

## Unit 2: Traveling the Silk Road



### Getting Started

- 1 Do you know what silk is? Can you guess why it is so valuable?
- 2 How can people protect themselves from thieves?
- 3 What are some popular items in your country that come from abroad?

## Building Background Knowledge

### Silk Road Items

A wide variety of highly-coveted items were traded by merchants traveling along the Silk Road, including gold, furs, spices, and gunpowder. Of course, silk was the primary reason why the trade route was originally established. The Chinese were the first to develop silk, but a demand for the glossy fabric woven from it grew quickly in the West. Before long, powerful people all around the Mediterranean region, including Cleopatra, started wearing silk garments. Particularly favored was fabric which had been treated with a purple dye made from mollusk shells.



▲ Fur



▲ Bars of gold



▲ Spices

# Traveling the Silk Road 03

## The Big Question

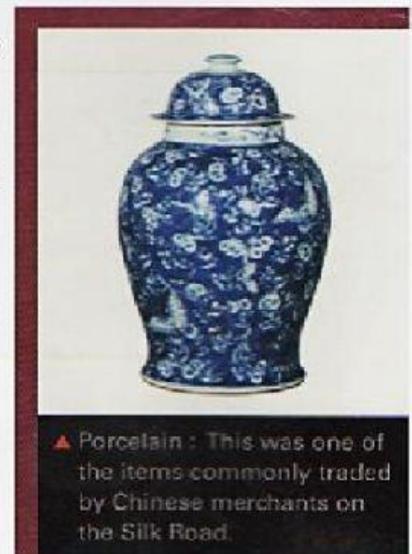
What was the most significant effect of the Silk Road?



Notes

Before the year 200 B.C., the **regions** of the Far East and the Mediterranean knew nothing of each other. That situation changed with the establishment of the Silk Road, a network of trade **routes** that linked East Asia with the Western world. The Silk Road stretched for 7,000 kilometers (4,300 miles) from the east of China to the European cities around the Western Mediterranean and south to parts of South Asia and Northeast Africa. It remained in use until around the fourteenth century.

The Silk Road is often referred to as the longest “highway” in history, as it passed through what today are 18 different countries. Many **commodities** such as gold, ivory, exotic animals, and plants were traded along the network, although the most important product was silk. Chinese **artisans** were the only people who knew how to make silk, and they guarded their secret tightly for many centuries in order to ensure a **monopoly** on the highly sought-after luxury item. **Porcelain** was another item in high demand that was unique to China, and other popular products like horses, spices, fruit, tea, and fur were traded to and from all corners of the route. These were usually transported in large camel **caravans**, and it could take several years for a single item to



**region** a specified area

**route** a way between two places

**commodity** a product traded, bought, or sold

**artisan** a skilled craftsperson

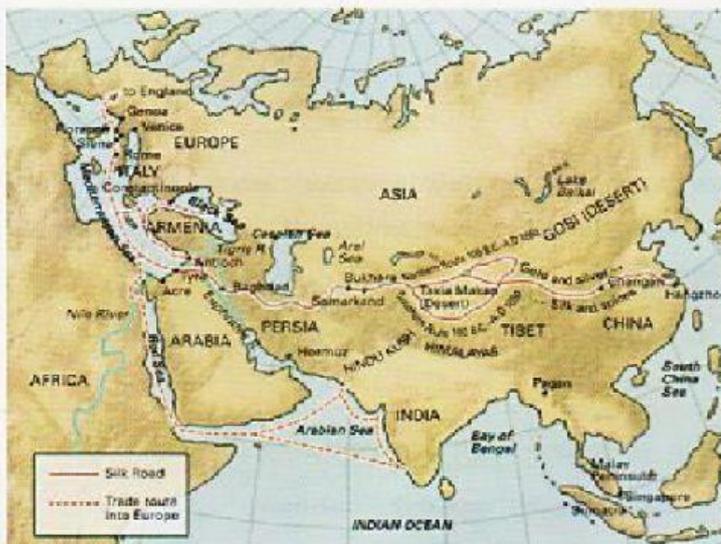
**monopoly** a situation where there is only one seller of a certain product

**porcelain** a white ceramic material

make it from one end of the route to the other.

The Silk Road brought as many dangers as it brought treasures, however. Travelers of the trade route had to pass through barren deserts where they were confronted with harsh temperatures and violent sandstorms. Other sections of the Silk Road weaved through tall, snowy mountains, which could make people sick from a lack of water or the high altitude among other things. In addition, **bandits** made a living stealing **precious cargo** from the camel caravans that traveled the Silk Road. The different kingdoms along the route also liked to tax merchants for passing through their territory. Faced with all these dangers and hardships, few merchants traveled the entire route; most chose instead to cover only a few hundred miles of it. Then, they would sell their goods to another merchant who would transport them an additional hundred miles, and so on.

The importance of the Silk Road for worldwide trade continued for more than one thousand years. Eventually, both Europeans and Asians developed more reliable ocean **vessels**. Sea routes cut down on both the cost and time it took to transport goods between continents. However, the Silk Road left a lasting impact as it was not only used to trade products, but also ideas. Camel caravans brought various religions, **customs**, and beliefs along with their goods. In other words, the Silk Road was the first known instance of a global cultural exchange.



▲ The Silk Road

← Notes

25

30

35

40

### On Your Own

How is the Internet like a modern version of the Silk Road?

**caravan** a large group of people traveling together for safety through a dangerous area

**bandit** a person who steals from others, especially while they are traveling

**cargo** things carried or transported in a vehicle

**vessel** a large ship

**custom** a traditional way of doing things in a society

## VOCABULARY BUILDING

✚ Complete each sentence with one of the words from the box.

Impact/altitude / stretch / exchange / hardships / weave

1. Losing your job is sure to have a negative \_\_\_\_\_ on your family finances.
2. Adolescence is full of \_\_\_\_\_, but it is also a blessing in disguise.
3. The pilot was instructed not to fly the plane above a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ of 27,000 feet.
4. The Alps \_\_\_\_\_ from Austria to France.
5. Motorcycles are small enough to \_\_\_\_\_ in and out of slow-moving traffic.
6. The Canadian student went to Germany through a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ program.

✚ Choose the words that are closest in meaning to the highlighted ones.

7. The only way to clear up a misunderstanding with someone is to **confront** them.  
  
a. ignore      b. face      c. console      d. insult
8. You won't possibly be able to grow any vegetables in this **barren** soil.  
  
a. tender      b. uncomfortable      c. infertile      d. moist
9. Our teacher will give the most responsibilities to the most **reliable** student.  
  
a. outgoing      b. self-conscious      c. dependable      d. confident
10. Make sure to wear warm clothing to protect yourself against the **harsh** winds.  
  
a. brutal      b. shallow      c. utmost      d. noisy
11. Our aim is to **ensure** that we deal fairly with all our customers.  
  
a. order      b. complete      c. underestimate      d. guarantee

12. There are none left because this is currently our most **sought-after** product.
- a. popular      b. exotic      c. expensive      d. childish

✚ **Complete each sentence with the following idioms.**

**Pass through / make it / cut down**

13. Don't worry, I think we're going to \_\_\_\_\_ to the finish line after all.
14. In order to stop global warming, countries need to \_\_\_\_\_ on their CO2 emissions.
15. You'll \_\_\_\_\_ the Rocky Mountains on your way from Minnesota to California.

## READING COMPREHENSION

**1. What is the main idea of the passage?**

- a) The Silk Road expanded international trade in the ancient world.
- b) The Silk Road introduced people to new cultures and products.
- c) The Silk Road was developed by Chinese merchants.
- d) The Silk Road helped societies become wealthier.

**2. Why was the Silk Road eventually abandoned?**

- a) The demand for silk in Europe dropped.
- b) Merchants concluded it was too dangerous.
- c) It became easier to ship goods by sea.
- d) China chose to stop trading with the West.

**3. Which Product came from China only?**

- a) gold
- b) spices
- c) porcelain
- d) horses

**4. The word precious in the passage is closest in meaning to**

- a) valuable
- b) enormous
- c) common
- d) strange

**5. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a danger of the Silk Road in the passage?**

- a) regional wars
- b) thieves
- c) harsh environments
- d) taxes

**6. What can be inferred about the name "Silk Road"?**

- a) The items traded along the road were as expensive as silk.
- b) It was invented and popularized by silk artisans from China.
- c) It means the longest highway in the world."
- d) Silk trade was the major purpose of the road