

Ancient China: The Silk Road Trade Challenge

Learning objective: To understand the significance of the Silk Road in Ancient China and the impact of trade on the exchange of goods, ideas, and inventions.

Ellie the elephant has been studying the historical maps of the Silk Road. In this activity, you must act as a trade advisor for an Ancient Chinese merchant. Sort the items listed in the word bank into the correct categories based on whether they were exported from China to the West, or imported into China from other lands. Then, answer the deeper thinking questions to justify the importance of these exchanges.

Word bank: Silk · Paper · Spices · Porcelain · Glassware · Tea · Wool · Gunpowder

1. Create two lists: 'Exports from China' and 'Imports to China'. Place the items from the word bank into the correct category. (4 marks)

2. Explain why silk was considered such a highly-prized commodity in the Roman Empire. Why might merchants keep the secret of its production hidden? (3 marks)

3. Compare and contrast: How did the invention of paper change the way information was stored and shared compared to earlier methods like bamboo strips or silk scrolls? (3 marks)

4. Justify your answer: If the Silk Road had never existed, how might the development of Ancient Chinese society have been different regarding its technological progress? (3 marks)

5. What might happen if a merchant travelling the Silk Road encountered a mountain range or a desert? Suggest two ways they would adapt their travel plans. (2 marks)

6. The Silk Road was not just for goods; it was for ideas. Name one religion or philosophical belief that travelled along these routes and explain its impact. (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a map of the Silk Road route. Include a label for the starting point in Chang'an and illustrate one type of animal (such as a Bactrian camel) used to carry goods across the difficult terrain.



Extension challenge: Imagine you are an explorer writing a diary entry about a day on the Silk Road. Describe the sights, sounds, and the value of the goods in your caravan. Include a 'price list' in your diary showing the value of your goods in ancient currency equivalents.