Let’s Trade!
Fur Trade Barter Game

The St. Joseph River was an important fur trade route in the late 1600s through the early 1800s. Trading companies established trade routes to obtain furs from Native Americans to ship back to Europe. Native Americans and Europeans interacted with each other to gain materials and create relationships that would shape their lives. Learn more about the fur trade and try your hand at trading!

Ages  8 and up, 3 to 4 players working together

Location  Indoors or outdoors

Materials Needed
- Print out four copies of the animal trading cards, below, and cut them out
- Print out two copies of the trade items cards, below, and cut them out

If you don’t have a printer, create your own cards from index cards or use a standard deck of playing cards. Instructions are below!

Did You Know?
The Fur Trade shaped our natural history and our cultural history, as well. The St. Joseph River was an active trade route during the height of the fur trade.

European travelers and traders from France and England interacted with Native Americans who lived along navigable waterways. Cities and forts were formed near waterways as places to gather. For example, Fort St. Joseph (near present-day Niles, Michigan) on the St. Joseph River was built in 1691 as a trading post.

“Voyageurs,” who worked for the fur companies, paddled large birch bark canoes to reach villages where native tribes were looking to trade. Trading furs for items of value established relationships and a strong bond between both groups of people. The furs ranged in value, with beaver pelts being the most commonly traded fur.

Europeans used beaver pelts to make felt top hats, which were fashionable at the time, and a sign of status. In exchange for pelts, Native American tribes received items that were of approximate value and were also coveted. These items included glass beads, spices, knives, kettles, blue or red cloth, silver, blankets, looking glasses, tobacco, ax heads, and other manufactured goods.

How to Play
This game can be played with 3-4 players who work together to try to get the highest cumulative score. This is done by creating as many sets of 3 or 4 animal cards as possible.

Deal  All players are dealt 10 cards: 9 animal cards and 1 special trade item card, placed face up on the table in front of them. (This is similar to a trading “rendezvous” where furs and trade items were often displayed on a blanket.) Place remaining animal cards face down for a draw stack. Each animal card includes its point value. Beavers, one of the most coveted furs, have the highest value at 12 points.

One player trades at a time. The oldest player goes first and trades 1 or 2 cards with any one other player. If trading 2 cards, they must be matching animals. Example: 2 mink cards). The player receives an equivalent number of cards back in exchange that do NOT have to match. Try to provide cards that will work towards making sets of 3 or 4 matching animals.

Play proceeds clockwise, similarly. A player can pass on their turn if there isn’t a logical trade, or they can use their “special trade item” card to draw from the deck to help make a set on their turn. When a player draws from the deck, they draw until they get the animal card they need, and place unwanted cards from
the deck face down at the bottom of the stack. The “special trade item” card dealt to each player can only be used once in
the game. Using the “special trade item” card is especially helpful later in the game when you are close to making a set of
3 or 4 animals, and know that the missing card is in the draw deck.

Play continues until no additional sets of 3 or 4 matching animals can be made.

Special Trade Item Cards
Set of glass beads can be turned in for ANY animal card,
Metal kettle or Blue Cloth can be turned if for any animal EXCEPT Beaver, Mink, Muskrat

Ending the Game and Scoring
When no other possible sets of three or four matching animals can be played, the “rendezvous” ends.

As a group, tally up the total points for each matching set of 3 or 4 animals in front of each player to get your combined
“rendezvous” score. (Example: 3 beaver = 36 pts.) Ten bonus points are given for each set of 4 matching animals.
(Example 4 beaver = 48 points, plus 10 bonus points = 58 points.) Point values are listed on the cards, and below.

Points Assigned
Beaver = 12 points
Mink = 11 points
Muskrat = 10 points
River Otter = 9 points
Red Fox = 8 points
Ermine = 7 points
Raccoon = 6 points
Cottontail Rabbit = 5 points

Try This!!!!
The Native people and French fur traders did not speak the same language. Try playing again without talking!

No printer at home?
Use index cards, and write the name of the animal and its point value (listed above) on the cards. Create 4 sets of animal
cards and 6 total “special trade item” cards: (2 kettle, 2 cloth, 2 glass beads).

OR Use a Standard Deck of Cards
Each animal and special trade item is assigned a card value from a deck of cards. To simplify scoring, assign point values
that match the playing card (Example, Ermine = uses the number 8 cards, and scores 8 points). Face cards are each worth
10 points. See below for assignments:

Beaver = King cards
Mink = Queen cards
Muskrat = Jack cards
River Otter = 10 cards
Red Fox = 9 cards
Ermine = 8 cards
Raccoon = 7 cards
Cottontail Rabbit = 6 cards
Fox Squirrel = 5 cards
White-tailed Deer = 4 cards
Coyote = 3 cards
Bobcat = 2 cards

Trade items
A Set of Glass Beads = any red suit Ace card
A Metal Kettle = any black suit Ace card
Blue Cloth = any Joker card

Want to Learn More?
A similar fur trading game for classroom settings or larger groups.

Information on life during the fur trade and Fort St. Joseph, with illustrations.
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=fortstjoseph

This site contains information and short videos about the fur trade culture in
present-day Iowa. From Iowa PBS. Fur Trading: A Native Iowan Industry | Iowa PBS

Activity provided by: St. Joseph County Parks
Animal Cards – Print out 4 copies and cut out

- Cottontail Rabbit-5
- Raccoon-6
- Red Fox-8
- Fox Squirrel-4
- Ermine-7
- White-tailed Deer-3
Animal Cards, continued – Print out 4 copies and cut out

Beaver-12

Bobcat-2

Coyote-1

Mink-11

Muskrat-10

River Otter-9
Trade Items – print out 1 copy and cut out

- **Kettle** (any animal EXCEPT Beaver, Mink, Muskrat)
- **Blue Cloth** (any animal EXCEPT Beaver, Mink, Muskrat)
- **Glass Beads** (any animal)

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- **Blue Cloth** (any animal EXCEPT Beaver, Mink, Muskrat)
- **Glass Beads** (any animal)