



## The General Store

This material has been adapted from the Campbell Museums General Store Community Exhibit. It can be used for online study or in the classroom.

Grade Level: 2-4

Goal: The goal of this lesson is to give students an understanding of the similarities and differences between the economy and material culture of the early 19th century and the economy and material culture of today.

### Objectives

- Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of the general store, its function, and what items were available there.
- Students will demonstrate understanding of the following concepts: cash, barter, and credit.
- Students will compare change over time in technology, packaging, and communication.
- Students will discuss the differences between life in the period between late 1800s-1930s compared to today.
- Students will demonstrate basic math skills.

Materials: to be used with online slides:

- Paper
- Pencils, markers, or crayons

I: Begin with a set of open-ended questions:

- A. Where do we shop for food, clothing, household goods, medicine, garden supplies, etc., today?
- B. Where do you think people over 100 years ago shopped?
- C. How do you think shopping was different in the past compared to today?

II: Open Slide Show to explore The General Store.

III: Background information/ This information is also included in the speaker notes section for slide 4.

A: Ask: "What is a general store?" A store in a rural or small town that carries a broad line of merchandise in a small space. It was the main shop for a community so people from the town and surrounding areas would make their purchases there. It often sold staple food items and various household goods like hardware and sewing items.

B. Ask the students to compare and contrast the general store to modern retail stores.

1. What kind of store has pretty much everything you might need? (Target, Walmart, et al)
2. What about other stores? How are they different from a general store? (more specialized; i.e. hardware stores, grocery stores, clothing stores, furniture stores, etc.)

a. Specialized store is a store that sells only one type of product, or specializes in a specific category of retail.

3. Why weren't there as many specialized stores in the 19th century? (there was not enough demand for a specific product so that a storekeeper could make a profit, at least in rural areas)

C. Explain that general stores also served as many other duties for the community. Many general stores were post offices, banks, libraries, and more.

D. Why was there a need for a store that had a bit of everything available? (without cars or planes, it was not practical to travel to cities or places where goods were produced--the store provided a central location where everyone in small villages and the surrounding countryside could shop and meet)

III: Making a purchase/ This information is also included in the speaker notes section for slide 10.

A: Making a purchase:

1. "Imagine you are a fruit grower in the 1900. You and your neighbors have very little actual money. You come to the General Store to purchase some sugar and new tools. How will you afford them?"
2. Explain the 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.
3. Explain the concept of **barter**. This was the most common method of transaction. Families would trade what they had for what they wanted or needed from the store.
4. Explain the concept of **credit**. A distant relative of today's credit cards, credit was basically the shopkeeper trusting his customers. He would give them what they needed, and they would pay with cash or goods when they could. Alternatively, the fruit grower above might "pay" with a large amount of his crop at harvest time and then apply that credit to items he needed at a later time.
5. . Sometimes the credit system would work the other way and be called a **tab**. The customer would bring in their goods and the storekeeper would determine the value. The customer could make purchases until this amount ran out.



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### B. Questions about Making a purchase:

1. What is the difference between bartering and paying with money?
2. Why might a farmer be unable to pay during certain times of the year like winter and spring? (nothing is growing so doesn't have anything he can use to "pay" the shopkeeper).
3. When could he afford to pay off his debts to the shopkeeper? (he was more likely to have produce to trade during harvest time)
4. Would you rather barter for goods or pay with money?

### IV: Extension Activities:

- A. Vocabulary Activity
- B. Need vs Wants
- C. Bartering Activity
- D. Morse Code Activity
- E. Primary Source Activity