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The Indian Ocean Trade: A Classroom Simulation

Africa in the WorldNEH Summer Institute 1993Final Project

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Background Information on the Indian Ocean Trade

The Indian Ocean Trade began with small trading settlements around 800 A.D., and ended in the 1500s when Portugal invaded and tried to run the trade for its own profit.

As trade intensified between Africa and Asia, powerful city-states flourished along the eastern coast of Africa. These included Kilwa, Sofala, Mombasa, Malindi, and others. The city-states traded with inland kingdoms like Great Zimbabwe to obtain gold, ivory, and iron. These materials were then sold to places like India, Southeast Asia, and China. These were Africa's exports in the Indian Ocean Trade. These items could be sold at a profit because they were scarce in Asian countries.

At the same time, the East African city-states were buying items from Asia. Many residents of the city-states were willing to pay high prices for cotton, silk, and porcelain objects. These items were expensive because they were not available in Africa at the time. These were Africa's imports in the Indian Ocean Trade.

The city-states along the eastern coast of Africa made ideal centers of trade. An important attraction was the gold obtained from inland kingdoms. The gold was needed mainly for coins, although it was also used for works of art, ornamentation on buildings, and jewelry. And, the city-states were easy to reach from Asia by ship because of the favorable wind and ocean currents. Ships had no trouble docking at the excellent ports and harbors located on the coasts of the city-states, making it easy to unload and load cargo. And ,merchants, tired after their long overseas journey, enjoyed the fine restaurants, lodging, and entertainment offered by the port cities. Finally, East Africa was a peaceful region, and the few conflicts that did occur were small and brief. All of these factors created an ideal setting for import-export companies to conduct business.

Many of the merchants from the Arabian peninsula, India, and Southeast Asia stayed in the city-states of East Africa. Interracial marriages were not uncommon, and gradually over the centuries, a new and distinct ethnic group developed, known as the Swahili. Today millions of Swahili people live in the nations of East Africa, where the Swahili language is widely spoken. (You can take Swahili courses at many colleges here in the U.S.) The Swahili language is a mixture of the Arabic, Hindi, and Bantu languages.

The Swahili city-states steadily grew and prospered, and were a major world economic power by the 1400s. Although the city-states were famous throughout Africa and Asia, no European countries knew of them. You can imagine the surprise, then, of Portuguese captain Vasco da Gama when, in 1498, he came upon the bustling port cities of Sofala, Kilwa, Mombasa, and Malindi as he sailed up the eastern coast of Africa. He and his crew were welcomed by each of the cities he visited, although neither his ships nor the European items they attempted to trade were of much interest to the Swahili governments.

Da Gama's mission was to find a route to Asia by sailing from Portugal, around Africa, then on to India.

European countries had been buying Asian goods for years through other, more difficult routes. But now the countries of Europe had begun looking for faster, cheaper routes to Asia. Vasco da Gama did eventually reach India with the help of a navigator from Malindi named Majid. In 1499, da Gama returned to Portugal and told the king and queen, who had sponsored his voyage, everything that he'd seen, including the shiploads of gold, ivory, porcelain, silk, and cotton being bought and sold in the port cities along the eastern coast of Africa.

The Portuguese government took immediate interest in the Swahili city-states. They sent more ships to the eastern coast of Africa with three goals: to take anything of value they could find, to force the kings of the city to pay taxes to Portuguese tax collectors, and to gain control over the entire Indian Ocean trade. The city-states had never needed forts or huge armies, and they were unprepared for the Portuguese attacks. One-by-one, the Portuguese captured the port cities, then wrecked, looted, and burned them to the ground. The residents of the cities who were unable to escape were killed. Shiploads of priceless goods were sent back to Portugal. However, the Portuguese attempt to take over and run the Indian Ocean trade was a failure.

If the Swahili city-states were destroyed by the Portuguese invaders, then how can we know so much about the Indian Ocean trade? One way is through archaeological evidence. For instance, pieces of Chinese porcelain vases and dishes can still be found along east African beaches. Another source of knowledge is the many documents written by people living at the time. For instance, Ibn Battuta, an African scholar, traveled to Kilwa in 1331 and wrote of its immense buildings and its countless other splendors. Vasco da Gama, and other Europeans who visited the Swahili city-states, also kept logbooks detailing both the wonders of the port cities—and, later, their violent destruction at the hands of the Portuguese invaders. And of course there are the records kept by African and Asian companies and governments of purchases and sales made via the Indian Ocean trade network. Archaeologists and historians are still working to piece together this great chapter in African history.

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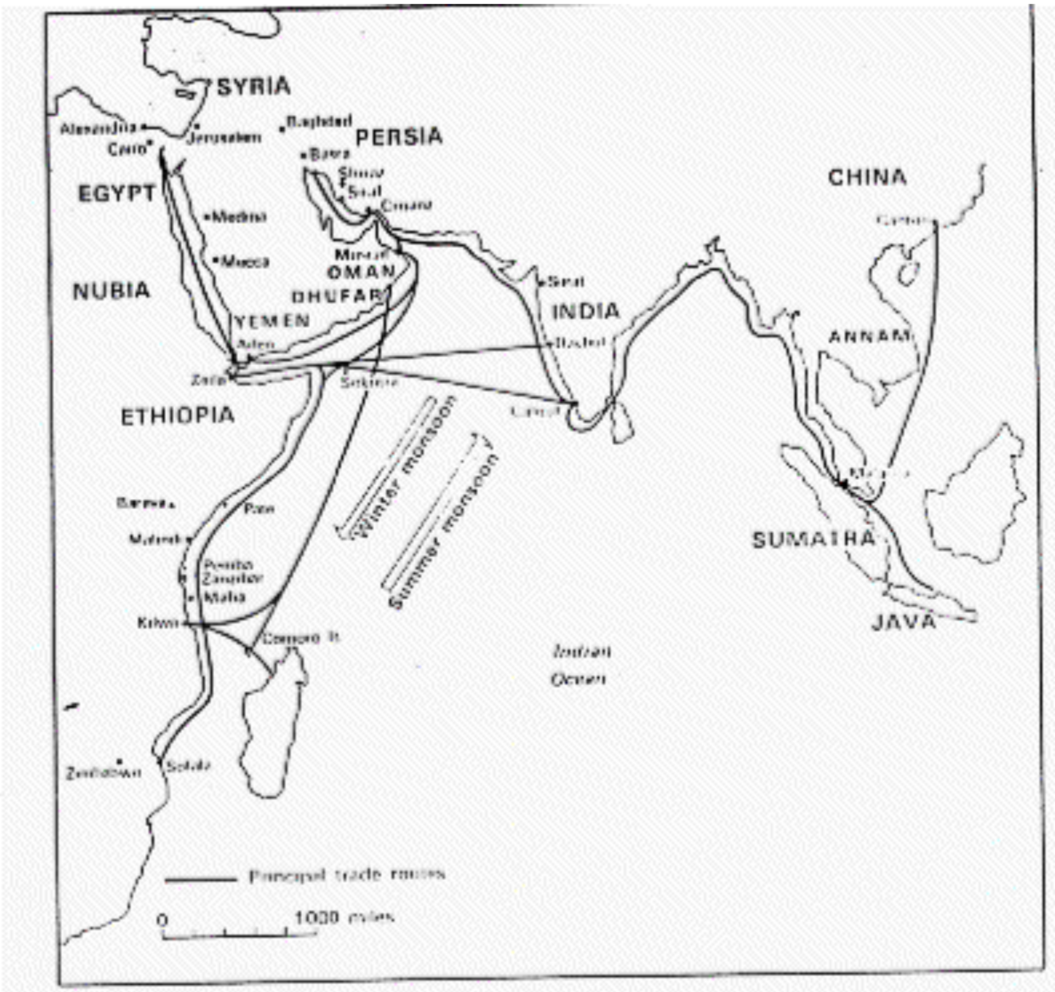


14 The Indian Ocean and its trade in about AD 1200

The Simulation

Description:

This is a simulation of the trade which took place between Africa and Asia between approximately 1000 and 1500 on the Indian Ocean. It demonstrates that Africa played a crucial role in the world economy long before contact with European nations. It allows students to use basic principles of economics as they conduct "trade" between the two continents.

The simulation can be used:

during a unit on African or Asian history
as a contrast to the European Middle Ages
as an introduction to the European Age of Exploration.

Rationale:

Africa's history as a world economic power is seldom presented at the high school level. This simulation helps students discard the notion that African people were primitive and isolated from the outside world by showing how kingdoms and city-states in Eastern and Central Africa were involved in the vast and profitable Indian Ocean trade network.

Materials:

one **Instructions/Price List sheet** per group
(optional) one **How to Make a Profit** sheet for each student
one **Balance Sheet** for each student
an overhead projector and overhead projection pens
(optional) "props"—sample items from Africa and Asia: cotton, silk, porcelain dishes, ivory, bars of iron—some of these are expensive, so you may need to employ the principle of "creative substitution"!

Time:

One or two 45-minute periods, depending on whether or not the class needs time before the simulation to work on the How to Make a Profit sheet.

Procedure:

Day One: For students whom you feel may need some extra guidance before being thrown into the actual simulation (which is quite fast-paced). DAY ONE may be skipped if you are working with an honors or higher-level class.

- Put students into small groups of no more than four. Assign each group the name of an East African city-state (examples: Malindi, Mombasa, Kilwa, Sofala, Zanzibar).
- Give **each group an Instructions/Price List** sheet.
- Give **each student a How to Make a Profit** sheet.
- Explain the simulation by going over the **Instructions/Price List** with the class. Inform the class that the simulation will take place tomorrow, and that today's work will be preparation for it.
- Explain that for any company to survive, it has to be able to make a profit. Similarly, to complete the simulation successfully, each group has to know ahead of time how to make profits. Explain why an item is more expensive in one place than it is in another (the Law of Supply and Demand).
- Go over the instructions on **How to Make a Profit** with the class. You may wish to do the first example with the class to demonstrate.
- Encourage students to work as a group as they complete the worksheet.
- After everyone is done, call on individual students to explain how they would make a profit on a given item. This enables you to be sure everyone understands how they can make a profit through the import-export business.
- Collect the Instructions/Price Lists so they can be re-used tomorrow. You may also wish to collect the **How to Make a Profit** worksheets to check them and then give them back tomorrow to be used as a reference.

Day Two

- Put students into small groups of no more than four. Assign each group the name of an East African city-state (examples: Malindi, Mombasa, Kilwa, Sofala, Zanzibar). (Students who went through the above procedure for DAY I should remain in the same groups.) You may wish to assign roles such as Timekeeper, Task Master, Spokesperson, etc. within each group. Seat one group in the middle section, and other groups on the sides (see seating chart).

. Give **each group an Instructions/Price List** sheet.

. Give **each student a Balance Sheet**.

. Explain the simulation, go over the **Instructions/Price List with** the class.

. Explain how to use the **Balance Sheet**.

. Give students approx. 10–15 minutes to work in their groups to plan the items and amounts they will import and export in order to make a profit. Each student should record this information on his/her **Balance Sheet**.*NOTE*: You can make this a game: the group that makes the most profit wins.

. Once time is up, don't allow anyone to change their Balance Sheets.

. Have the Spokesperson for the group seated in the middle explain how they conducted their trade. Write the information on an overhead **Balance Sheet**.

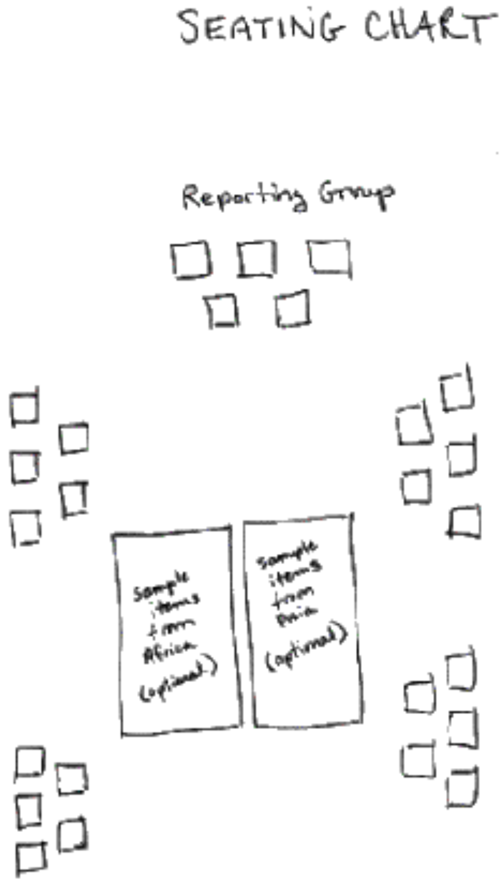
. Have the groups rotate their seating arrangement and repeat #8.

. Repeat #9 until all groups have reported to the class.

. A winning team can be declared at this point. Wrap-up with a brief discussion.

NOTE: some students my be surprised to learn that the iron bars are the most profitable item. Most people think that the porcelain dishes are the most profitable because you can sell them for the highest price. This is a good opportunity to discuss profit as a function of volume and percentages.

For instance, selling a set of dishes earns a gain of 70 gold coins (buy for 30 and sell for 100), but only a 230% profit. Selling an iron bar earns a gain of only 9 gold coins (buy for 1 and sell for 10), but it earns a whopping 900% profit. Therefore, selling 30 gold coins worth of iron bars is far more profitable (earning a gain of 270 coins) than selling 30 gold coins worth (1 set) of porcelain (earning only 70 coins).



The Indian Ocean Trade

Instructions:

Your group is a trading company in the year 1324. The merchants working for the company are from East Africa and Asia.

The object of the simulation is to make as much profit as you can by traveling back and forth across the Indian Ocean and conducting trade between Asian and African kingdoms. Use the **Price List** below as a guide.

Rules:

- You may begin in either Asia or Africa.
- Each group starts out with 5 gold coins.
- Each group has a total of TWO ROUND TRIPS—that's four one-way trips across the Indian Ocean.
- Each member of the group should keep track of the company's profits and losses step by step. Use the **Balance Sheet** to do this.
- If your group goes into debt, the company is out of business and your turn is over.

Price List

Buyer's Guide

In Asia, you can buy:

10 yards of cotton……………………..1 gold coin

1 yard of silk…………………………….1 gold coin

1 set of porcelain dishes………………30 gold coins

In Africa, you can buy:

1 ivory tusk……………………………..10 gold coins

1 bar of iron……………………………..1 gold coin

Seller's Guide

In Asia, you can sell:

1 ivory tusk……………………………..20 gold coins

1 bar of iron……………………………..10 gold coins

In Africa, you can sell:

10 yards of cotton…………………….5 gold coins

1 yard of silk……………………………5 gold coins

1 set of porcelain dishes…………….100 gold coins

Name:
Date:

How to Make a Profit

Directions: Use your group's Price List to determine the answers to the following questions. Use the units listed on the Price List.

1 . To make a profit on COTTON,you would buy it in (A)_______________ for (B)_______________ gold coins and sell it in (C)_______________ for (D)_______________ gold coins.

You would make _______________ gold coins in profit.[subtract (B) from (D), that's (D)-(B)=?]

2. To make a profit on SILK,you would buy it in (A)_______________ for (B)_______________ gold coins and sell it in (C)_______________ for (D)_______________ gold coins.

You would make _______________ gold coins in profit.[subtract (B) from (D), that's (D)-(B)=?]

3. To make a profit on PORCELAIN,you would buy it in (A)_______________ for (B)_______________ gold coins and sell it in (C)_______________ for (D)_______________ gold coins.

You would make _______________ gold coins in profit.[subtract (B) from (D), that's (D)-(B)=?]

4. To make a profit on IVORY,you would buy it in (A)_______________ for (B)_______________ gold coins and sell it in (C)_______________ for (D)_______________ gold coins.

You would make _______________ gold coins in profit.[subtract (B) from (D), that's (D)-(B)=?]

5. To make a profit on IRON,you would buy it in (A)_______________ for (B)_______________ gold coins and sell it in (C)_______________ for (D)_______________ gold coins.

You would make _______________ gold coins in profit.[subtract (B) from (D), that's (D)-(B)=?]

Name:
Date:

Balance Sheet: The Indian Ocean Trade

Where To?	What will you Buy or Sell?	Money Spent or Earned	Money Left
START IN:	Buy:______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________	____________ ____________ ____________ ____________	
1. GO TO:	Sell:______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________ Buy:______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________	____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________	
2. GO TO:	Sell:______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________ Buy:______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________	____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________	
3. GO TO:	Sell:______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________ Buy:______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________	____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________	
4. GO TO:	Sell:______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________ Buy:______________________________ ______________________________ ______________________________	____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________	
Subtract the 5 gold coins you started with from the amount of money you had left after your fourth trip.			TOTAL PROFIT: