

# MONEY THROUGHOUT HISTORY



**3**  
**Rai**  
(Yap stone)  
Yap State, Federated States of Micronesia, Oceania  
1400 C.E. to today



**1**  
**Tevau**  
(red feather money coil)  
Solomon Islands, Oceania  
Before 1700 to 1980 C.E.



**2**  
**Amole**  
(salt block)  
Ethiopia, Africa  
525 to 1894 C.E.



**4**  
**Tajadero**  
(Aztec hoe and axe money)  
Mesoamerica, North America  
800 to 1600 C.E.



**5**  
**Tea brick**  
China, Russia, Central Asia  
800 to 2000 C.E.



**6**  
**Tabua**  
(whale teeth)  
Fiji, Oceania  
1800 C.E. to today



**7**  
**Cowrie**  
(shells)  
Africa, Asia, Europe  
7000 B.C.E. to 1900 C.E.





# MONEY THROUGHOUT HISTORY



## Rai (Yap stone)

From the Pacific island of Yap, rai ranged from a few centimetres to four metres in diameter. They were used, beginning over 500 years ago, for significant transactions. Quarried on the island of Palau, rai were transported to Yap on rafts, crossing 500 kilometres of open ocean. These difficult voyages were part of what gave rai their value. These stones did not physically change hands because they were often too big. People simply agreed that the ownership changed. Rai are still in use today for marriages and land transactions.

3

## Cowrie (shells)

These were one of the most common forms of currency in Africa, Europe and Asia. In China and Japan, they were used for at least 1,500 years. Cowries were so important in China that they inspired the shape of the Chinese character that means "to buy."



7

## Tevau

### (red feather money coil)

This currency is from the Santa Cruz islands, which are part of the Solomon Islands in Oceania. The coils were made with the tiny feathers of the Scarlet Honeyeater bird. The island's Indigenous Nandö people would catch the tiny birds, plucking a few feathers and then setting them free. It took between 50,000 and 60,000 feathers to make one coil. The coils were traditionally used for purchasing goods or services or as a wedding gift. They have not been used on the islands since the 1980s.



1

## Amole

### (salt block)

Before iceboxes or refrigerators, people used salt to preserve food. Salt was quite hard to come by, made for the most part by evaporating sea water. Because salt was rare and valuable, many different cultures used it as money. It is believed the ancient Romans paid their soldiers with salt—or at least paid them a sum of money for acquiring salt. This pay was known as *salārium* and is the root of the English word "salary." This salt brick is from Ethiopia and they were used there until the 1930s.



2



## Tajadero

### (Aztec hoe and axe money)

While the Aztecs valued silver, they never used it as currency. According to Spanish reports at the time of the conquest, copper and tin axe-shaped objects were used as a form of currency. These items—too fragile to be used as tools—were first made in about 800 C.E.; however, it is likely they were only used as money after European contact. The copper was often mixed with arsenic to make the metal light in colour.

4

## Tea bricks

These were used as currency in different parts of Central Asia from the 9th to 20th century C.E. The use of tea as a commercial trade item began with demand for Chinese tea by Russian nobility. Initially, dried leaves were shipped along the silk route; however, over time people found it more convenient to process the tea and form it into solid book-sized bricks. Eventually, tea bricks became an accepted medium of exchange that could be used as easily as silver or other trade items.



5

## Tabua

### (whale teeth)

Sperm whales have the largest teeth of any whale. As early as 1800 C.E., their teeth were used as a valuable currency on the island of Fiji. The tabua were first rubbed smooth and then stained yellow with spices or smoke. Often a hole was drilled at either end and a braided cord was attached. Tabua are still used as gifts of honour or to commemorate weddings.



6

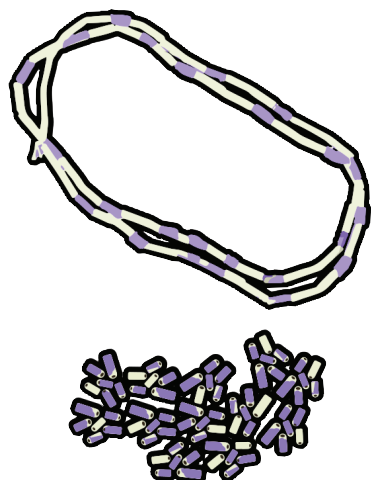
# EARLY CURRENCY IN CANADA FLASH CARDS



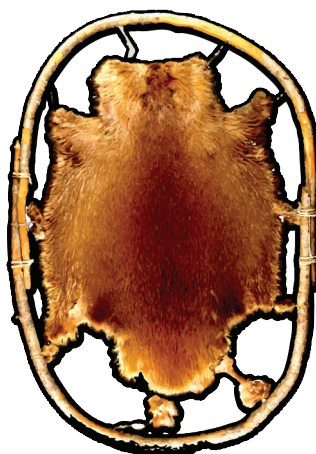
**1** Abalone and  
Dentalium Shells



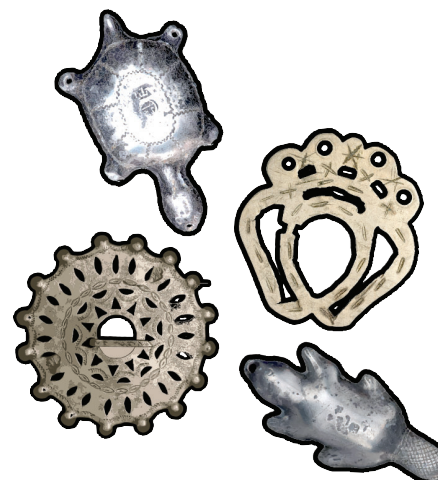
**2** Playing Card Money



**3** Wampum Beads



**4** Beaver Pelts

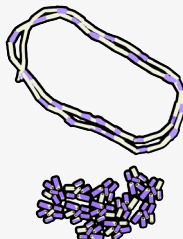
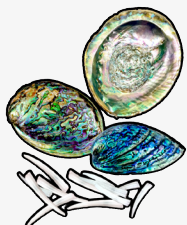


**5** Trade Silver

# CURRENCY INQUIRY WORKSHEET



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_



**My Currency is: (circle above)** \_\_\_\_\_

1. When do you think this object was used as currency? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Who do you think used it? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What qualities would have made this object useful as currency? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What qualities would make this object difficult to use as currency? \_\_\_\_\_

5. A question I still have about this money is... \_\_\_\_\_



# MONEY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

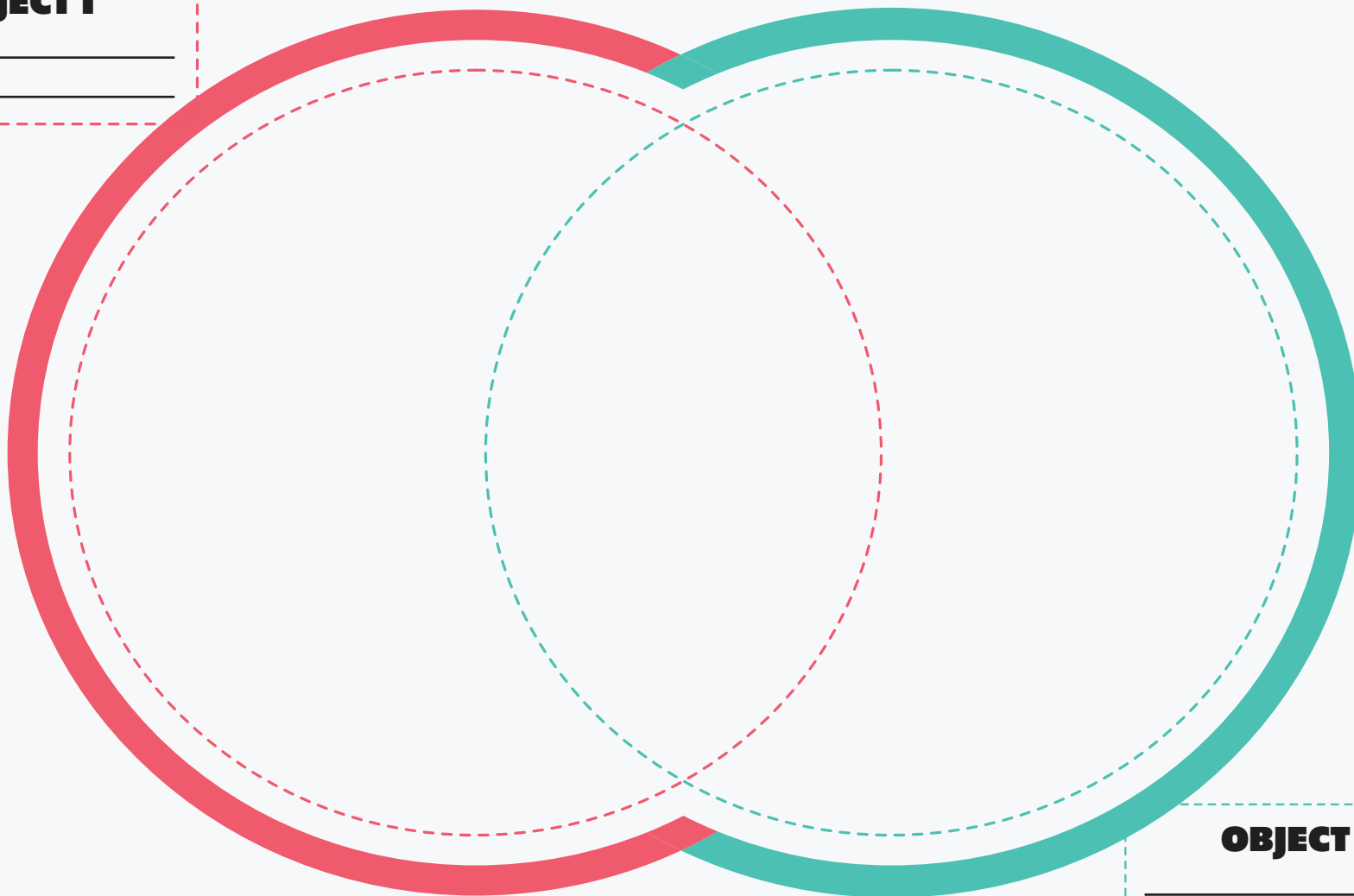
Use the Venn diagram below to compare two money examples. Write things they have in common in the overlapping centre.



**OBJECT 1**

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**OBJECT 2**

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# MONEY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

## Currency Inquiry Answer Sheet

### ABALONE AND DENTALIUM SHELLS

#### 1. When do you think this object was used as currency?

There is evidence of trade of the shells from 2000 B.C.E. to 1900 C.E.

#### 2. Who do you think used it? Why?

Indigenous communities of the Pacific Northwest in British Columbia traded both abalone (round mollusk) and dentalium (tusk-shaped mollusk) shells with other communities. People harvested white abalone shells and dentalium off the coast of Vancouver Island. Through trade, the shells travelled south to California, north to Alaska, and into the Central Plains and Rocky Mountains. Black abalone shells from California have also been found at burial sites in British Columbia.

People often used the shells as ornaments, stringing the dentalium together to form elaborate necklaces.

#### 3. What qualities would have made this object useful as currency?

- Rare but not too rare: The shells came from specific coastal regions. This made them rare and made it impossible for people living more inland to harvest them. However, Coastal Indigenous communities would supply enough to allow for trade with others.
- Portable: The shininess of the polished shells made them attractive to use as ornaments.
- Hard to counterfeit: Making the shells into beads required handwork and specific skills and tools, increasing their value.

#### 4. What qualities would make this object difficult to use as currency?

- Coastal communities could have a monopoly on shells since people inland had a hard time accessing them.
- The value of shells could fluctuate if trade for more useful staples, such as food, was needed at certain times.





# MONEY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

## Currency Inquiry Answer Sheet

### PLAYING CARD MONEY

**1. When do you think this object was used as currency?**

Playing cards were used as currency from 1685 to 1763.

**2. Who do you think used it? Why?**

In the early days of New France, coin shortages were common. In 1685, a shipping delay resulted in the French government having no money to pay its soldiers stationed at Québec. The government issued playing cards with a value written on the back to serve as money. The following year, the cards were exchanged for coins sent by ship from France. It did not matter what was on the face side of the card. The inscribed value and the officials' signatures on the back of the cards turned the playing cards into money. The government cut the cards into various shapes and sizes to help illiterate people identify their values.

The experiment was such a success that playing card money continued to be issued off and on for the next 60 years.

**3. What qualities would have made this object useful as currency?**

- Portable: Playing cards were a popular item available within the colony and were easily carried.
- Divisible: The cards could be cut into pieces for fraction values.

**4. What qualities would make this object difficult to use as currency?**

- The cards were made of paper and could be easily damaged or destroyed.
- A playing card was somewhat easy to counterfeit.
- There was the risk that, in the event of a change of power, the currency would no longer be accepted. For example, when the British conquered New France in 1763, the playing cards became worthless—and not everyone exchanged their cards for money in time.



# MONEY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

## Currency Inquiry Answer Sheet

### WAMPUM BEADS

#### 1. When do you think this object was used as currency?

Wampum beads were used as a trade item before and during the fur trade. In the 1630s–1700s, they were used as a currency in parts of New England and were also traded in Lower Canada.

#### 2. Who do you think used it? Why?

Before contact with Europeans, Indigenous peoples in North America had well-established trading networks throughout the continent. Among the goods traded were purple and white beads called wampum, made from whelk (a sea snail) and quahog (clam) shells. Indigenous peoples on the Atlantic coast collected shells, made beads and traded them with other Indigenous communities as well as with European settlers for resources like food and furs. Wampum was used in Lower Canada for trading in the 18th century.

For a brief period beginning in the mid 17th century, European settlers in New England used wampum as a form of currency. Colonial governments had fluctuating exchange rates and would accept wampum for payment for things such as taxes and food.

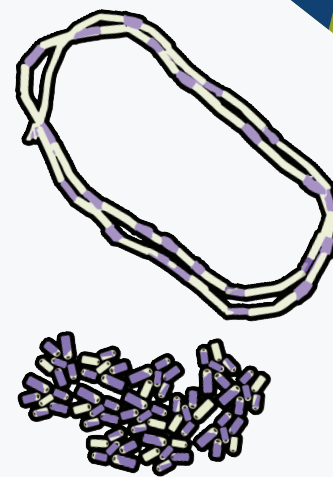
It is important to distinguish between wampum beads and wampum belts. A wampum belt is a ceremonial communication tool and served as an important record of laws, treaties and historical events. While the beads were used as currency, the belts were not.

#### 3. What qualities would have made this object useful as currency?

- Hard to counterfeit: Wampum beads were initially difficult to make.
- Rare but not too rare: The shells were collected and made into beads only on the Atlantic Coast, so there would be a limited supply available. They were traded inland with settlers and other Indigenous communities.
- Durable: Wampum beads were sturdy, waterproof and light.
- Portable: People could put the shells on a string to organize them and keep them together.
- They were already valued by Indigenous communities. For example, Indigenous people used them to make wampum belts, which are important records.

#### 4. What qualities would make this object difficult to use as currency?

- Factories in the 1800s meant faster production of wampum beads, changing their value and their exchange rate.
- The beads were very small and could be easily lost.
- Beads varied in size and quality, which made it hard to standardize their value.





# MONEY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

## Currency Inquiry Answer Sheet

### BEAVER PELTS

#### 1. When do you think this object was used as currency?

Beaver pelts were used as currency from the 1650s to the 1840s (during the fur trade period in Canada).

#### 2. Who do you think used it? Why?

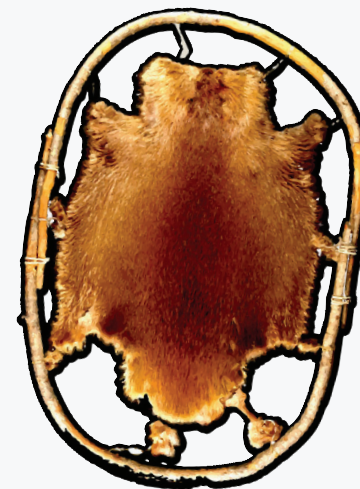
Beaver pelts were an important currency during the fur trade period. They were exchanged between Indigenous communities and fur trade companies. The size, quality and colour of a beaver pelt determined its worth and what it could be traded for. Winter pelts, which were thicker and softer than summer pelts, were more valuable. Each spring, voyageurs (fur transporters) left the trading post in canoes loaded with trading goods in search of First Nations communities to trade goods for furs. Beaver fur was popular in European fashion at the time.

#### 3. What qualities would have made this object useful as currency?

- Hard to Counterfeit: A standard "made beaver" was a cleaned, stretched and dried adult beaver pelt. This standard helped serve as a benchmark for other fur traded at the time.
- Portable: The waterproof fur of the dried pelts made travelling with the furs easier through extreme weather.
- Rare but not too rare: While beavers were a common animal, the work involved in trapping one and preparing the pelt was time-consuming. Travelling to remote locations to find the animal also increased its value.

#### 4. What qualities would make this object difficult to use as currency?

- An animal fur is only as valuable as its demand in the market. Beaver fur was eventually replaced by advanced silk technology as the fashion material of choice.
- A made beaver was quite large and had to be transported long distances.
- While waterproof, the pelt could be damaged in other ways that would lower its value.
- Pelt trading usually went in one direction, from seller to buyer. This made it less circular than currencies exchanged back and forth.



# MONEY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

## Currency Inquiry Answer Sheet

### TRADE SILVER

**1. When do you think this object was used as currency?**

Trade silver was used as currency from the 1600s to the early 1800s.

**2. Who do you think used it? Why?**

Both the French and the English melted silver from coins to make objects that were more appealing to Indigenous traders. The Europeans presented silver articles such as arm bands, earrings, brooches and crosses as gifts to build diplomatic ties.

These ornaments became prized possessions and prestige items among some First Nations communities. By 1760, fur traders had recognized the usefulness of silver jewellery as a trade good for furs. Two beaver furs could be traded for one silver brooch.

**3. What qualities would have made this object useful as currency?**

- Rare but not too rare: As a precious metal, silver would hold its value and could be-remelted and used in other ways.
- Divisible: The silver would come in small amounts that could be gathered together or used individually.
- Durable: The metal would hold well in heat or cold, rain or sun.

**4. What qualities would make this object difficult to use as currency?**

- Traders needed to check they were getting silver, not another metal as a substitute.
- The assorted sizes and shapes of the silver ornaments made it difficult to standardize a size and value.

