

FOR TEACHERS



A short animation about the HBC blanket serves as a context for further investigation and study of how HBC, through its trade with Canada's First Nations, was a major contributor to Canada's story.

Information about the Point Blanket

History

- Hudson's Bay Company had woollen blankets available for trade from its inception in 1670. By 1780 the Company formally adopted the point blanket as a staple of trade. HBC still sells point blankets today.
- Short lines were often woven or sewn into a corner of the blanket's central field. These lines, or "points", identify the size, and thus the value, of the blanket. In 1780, for example, a two-point blanket (with each point representing about a yard of finished cloth) was valued at 2 1/2 beaver pelts at Fort Albany.

Characteristics

- Pointed blankets are made of 100% wool and have always been manufactured in a range of colours and basic patterns.
- To the First Nations the blanket represented a large piece of ready-to-use fabric, which was easier to procure than traditional blankets made of animal hide or plant fibres.
- The wool of the HBC point blanket was weather-hardy and offered good insulation from harsh weather conditions.

Colour

- The white HBC point blankets were effective camouflage for hunting during the winter months.
- The multi-coloured HBC blankets (striped in green, red, yellow and indigo) appealed to the First Nations sense of colour and pattern.

Uses

- A point blanket could be worn/used as is or: shaped into a robe, a capote – long, hooded wrap coat – or a vest; cut up to make breeches or leggings; formed into boot tops, liners, or even socks; used as a door for a cabin, a roof for a lean-to, a sail for a canoe, or as bedding on a dog sled.
- The woollen blanket became an essential item of clothing for the First Nations. It was worn in all kinds of ways as a means of expressing their individuality, sometimes off the shoulder, wrapped about the waist or draped over the head.

HBC Web Resources

Blanket Animation

Standard of Trade

HBC Point Blanket

HBC Our History Timeline (1780)

HBC Image Gallery

HBC point blanket coat - Fashion Images #7

HBC point blankets in Kwakiutl Indian house at Fort Rupert - Historical Images #3

HBC store, Temagami, Ontario, Bear Island - Trade and Retail Images #13

HBC point blanket capote - Art Images #5

HBC point blanket capote - Art Images #10

External Websites

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

The Point Blanket Site

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Big Idea

The HBC point blanket was a valued commodity in the early days of Canada's history and was an important trade item between First Nations and Europeans.

Critical Questions

- What characteristics of the point blanket made it such a valued item among First Nations and Europeans?
- How did the point blanket encourage trade between the First Nations and Europeans?

Curriculum Connection *Intermediate Grades*

Trade between First Nations and Europeans in early Canada

Getting Started

The animated story can serve as a way to generate students' interest in learning more about why the HBC point blanket was an important trade commodity.

After students view the animation, engage them in discussion by posing questions such as:

- What did you learn from the story of the point blanket?
- What did you find most interesting?
- What more would you like to find out about the point blanket?

Following the discussion, have students identify an investigation they would like to conduct and decide where they will get the information and how they will share it with the class. Students might be interested in learning more about topics such as blanket manufacture, colours preferred by other aboriginal groups, or how the blanket was made into other articles of clothing.

Concept Benefit of the Trading Process

The HBC point blanket was valued by both the First Nations and Europeans as it was well suited to the Canadian climate and could be used for many purposes.

Task

Students view selected areas of the HBC website for information on how the point blanket was important to the First Nations and to the Europeans in Canada. They record information either related to the First Nations or to the Europeans.

Questions to Guide Students' Thinking

- Why did the aboriginal people (or Europeans) value the point blanket?
- How was the point blanket a flexible product?
- What properties did the point blanket have that made it useful for many purposes?
- Which use for the blanket do you think was most creative? Why?
- Why was a white blanket useful for some aboriginal groups?
- What other types of clothing and outerwear did aboriginal people use for warmth? (In responding to this question, students can find information at <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/>)
- What type of clothing did the Europeans wear to keep warm during the Canadian winters?

Students decide how to communicate and share the information as it relates to the use of the point blanket. They could:

- create a storyboard that shows the various uses of the point blanket by aboriginal people (or Europeans) and tell why it was valuable for each use.
- use a graphic organizer to describe materials that First Nations (or Europeans) used against the cold climate of Canada.

Concept Benefits of Trading Process

The point blanket was an important trade commodity between the First Nations and the Europeans.

Task

Students use information from the HBC website to verify this statement, giving examples to explain their reasoning.

Questions to Guide Students' Thinking

- Why was the blanket an important commodity for trade?
- Thinking about the trading process, how was the value of the point blanket determined in beaver pelts?
- Were the “points” on the HBC blanket a fair way of assigning value? Why or why not?
- Why did the point blanket represent the highest percentage of goods traded?

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

- create a drama showing the Europeans and First Nations involved in the trading process.
- present an argument for why the point blanket represented the highest percentage of goods traded.
- write a letter that a European trader would send home describing how the blanket was important to the success of his trading with the First Nations.

Suggestions for expanding and extending students' learning

Students choose a topic to investigate and share their learning in a creative and interesting product.

- Investigate why England excelled in the manufacture of woolen goods and produce an illustrated story.
- Using a graphic organizer, compare current methods of producing woolen blankets with the method used 200 years ago.
- Conduct a scientific inquiry to examine the insulating properties of wool. Report the results.