spoken in the Taklamakan Desert region alone.

Silk Road routes passed through the outer edges of China’s territories. During the height of the Han (206 BC–AD 220) and Tang (AD 618-907) Dynasties, emperors established military garrisons in oasis towns to protect China’s borders. Garrisons patrolled and maintained roads and provided a market for local communities. In periods of turmoil, armies were recalled, and the loss of the garrisons affected trade. Travelers still used Silk Road routes, but without the protection of military garrisons, travel was more uncertain than ever.

Keywords: 6-8, 9-12, trade, life ways, discussion, reading, world history
Lens: history, economics, geography

COMPELLING QUESTIONS

Is the Silk Road an example of globalization?

Should the Silk Road be renamed?

How did international trade happen hundreds of years ago?

OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze exchange along the Silk Road.

Students will research the Silk Road in China Hall, or using the online exhibition.

Students will argue and defend their opinion on whether or not the Silk Road is an example of globalization and whether it is properly named.

STANDARDS

C3 Framework

D2.Eco.3 Explain the roles of buyers and sellers in product, labor, and financial markets.

D2.Eco.14 Explain barriers to trade and how those barriers influence trade among nations.

D2.Geo.7 Explain how changes in transportation and communication technology influence the spatial connections among human settlements and affect the diffusion of ideas and cultural practices.

D2.Geo.11 Explain how the relationship between the environmental characteristics of places and production of goods influences the spatial patterns of world trade.

D4.1 Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.

Common Core

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CPS Framework Alignment:

Grade 6, Unit 7: Rise of Asia

Grade 9, Unit 1: Introduction to Geography

APPROXIMATE TIME

1-2 class periods

PREPARATION NOTES

This activity has eight categories of cards: China, Rome, East Africa, Arabia, India, Merchants, Disease, and Religion.

The activity works well when each card is printed on different-colored paper. After printing and cutting the cards, distribute the cards as listed below (under "Explore"). You can place these in envelopes ahead of time and label them with their identity and trading goals. Sample photos of cards and envelopes are included below.

GALLERY OF FOCUS

Gallery 5: Crossing Boundaries, Building Networks:

<http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-5>

OTHER MATERIALS

Access to museum content (in exhibit or online:

<http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/>)

Game pieces

Note-taking Sheet for Marco Polo

Map of Silk Road

PROCEDURES

› Engage

Start a discussion using the following questions. This could also be completed as a quick-write.

Examples:

- Where does your shirt come from? Have students check their labels, and locate the places on a map.
- How do you think your shirt made its way to you? What are all the stages (for example, made, shipped, sold, bought by you) in its journey?
- What is globalization? Where have you heard that before? What does it mean?
- How long has globalization existed?
- Imagine you are living 1,000 years ago. If you wanted a shirt from [Vietnam], how could you get it?

Students may need support on the final question. Ask them to think about what kind of transportation existed 1,000 years ago and how likely it was that each kind was used to transport goods like clothing.

› Explore (Questions and Inquiry)

Introduce the concept of the Silk Road. We are going to ask ourselves how people traded all over the world before airplanes, trains, semi-trucks, and cargo ships.

Show a world map, and ask students what they already know about the Silk Road.

Introduce the activity by first assigning roles and asking students to show on the map where they are from:

- Chinese Trader (1 student) with the following cards:
 - Silk
 - Gunpowder
 - Bubonic Plague (disease)Wants: Ivory, Olive Oil
- East African Trader (1 student) with the following cards:
 - Ivory
 - Bubonic Plague (disease)Wants: Textiles
- Roman Trader (1 student) with the following cards:
 - Glass
 - Olive Oil
 - Bubonic Plague (disease)Wants: Silk, Spices
- Indian Trader (1 student) with the following cards:
 - Textiles
 - Buddhism (religion)Wants: Incense

PROCEDURES (CONTINUED)

- Arabian Trader (1 student) with the following cards:
 - Incense
 - Spices
 - Islam (religion)Wants: Glass, Gunpowder
- Marco Polo (5 students) - one will stay with each trader and describe everything that goes on using the graphic organizer below
- Merchant (remaining students) with one of the following cards:
 - Oasis Towns
 - Caravans
 - Ships
 - Language
 - Trade relationship

Share the following rules:

- Only Merchants can initiate trade
- The game is over when everyone has what they want.
- Marco Polo(s) will watch and report on what happens
- A “Merchant” card must be part of every trade.

This activity takes around 10-15 minutes.

➤ Explain (Apply Disciplinary Lens)

After the activity, have the Marco Polos make their reports using the following discussion questions:

- What happened?
- What surprised you?
- Why did the merchants do all of the trading?
- What questions do you have?

Marco Polo can “phone a friend” and call on other students to help them explain everything.

The class can then generate a list of questions they have about the Silk Road.

PROCEDURES (CONTINUED)

› Elaborate (Gather and Evaluate Evidence)

Working in groups, students will explore content in the Cyrus Tang Hall of China. Content can be explored in one of two ways:

- Visiting the museum in person
- Using the online exhibition: <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/>

In the exhibit, have students focus on different topics. Some guiding questions can include:

- How was the Silk Road discovered?
- What was the Maritime Silk Road?
- Who were the people on the Silk Road?
- How do social scientists today know about the Silk Road?
- What was traded on the Silk Road?

Students will work together to answer the following questions:

- What is the main idea in this case?
- What objects are in this section?
- What things were most surprising to you?
- What made you ask more questions?
- What did this case make you learn about the Silk Road that you didn't know before?

Upon completion of the visit, groups can share their information through a gallery walk.

› Evaluate (Develop Claims, Communicate and Critique Conclusions)

Students can work together in groups to analyze the question, "Is the Silk Road an example of globalization?" and "Should the Silk Road be renamed?"

You can assign students to different arguments, or let them choose.

Students can give feedback to each other using the rubric included below.

Background Knowledge Needed:

General knowledge of regional geography and other civilizations in the area will be helpful.

Anticipated Misconceptions:

Students may imagine the Silk Road as a single roadway across the Eurasian continent.

Methods to Build Empathy:

Social empathy

Students will be having a debate and they will need to practice the skills of listening and responding to each other's ideas.

Opportunities for Informed Action and Contemporary Connections:

Students can learn more about where their own clothing is made and think about informed action regarding conditions of workers around the world.

ENRICHING THE LESSON

Extensions

For an additional challenge, have students explore other communities along Silk Road.

Ask students to compare and contrast the Silk Road with modern international trade.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

TedEd Silk Road video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/vn3e37VWcOk>

Crash Course World History: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfe-eNq-Qyg>

LESSON GLOSSARY

These concepts are embedded in the museum content and may be unfamiliar to students.

nomad – a member of a people having no permanent settlement, who travels from place to place to find fresh pasture for their livestock

oasis – a fertile spot in the desert where water is found

globalization – the development of an increasingly integrated global economy

caravan – a group of people, especially traders or pilgrims, traveling together across a desert in Asia or North Africa

NOTES FOR FIELD TRIP PLANNING

Before

The “Engage,” “Explore,” and “Explain” sections of the lesson plan can be used as a pre-visit activity. Have students generate a list of questions and assign students to topic groups to join in the museum. You may wish to show students how the digital reading rails work using the online exhibition: <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/> as an example.

During

While in the museum, students can conduct their object research described in “Elaborate” in the exhibition. Guide them to Gallery 5, though depending on time, encourage them explore the rest of the exhibit first.

After

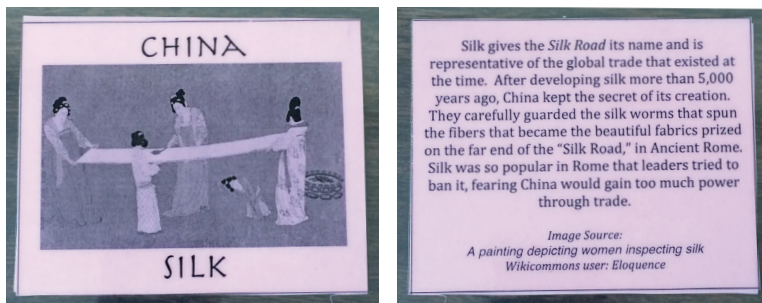
After visiting the exhibit, the class can wrap-up by completing the group discussion described in the “Evaluate” section of the lesson.

Make your own Silk Road cards

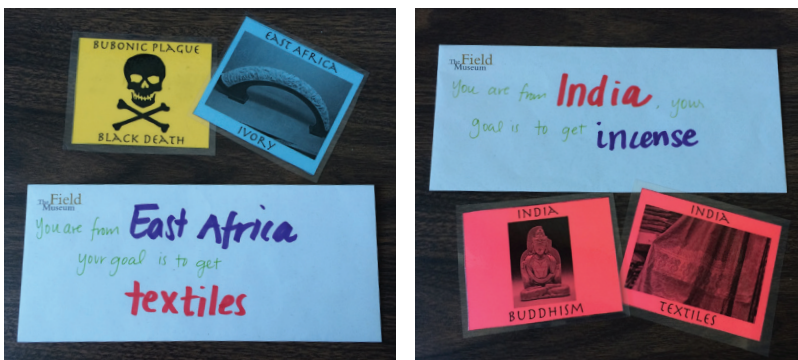
Cards can be printed on colored paper and laminated for future use.



Cards are meant to be printed double-sided so that students can learn about the items they are trading.



To clarify student goals, you can separate cards into envelopes and label them with students' identities and objectives.



Make your own Silk Road cards

Print sheet on colored paper. Cut on dotted lines. Fold down the middle after cutting.



China

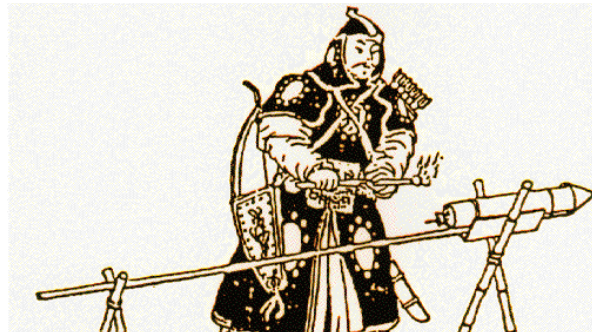


SILK

Silk gives the “Silk Road” its name and is representative of the extensive trade that existed at the time. After developing silk more than 5,000 years ago, China kept the secret of its creation. Producers carefully guarded the silk worms that spun the fibers. Silk fabric was so popular in Rome that leaders tried to ban it, fearing China would gain too much power through trade.

Image Source: A painting depicting women inspecting silk. Wikicommons user: Eloquence

China



GUNPOWDER

The invention of gunpowder is regularly attributed to China. According to legend, Chinese alchemists were trying to make a potion of immortality and got a lot more than they bargained for. Soon, the Chinese military adapted gunpowder for use in war, making rockets, cannons and other types of bombs to defend against attacks from northern tribes, like the Mongols.

Image Source: Early Chinese Rocket. Wikicommons user: Giltagger

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East Africa



IVORY

Many societies have prized ivory, which comes from the tusks of animals like elephants, and used it for art, jewelry, musical instruments, and religious objects. Ivory continues to be a valuable and controversial item. Many countries have banned ivory sales because endangered animals are often illegally killed by poachers who harvest and sell their ivory.

Image Source: Carved ivory in Sa'dabad Palace, Iran. Wikicommons User: Soerfm

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Rome



GLASS

Romans mastered the art of blown glass, made from melted sand. Glass shaped by blowing was thinner, and glassworkers were able to make bowls, cups, and decorative vases.

Image source: Green Roman glass cup unearthed at Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD) tomb, Guangxi, China. Wikicommons user: John Hill

Rome



OLIVE OIL

Mediterranean civilizations traded olive oil long before the Silk Road. It was particularly popular in Ancient Egypt, and used across the continent for food and religious ceremonies.

Image Source: Olive Oil. Wikicommons user: Poyraz 72

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India



TEXTILES

India exported silk woven into textiles. This tradition continues to the present day. India follows just behind China as the second largest producer of silk worldwide.

Image source: A traditional Banarasi sari with gold brocade.
Wikicommons user: Ekabhishek

India



BUDDHISM

Traders along the Silk Road didn't set out with the purpose of sharing religions in other parts of the world, but as more people interacted and shared ideas, it was natural for belief systems to spread. Buddhism is one of many faith traditions that spread as a result of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road.

© The Field Museum, Cat. No. 119332, Photographer John Weinstein

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Arabia



INCENSE

Incense became a central part of spiritual practice across the Eurasian continent. Lighting fragrant incense was seen as a way of making an offering to gods in many different religions, and its use is still common in faith traditions today.

Image source: Incense burning at temple in Taipei, Taiwan. Wikicommons user: Miuki

Arabia



SPICES

A variety of spices, including cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, pepper, and turmeric, traveled the Silk Road and became the foundation of many of the foods we love today. Though these spices did not originate in the Middle East, they frequently traveled through this territory because of the number of powerful trading settlements there.

Image source: Spices in Mapusa Market, Goa, India. Wikicommons user: Deepak-commonswiki

Arabia



ISLAM

Traders along the Silk Road didn't set out with the purpose of sharing religions in other parts of the world, but as more people interacted and shared ideas, it was natural for belief systems to spread. Islam is one of many faith traditions that spread as a result of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road.

Image Source: "Allah" in Arabic calligraphy. Wikicommons user: Tauhid16

Make your own Silk Road cards

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Bubonic Plague



BLACK DEATH

Scholars believe that the Bubonic Plague, which is also known as the “Black Death” and resulted in the largest mass death in human history, spread from China to Europe along the Silk Road. Bubonic Plague was carried by rodents along the trail, and killed both traders as well as people in the various towns along the way. Other diseases, like measles and smallpox also spread along trade routes.

Image Source: Wikicomonns. Author: Gabriel VanHelsing

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Merchant



TRADE RELATIONSHIPS

Many nomadic tribes worked together to make the Silk Road work. Even tribes previously known for raiding and conquering, like the Mongols, put their weapons down to support steady and profitable trade across the continent.

Image Source: Aiden Jones / flickr.com

Merchant



CARAVANS

The domestication of pack animals, including camels, enabled groups of traders to travel long distances. Camels were well-suited to cross China's Taklaman Desert. Horses fared well along the grasslands of the steppes, and donkeys helped crossing mountainous regions. Much of the Silk Road wasn't more than the path made by caravan tracks in the sand.

Image source: One-humped camel. Wikicommons user: jiron

Merchant



LANGUAGE

Nomadic merchants served as intermediaries between cultures of many different languages. Scholars have discovered records of dozens of different languages, including Chinese, Arabic, and Tocharian. The most common language found was Sogdian, a language from Iran. Scholars believe that most merchants spoke this language to each other.

Image source: Globe of Language. Wikicommons user: M. Adiputra

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Merchant



SHIPS

The Silk Road was more than paths across the grasslands and deserts of Asia. It also represented maritime trade routes expanding from Japan and Thailand to the inner coasts of Africa.

Image Source: Java Shipwreck, Cyrus Tang Hall of China. Cat. No. 357835"

Merchant



OASIS TOWNS

It was rare that a single merchant would travel the entire length of the Silk Road. Instead, merchants ran regular routes between large commercial cities, where goods were produced, to the oasis towns along the route. Many of the cultural and material exchanges we imagine happening on the Silk Road happened in the cities along the way.

Image source: Magao Grottos. Wikicommons user: Zhangzhugang

SILK ROAD ACTIVITY

Is the Silk Road an example of globalization?



Image Source: Wikimedia user Lud029

You are Marco Polo

Your job is to observe what is happening and describe it

What I Notice

What I Think

STUDENT HANDOUT



SILK ROAD ACTIVITY

Is the Silk Road an example of globalization?

Rubric

	4 Exceeds Expectations	3 Meets Expectations	2 Approaches Expectations	1 Does not meet Expectations
Make a clear argument relevant to the content	Argument is clear, and illuminates something new about the content	Argument is clear and connected to the content	Argument is either unclear or not connected directly to the content	Argument is neither clear nor connected to the content.
Use evidence from objects or readings	Student uses 3-4 pieces of evidence from objects or readings, describing them fully	Student uses 1-2 pieces of evidence from objects or readings, describing them fully	Student uses 1-2 pieces of evidence from objects or readings, but does not describe them fully	Student does not mention specific objects or readings, or uses unrelated objects/readings
Explain why the evidence supports their argument	Explanation of connection between evidence and argument offers innovative interpretation and illuminates something new about the content.	Explanation of connection between evidence and arguments is clear and convincing	Explanation of connection between evidence and arguments is unclear or disconnected	No explanation of connection between evidence and argument
Listen to others and restate their ideas	In Speaking			
	Clearly restates the ideas of others and incorporates other's ideas into their own argument, whether agreeing or disagreeing	Clearly restates ideas of others before returning to original argument	Incorrectly restates the ideas of others before returning to original argument	Does not restate the ideas of others before returning to original argument
	In Writing			
	Addresses other perspectives and/or counter arguments and uses them to strengthen their argument	Addresses other perspectives and/or counter arguments and clearly explains reasoning for their original argument	Addresses other perspectives and/or counter arguments but does not connect them to original argument	Does not address other perspectives and/or counter arguments.

STUDENT HANDOUT

SILK ROAD ACTIVITY

Is the Silk Road an example of globalization?



The China Educator Toolkit was generously supported by:

