

The History of Bartering

Have you ever given a friend a book, video game, or other item in exchange for something of theirs? If so, then you have bartered. *Bartering* means trading goods or services with another person without paying any money. This type of exchange was used by early civilizations, and some cultures still use it today.

Bartering was first used in 6000 BCE before money was invented. It was introduced in ancient Mesopotamia, an area in what is now southwest Asia. In the city of Babylon, the bartering system was improved. Goods were exchanged for food, tea, and spices. Salt was a popular item that was often exchanged. It was so valuable during the Roman Empire (27 BCE–476 CE) that Romans used to be paid in salt. In Europe in the Middle Ages (the time after the Roman Empire and before the mid-1400s), people used to travel around the world to trade crafts and furs for silks and spices. When money was invented, bartering didn't stop, it just became more organized.

As with most things, bartering has its positives and negatives. One problem is that you can't always be sure of the quality of the item you receive. It's not like buying something in a store where you can return it if you're not happy with it. Another problem can be how well you know the person you're making the exchange with. Can you be sure the other person is honest and trustworthy?



On the positive side, you don't need money to barter. People swap things that have similar value, but they aren't always the same kind of thing. For example, you don't have to exchange clothes for clothes or food for food. In the past, people used to exchange fur for tea and spices. Today, you might exchange a sofa for a television. Some people offer services in exchange for items. For example, if you're good at fixing things, you can offer to repair something in exchange for an item you want; or if you know about taxes, you can offer to help a local business with theirs in exchange for a free service. The best thing about bartering is that if it's done well, it can be a win-win for everyone.



▲ The “floating markets” of Thailand used to be local places for trading and bartering, but now they are mostly for tourists.

B Read the article. Match the main ideas to the paragraphs.

Paragraph 1: _____

a. how bartering has been used throughout history

Paragraph 2: _____

b. the possible negatives of bartering

Paragraph 3: _____

c. what bartering is

Paragraph 4: _____

d. the positives of bartering

C Match the underlined words and phrases in the article to the meanings below.

1. _____: goods made by hand

2. _____: in return for

3. _____: true to their word

4. _____: a situation that everyone is happy with

5. _____: trade

6. _____: from a very long time ago

D Read the statements. Then read the article again and write **T** for *true* or **F** for *false*.

1. Bartering was only used in the past.
2. The people of Mesopotamia were the first to barter.
3. Bartering stopped when people started to use money.
4. When you barter, you can bring back the item if the quality is bad.
5. When two people barter, they have to exchange the same kind of thing.
6. Bartering can make people's lives better.

E Answer the questions with information from the article.

1. When did people first barter? _____
2. What did the Romans like to barter with? _____
3. Which people used to barter furs for silks? _____
4. If you want to barter with someone, what should that person be like? _____
5. What do some people offer to exchange instead of goods? _____