

The Price of European Commodities in 1803
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Introduction

Coffee, tea, sugar, bread. Commodities that we all know and need. Ever wonder about the price and availability of such items in 1803? This lesson will take the student on a 19th century shopping trip! The students will purchase common, everyday, household goods from Strobel and Martini, a commodities brokerage firm located in France. The student will use primary source information, such as a list of the goods offered for sale and their price, from an original 1803 price list of goods. Again, students will use the wonderful digital library provided by Louisiana State University to secure period price lists and particulars.

Content Area and Grade Levels

This lesson on the purchase price of particular European commodities in 1803 is anchored in Social Studies for high school students(grades 9-12).

Curriculum Standards

Louisiana Curriculum standards to be addressed in this unit are:

Economics

- *E-1A-H1 Analyzing the impact of the scarcity of productive resources and examining the choices and opportunity costs that result.
- *E-1A-H8 Applying economic concepts to understand and evaluate historical and contemporary issues.
- *E-1B-H2 Analyzing how changes in supply and demand, price and profit, influence production and distribution in a competitive market system.
- *E-1B-H4 Analyzing the causes and consequences of worldwide economic interdependence.
- *E-1B-H6 Analyzing Louisiana's role in the national and world economies.

History

- *H-1A-H2 Explaining and analyzing events, ideas, and issues within a historical context.
- *H-1A-H3 Interpreting and evaluating the historical evidence presented in primary and secondary sources.
- *H-1A-H5 Conducting research in efforts to analyze historical questions and issues.

Implementation Overview

This lesson is to be implemented within a unit on the Louisiana Purchase; particularly a study of the importance of the port at New Orleans and how that city's geographical position influenced the location of 19th century business. The lesson should give the student a better understanding of the cost of "everyday" commodities in Louisiana in 1803. The student will peruse actual price lists of European commodities dealers Strobel and Martini of Bordeaux, France. Each student will create a "sales receipt" of items that they "purchased" from the French Brokerage firm. Students may "shop til they drop", but all prices must be converted into American money.

Encourage student creativity in production of their period sales receipt. I ask my students to imagine a Wal-mart sales ticket and go from there. Don't forget all applicable taxes, tariffs, and duties. Ready? Let's go shopping!

Estimated project time: 1-2 one-hour class periods.

Project value: 100 points

Resources Needed:

1. Classroom internet access to download primary source period information from the LSU Digital Library.
2. Strobel and Martini. Prices Current at Bordeaux, the 26th May 1803. Available through the LSU Digital Library at <http://www.louisianadigitallibrary.org/u/?lapur,7230>.

Entry Level Skills and Knowledge

Other than basic reading and writing skills, the student needs to be familiar with exchange rates (Francs to dollars) and have a basic understanding of the concepts of tariffs and duties. Teacher may want to preface this lesson with a lesson on currency and exchange rates in the early 1800's. Student will be asked to read a list of goods and prices and convert the prices to American money.

Evaluation

The Student will be evaluated on the following:

1. Overall presentation of the "sales ticket". Appearance, accuracy, and creativity. (encourage students to use poster-sized sales receipts. Students may want to "age" his receipt so it may look more authentic.)
2. Did the student follow all directions and protocols for this project?
3. Project is worth 100 pts.

Possible Variations

This lesson can be varied according to class size and ability. Obviously, I expect a greater knowledge of complex economic issues from my high school AP class. For lower grade levels, keep it simple and fun. The important area to stress here is the research angle. Make sure students spend as much time as they need searching the LSU Digital Library for primary source documents.

Conclusion

A lesson about the prices of commodities in 1803 is an invaluable one for 21st century young people. After this lesson, students will have a much greater appreciation for the difficulties and expense that went along with shipping international commodities to the Americas in 1803. This lesson should help students understand the concepts of capitalism, monetary exchange, weights and measures, and also serve to foster an appreciation of global cooperation in the exchange of goods and services.