

Activity 4: The Fur Trade: Primary Source Evidence

From the early 1600s to the mid-1800s, the fur trade was an important part of the commercial economy in what became Canada. Although dominated by European demand for beaver-felt hats, there was great variety in its operations, involving different furs, trading networks, and alliances. The fur trade promoted European exploration and settlement, and established social, economic, and religious relationships — and significant conflicts — between and within Europeans and Indigenous peoples. It was also fiercely competitive, driven by a longstanding commercial and imperial rivalry between Britain and France and their respective colonies.

Essential Question: Why did the French and other Europeans come to North America, and how did they interact with the First Peoples?



Champlain Trading with the Indians by CW Jeffreys, 1911
(courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-103059).

Historical events are often depicted in art, created at the time and after. Like any primary source, paintings are products of particular perspectives and bring inherent biases.

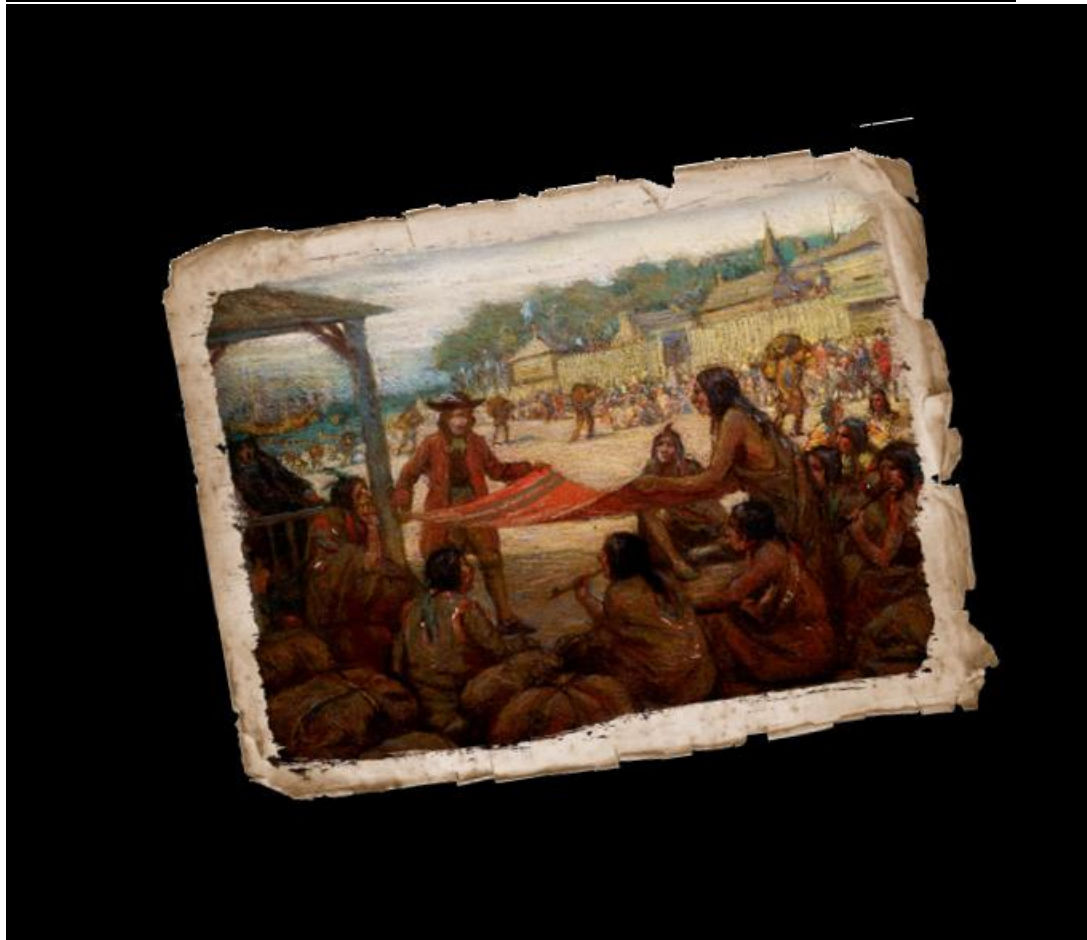
Working in small groups, read **Fur Trade** on The Canadian Encyclopedia, then examine one of the two paintings (below) of the fur trade in Answer the following questions:

- **The 5Ws:** Who is the artist? Who is in the painting and who is not? When and where was it painted? What is the painting about? Why might the painting have been created?
- **Context:** What else was happening at the time? What questions about the fur trade might this source help to answer?
- **Exploring:** Examine the details of the painting. What stands out? Are any symbols used? Whose perspective is the image from? How do you know? How could this painting have been different from another perspective? Who was the intended audience?
- **Reaching Conclusions:** What observations and inferences can you make about the artist's intended purpose? What is the implied message, based on your observations?
- **Finding Proof:** Compare your conclusions with other sources. Does the **Fur Trade** article or the other painting pictured here confirm or challenge your conclusions?



Artist - Frances Anne
Hopkins (1838 – 1919)

www.hbcheritage.ca



Title: The Fur
Traders at
Montreal by
George Agnew
Reid 1916 –
(LibraryArchives
Canada/c-
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