Oregon’s First People: The Native Americans of the Northwest
Native American Trade: Barter & Exchange

Grade: 3-5
Subjects: Economics, Native American History, Oregon History, Financial Literacy
Suggested Time Allotment: 1-2 Class periods

Lesson Background:

Because Oregon is such a geographically diverse state, Native peoples living in different regions had access to different types of natural resources. Every region of the State had some of the things people considered necessary for life, but no one region had all of the things. Therefore, tribal groups living in different regions would trade with one another in order to get those goods that could not easily be attained from their local environment.

For example, peoples of the Coastal region (such as the Chinook, Siletz and Tillamook) would trade seashells and baskets made of woven cedar bark with inhabitants of the interior Great Basin (such as Bannock and Shoshone), who could supply bison hides and the obsidian used to make arrowheads.

So, even before the arrival of the first Euro-American settlers, Oregon already had a well-developed trade economy based on a system of barter. The barter system is a method of buying and selling goods without the use of money. There are no “prices” in a barter system—goods and services are exchanged directly for other goods and services, and the two parties in the transaction decide on the relative values of the trade goods at the time they are making the trade.

Activity Preparation:

Begin the lesson by making sure that the class understands the basic concept of bartering. Because young people naturally barter on a number of occasions, this can be easily accomplished by citing a couple examples from their lives.

Example: Halloween Candy. When trick-or-treating, kids always get a few kinds of candy that they do not like. These pieces of candy will often be traded to a sibling, friend or parent—the type of candy you don’t like might be another person’s favorite kind. When making these trades, the two trick-or-treaters often need to agree on relative values: How many little candy bars should you have to give up in order to get the big candy bar? How many pieces of bubblegum equal one bag of M&M’s? Depending on who is doing the trading, different pairs of trading partners might come up with entirely different answers to these questions.
Activity:

Native Americans bartered not only with natural resources (fish, meat, seashells, hides) but also with hand-crafted goods (pottery, basketry, woven mats). Use visual materials such as the photo essays in Historic Oregon Newspapers, 'Stone Implements Used By The Oregon Indians,' Portland Oregonian 1905 and ‘Many Indian Baskets': Portland Oregonian 1905.

A few class days ahead of time, let the class know you are planning an activity called “Barter System Rendezvous.” Explain that this will be a day when all boys and girls should bring to class an item that is worth between one and two dollars, that they would be willing to trade with somebody else in the class. MAKE SURE students understand that the exchange is real and will be for keeps. It is probably also a good idea to prepare a letter to parents, explaining all this—you may also want to encourage parents to visit class on the day of the “Rendezvous.” Alternatively, you may supply the items yourself, having students draw their item randomly from a bag.

When the day of the “Barter System Rendezvous” arrives, ask students to place their trade items on their desks. Each child may be asked to take a turn telling the class about their item (“show and tell.”) Let the students walk around the class and get a sense of what others have brought. Once they are seated, you should review the basics of bartering, and explain that they do not have to exchange their item if they feel there is not another item that is worth as much to them as the one they brought. They can also do multiple trades: i.e. barter their item for something else, then barter that item for another, and so on. You (the teacher) may initiate the first exchange by offering one student the item you brought--this should get things rolling. Announce to the class that they only have 30 minutes to complete their exchanges. While they are conducting their bartering, walk around the room and listen to the different comments made. Announce when five minutes remain.

When time is up discuss with the groups: How many students were able to trade their item for the item they wanted most? How many didn't make a trade at all? Why? Was there anyone who traded more than once to get the item of their choice?
Lesson:

Before the coming of American and European settlers, Oregon had been inhabited for more than 14,000 years by Native American people. In fact, the oldest known human remains on the North American continent were discovered in recent years outside Paisley, Oregon (MSNBC story about the discovery: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26819601/ns/technology_and_science-science/). DNA evidence indicates that these people originated in northern regions of Asia and that they are the direct forbears of the Indian people who still live in Oregon today: they are known to archaeologists as Paleo-Indians (“Paleo” is a prefix that means “ancient”). Paleo-Indians crossed over a land bridge that existed between Siberia and Alaska during the last Ice Age, when sea levels were much lower than the present day. These people were nomadic hunters who lived in small bands that followed the herds of large prehistoric mammals known as megafauna. Many Archaeologists believe that significant human impact on the environment of North America actually begins here, because they theorize that over-hunting by these Ice Age people helped lead to the extinction of such animals as the mammoth, the woolly rhinoceros and the giant ground sloth. As the big game species disappeared and the environment warmed with the retreat of the polar ice caps, groups of Paleo-Indians began to settle more permanently in various areas, adapting diverse cultures and lifestyles based on new food-gathering strategies (fishing, hunting smaller game, gathering wild plants)

Newspaper articles to support the lesson:

First mention of 'Indians' in an OR newspaper, from April 29, 1847 Oregon Spectator. Editors' advice to pioneers: "Treat the Indians kindly along the road, but trust them not."
http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/lccn/sn84022662/1847-04-29/ed-1/seq-1/

From 1873 Jacksonville Sentinel, an editorial advocating for disarming all Indians on reservations and a forceful resolution to the Modoc uprising:
http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/lccn/sn84022657/1873-04-26/ed-1/seq-2/

From 1884 Daily Astorian, 'Northwestern Indians: What the Indians require and what the government must pay.'
http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/lccn/sn96061150/1884-02-28/ed-1/seq-1/

'Festivities of The Buck Moon on Umatilla Reservation,' from 1900 Sunday Oregonian:
http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/lccn/sn83045782/1900-07-08/ed-1/seq-25/

'Joseph In Wallowa: Old Chief Wants Land of His Youth for Reservation,' news report from 1900 Oregonian:
http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/lccn/sn83045782/1900-06-24/ed-1/seq-13/
'Davenport: An Oregonian Whom The Indians Loved Because He Never Told Them A Lie,' from 1905 *Sunday Oregonian*: (or, The Good White Man meets the Good Indians--note: they loved~him!)  

'Stone Implements Used By The Oregon Indians,' *Oregonian* 1905:  
http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/lccn/sn83045782/1905-01-01/ed-1/seq-34/

'In Indians' Behalf': 1905 *Oregonian* article about conference on reform of Indian Schools.  
http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/lccn/sn83025138/1905-08-22/ed-1/seq-11/

‘Many Indian Baskets’: *Oregonian* 1905:  
http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/lccn/sn83045782/1905-07-16/ed-1/seq-41/