

THE FUR TRADE

The Hunting of the Beaver

Beaver fur was very popular with the men and women of Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Beaver fur was very in style, and it was used to make a variety of items. One of the most popular items made out of beaver fur were waterproof beaver fur felt hats.

Soon after the Europeans arrived in Canada, they realized that there were a lot of beaver. Because of this, they started to organize the hunting of this beautiful creature, to help meet the needs of the people living in Europe.

The Indigenous People of Canada and the Fur Trade

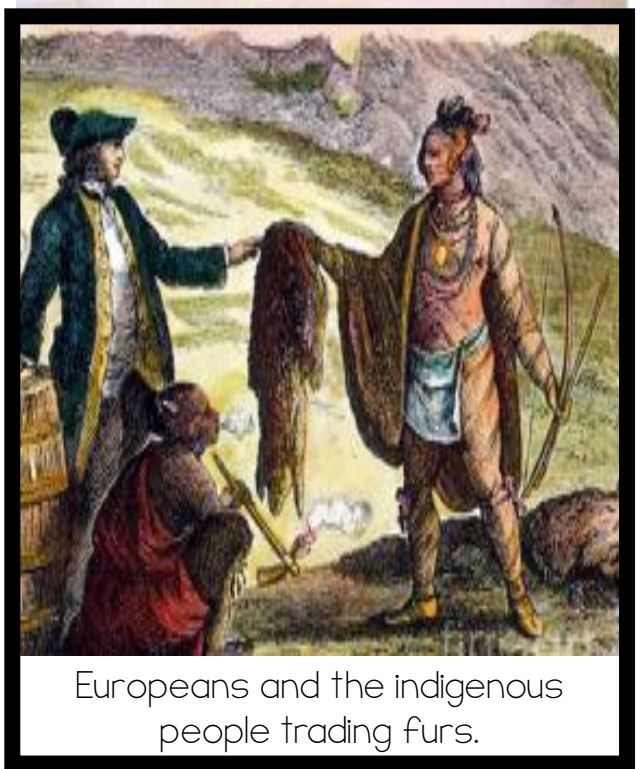
Before the Europeans arrived in Canada, the indigenous people had been hunting beaver to make clothing from their thick fur for many years. They were very experienced at hunting the beaver.

Because of this, the Europeans decided to set up relations with the indigenous people; this allowed them to get help with hunting on these strange new lands, and to maximize their fur trade profits.



The Canadian Beaver

Over time, groups of Europeans set up fur trade companies and built forts and trading posts. The French set up their trading posts west of the Great Lakes, and along the St. Lawrence River. They called themselves the North West Company. The English built their trading posts around the Hudson's Bay, and called themselves the Hudson's Bay Company. They built their forts here because it allowed them to have easy



Europeans and the indigenous people trading furs.

access to furs, and the waterways needed to transport them. It was also helpful to build them here because they were close to the indigenous people who were helping them. The fur trade companies hired indigenous guides, explorers, and clerks. They also hired men known as “les voyageurs”, who worked in the forts and transported the furs in their canoes.

The indigenous people of Canada played an important role in the fur trade. They knew where to best find the beaver, and also knew how to trap and hunt them successfully. They were the main suppliers of furs for the fur trade companies. After hunting the furs, they would take them to trading posts and trade them for special items that came from Europe. These items included things like pots, tobacco, mirrors, axes, and knives.

Les Voyageurs

Les voyageurs worked for the North West Company,. Their job was to paddle canoes for long periods of time from Montreal to the interior of Canada.

Les voyageurs were men who were brave and courageous. They had to face many dangers on land and water in order to reach their destinations. Their jobs were long and hard, as they worked to transport furs and other goods more than 5000 km.

A typical workday for a voyageur lasted about 14 hours, but could often be longer. They were responsible for paddling their canoes at a very fast pace for a long period of time, and carry their canoes and supplies across land. Because of this, they had to be very strong.

Les voyageurs were also important to the mapping of Canada. Many explorers joined them on their journeys, allowing them to map out the continent of North America.



Les Voyageurs transporting furs.

THE FUR TRADE

TEXT MAPPING QUESTIONS

- 1) List a popular item made from beaver fur.
- 2) Why did the people from Europe decide to work with the Indigenous people?
- 3) Where did the Europeans set up trading posts?
- 4) Who did the fur trade companies hire?
- 5) How did the indigenous people of Canada help the fur trade?
- 6) Who did the Voyageurs work for? What was their job?
- 7) Describe a typical day in the life of a Voyageur.
- 8) How did the Voyageurs help with the mapping of Canada?