

FOR TEACHERS



A small collection of images of beads and beadwork serves as a context for further investigation and study of how HBC, through its trade with First Nations, was a major contributor to Canada's story.

Information about Glass Beads

- Beading is a craft that has been practised by almost every culture in the world.
- Glass beads were highly valued by the First Nations because they were durable and came in a wide variety of colours.
- Before glass beads arrived on the scene, the First Nations were accustomed to using pieces of bone, shell or rock to adorn their clothing. Quillwork using dyed porcupine quills was also popular.
- HBC sourced beads from Europe specifically for the trade. They introduced glass beads from Venice, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Germany to the First Nations in exchange for provisions or simply to gain their goodwill.
- Beads were a staple of the trade right up to the modern period. Seed beads were the most popular over time.
- The First Nations incorporated the beads into a well-established tradition of craft, custom and beliefs.
- Beads became common items to offer in gift exchanges when alliances and treaties were formed.
- The First Nations adapted European materials to their traditional ways of making clothing and accessories, substituting cloth for hide, beads for quillwork, and silk ribbon appliqué for painted designs.
- Native beading became something of a commodity in the Victorian period. First Nations began a craft tradition of making beaded items for commercial sale back to non-natives
- Starting in the early 1800s, the First Nations developed beaded souvenirs. They sold standard items of native apparel such as moccasins and pouches in addition to a host of remarkable new objects that catered to the Victorian taste for novelty and the exotic. They made things such as watch pockets, picture frames, miniature canoes, dolls, boot-shaped pincushions, smoking caps and beaded drawstring pouches that were very popular gifts for young Victorian girls. This tradition of beaded craftwork continues today.
- The fort "**patches**" are examples of the traditional native art being modified to modern commercial purposes.

HBC Web Resources

Standard of Trade

External Websites

The History of Beads, Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre

The Bead, Textile Museum of Canada

The Wolf Den

Native Canadian Crafts

Prairie Edge Trading Company and Galleries

Iskwew Beadworks

Métis Beading and Embroidery

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Big Idea

Glass beads were a valuable trade item in the fur trade.

Critical Questions

- Why did glass beads become a valued trading commodity to the First Nations?
- How did glass beads develop into an industry for the First Nations?

Curriculum Connection *Intermediate Grades*

Glass beads from Europe were a valued trade commodity.

Concept Benefit of the Trading Process

Glass beads from Europe were a valued trade commodity.

Task

Students view selected areas of the HBC website and other sites for information about the trade and use of glass beads by the First Nations.

Questions to Guide Students' Thinking

- Where were beads used other than in North America? How?
- What did First Nations use for decoration on their clothing before contact with the Europeans?
- Why did the First Nations value the glass beads?
- How did the use of the beads reflect the characteristics of the various groups?

Students decide how to communicate and share the information. They could:

- use a graphic organizer to present information about how First Nations decorated clothing and accessories before and after contact with Europeans.
- on a world map, trace the journey that glass beads made from European countries to North America and back to Europe.

Concept Benefit of the Trading Process

Decorating with glass beads continues to be an important industry for First Nations in Canada.

Task

Students collect information regarding how beads are an important element in First Nations crafts.

Questions to Guide Students' Thinking

- How are beads used by First Nations in crafts today?
- Why do you think crafting with beads has remained popular from the early trading days until present day?
- What beaded article would you like to have for yourself? Tell why.

Students decide how to communicate and share the information. They could:

- create a visual display of beading images that show the bead styles of First Nations crafters.
- write a promotional piece for one beaded article highlighting the intricacy of the design and its other merits.