



Bartering at the General Store

This lesson can be done in the classroom or over a class web meeting.

Objectives:

- To discuss why bartering was the main exchange system used general stores during the 1880s to 1930s.
- To examine the different kinds of goods that were bought and traded during this time period.
- To explore how purchasing items during this time period was different from purchasing items today.

Materials:

- Construction paper
- Crayons, colored pencils, markers
- Glue/tape
- scissors

Background:

Review the vocabulary words: Barter, dry goods, produce, and groceries.

Explain to students that there was scarceness of **cash** in early America. There was no national currency until the 1860s and the Civil War. Before that states, cities, and even individual banks printed their own money! Most people didn't have cash money on hand to use to purchase things. Bartering was the most common method of transaction. Families would trade what they had for what they wanted or needed from the store.

There were often two types of main goods to be found at general stores. Items that were traded with were mostly farm goods, and items to be traded for were commercial goods, or goods that could not be found in the community.

- Goods to be traded **with**. These were mostly farm items: flour, beef, eggs, butter, syrup, hides, animals, fruit.
- Good to be traded **for**. These were commercial goods, or goods that could not be found in the community: spices, medicines, tools, china, fabric (silk, satin), rice, tea, coffee.



Activity:

As a class or on their own, have students create a list of 5 items that would be bartered **with** and **for**. Use information from background section as examples. If doing activity as an online class meeting, have half the class create bartering with items and the other half to create bartering for items.

Have each student to make an item or a basket full of a type of item from one of the lists that the class has created out of construction paper.

- Example: to barter **with**, make a basket of eggs or loaf of bread.
- Example: to barter **for**, make a shovel or a bag of coffee.

Once all of the students have completed their items tell them to trade amongst each other. If this activity is to be done in class, have students barter for and with at least 3 different times. If done via a web class, call on barter **with** items to select their barter **for** items.

End of Activity questions:

1. What types of items do we find at a grocery store today?
2. Are these items similar/different from items found at a general store in the past?
3. How do we purchase items today?
4. What is the difference between bartering and paying with money?
5. Would you rather barter for goods or pay with money?