

THE GAME OF MERCANTILISM

As a result of the Age of Exploration, trade grew between Europe and other parts of the world. Ships from Portugal, Spain, France, England, and The Netherlands sailed to Africa, Asia, and the Americas. They returned with goods that were in great demand among Europeans.

The leading countries of Europe soon found themselves competing for control of world trade routes. Trade meant money and money meant power. A system called "mercantilism" developed in which kings tried to increase their country's exports while decreasing imports. Exports were goods sold to other countries. Imports were goods bought from other countries. If a king could export (sell) more products than he had to import (buy), he would be money ahead. Besides controlling trade, the king's mercantilist policies included control of farming and manufacturing in his own country. If production at home could be increased, there would be less need for imports and greater opportunities for exports.

European rulers encouraged the organization of joint-stock companies and collected a percentage of company profits. Kings also supported the establishment of trading posts where valuable products were gathered together and sent back to the home country. Plantations were started which used slave labor to grow such cash crops as sugar, coffee, and tobacco.

Explorers from Portugal, Spain, France, England, and The Netherlands sailed the Atlantic and Indian oceans and claimed lands where colonies eventually grew up. Using the system of mercantilism, kings insisted that their colonies sell goods and raw materials only to the mother country. In addition, colonists were required to buy products only from the mother country. The English Colonies in America, for instance, had to sell raw materials like lumber to England at prices that were lower than what could be charged if sold to other European nations. The English Colonies were also forced to buy manufactured products only from England at whatever prices English merchants demanded. These policies by the mother country led to "smuggling," a practice whereby colonists secretly bought cheaper goods from other nations.

During the period of mercantilism -- the 1500's, 1600's, and 1700's -- nations competed for trade routes and colonies. Pirates from one country sometimes attacked trading vessels of rival nations and stole valuable cargo. Spanish ships heavy with gold and silver were favorite targets. Wars occasionally broke out as empires rose and fell.



Kings believed that mercantilism was the way to power. If money flowed into the treasury, the king could afford a life of luxury. He could build a large navy to protect his colonies and trading interests. And since his own subjects could not be drafted, he could afford to hire "mercenaries" -- paid soldiers from foreign lands -- to fight his battles.

(1) Explain the meaning of the term "mercantilism."

(2) Why was it important for a country to have more exports than imports?

(3) Why did the rulers of European countries want to see joint-stock companies formed and trading posts and plantations set up?

(4) Why did kings want their colonies to trade only with the mother country?

(5) Why did the colonists smuggle goods into the English Colonies?

(6) What reasons did kings have for thinking that mercantilism was the way to power?

Rules for THE GAME OF MERCANTILISM

The class will be divided into five teams representing Portugal, Spain, France, England, and The Netherlands. The object of the game is for each country to gain control over trade in various products from around the world. These products, which are shown on the map on the last page, were carried to Europe by merchant ships during the 1500's, 1600's, and 1700's -- the period of mercantilism.

Play begins when each person in class secretly chooses a part of the world where they would like to trade -- North America, the West Indies, Venezuela, or any other place underlined on the map. Put the name of the place you choose under the heading "Round 1" on the next page. Write the place name in the top half of the space next to your team's country. In the lower half of the space, fill in one product from that part of the world. For example, you might go to Brazil and choose sugar. Brazil would be written in the top half of the space and sugar in the lower half.

After everyone has made their choices for Round 1, the teacher will ask a volunteer from each team to pass their papers to the front of the room. The teacher will then announce the place and product selected by the player representing Portugal. If none of the other four players (representing Spain, France, England, and The Netherlands) has chosen both the same

place and product, then Portugal has successfully established a trade route. And Portugal scores the number of points in parentheses following the product on the map. The teacher will next announce the choices for the other four players, and points will be scored accordingly. However, points will not be scored when two or more teams choose both the same place and product. At the end of Round 1, pages passed to the front will be returned and Round 2 will begin.

When a product is selected that results in the scoring of points, this product (but not the place) will be crossed out on the map and cannot be chosen again. When two or more teams choose the same place and product, that product will not be crossed out. It can be picked again in a later round.

Rounds 2-10 will be played in the same way as Round 1. The country with the most points at the end of Round 10 wins the GAME OF MERCANTILISM.

Country	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
Portugal					
Spain					
France					
England					
The Netherlands					

Country	Round 6	Round 7	Round 8	Round 9	Round 10
Portugal					
Spain					
France					
England					
The Netherlands					

