

From Isolation to Globalization:
Taking the First Steps along the Silk Road

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Introduction

When considering the impact of the Silk Road in past times, parallels with globalization of the modern age are readily brought to mind. Major changes prompted by the Silk Road took place during the millennium from approximately 400 to 1400 CE. And while the world is just embarking into the global age, the speed and magnitude of today's changes make comparisons with the changes brought about by the Silk Road an interesting proposition.

Perhaps no one has done more to popularize the notion of globalization than Thomas L. Friedman in his books, The Lexus and the Olive Tree (1999) and The World is Flat (2005). Coining colorful expressions such as “electronic herd” (1999) and “triple convergence” (2005), Friedman makes the case that people today “live in an interconnected world where technology and instant communications are constantly changing the rules, where the race goes to the swift and the adaptable, and where American workers had better hustle if they want to stay in the game” (Steel, 2005, p. 35). The Internet, specifically “When Netscape Went Public,” finds a crucial niche as a “flattener” in Friedman's (2005, p 56) analysis.

Before this process of globalization began, trade and culture were often highly regionalized. In some cases, such as the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE) and later the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE) in China as well as the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868 CE) of Japan, isolation was preferred. The legal bans against trade combined with geographic

isolation from mountains, deserts, and oceans to allow some cultures to grow independently of other cultures. In other cases, physical geography alone allowed civilizations to develop in isolation. The cultures of Europe and the cultures of Asia had very little contact prior to the development of the Silk Road.

The development of the trade routes between the peoples of the Mediterranean Sea region and the peoples of central and East Asia began a process of exchanging ideas, blending cultures, and expanding the trade of products once found only in certain regions. Those routes, together called the Silk Road or silk roads (plural), started the process that grew into a global economy centuries later.

The time period of the Silk Road (<http://www.silkroadproject.org/>) predates Friedman's "three great eras of globalization" (2005, pp. 9-11). According to Friedman (2005), the first globalization era began in 1492 as trade developed between two halves of the globe across the Atlantic. This period lasted until 1800 when the second globalization era began. This second era was initially led by advances in transportation and then by advances in telecommunications. By 2000 the second globalization era gave way to the current era, with today's innovations powered by a global fiber-optic network.

Given Friedman's categorizations, it would make sense not to include the medieval years of the Silk Road as part of a globalization era. However, the Silk Road did much to bring people together on a smaller geographic scale. Perhaps it could be called a period of "hemisphericalization." The Silk Road helped to link the peoples of the Eastern Hemisphere much as the Internet has helped to link the peoples of the entire world.

As we begin to understand the import of changes associated with globalization, we also read disturbing reports concerning the dearth of knowledge American students have about the rest of the world. Vivien Stewart (2005), vice president for education of the Asia Society, has reported on studies by that society and the National Geographic Society revealing a major deficit in American students' understanding about areas of the world that are crucial to the well-being of the United States. At the same time, Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco (2005), Courtney Sale Ross University Professor of Globalization and Education at New York University, has stressed the importance of globalization for education. Globalization "will increasingly define the contexts in which young people growing up today will live, learn, love, and work" (2005, p. 210).

This development involves more than just preparing for employment in a global economy. According to Mr. Suárez-Orozco (2005):

Globalization will affect schooling worldwide because of a general convergence: by de-territorializing the competencies and sensibilities that are rewarded, it generates powerful centripetal forces on what students the world over need to learn to emerge as productive, engaged, and critical citizens of tomorrow. . . . The work of education will henceforth be tending to the cognitive skills, interpersonal sensibilities, and cultural sophistication of young people whose lives will be engaged in local contexts yet suffused with larger transnational realities (p. 210).

These considerations formed the background for the lesson plan which follows. Comparing the Silk Road with the Internet presents an intellectual challenge. This is an appropriate time for such an engagement as the world undergoes globalization. And there is a need to engage students in this challenge as they currently exhibit a lack of

understanding about global developments that will help determine their ability to succeed in the future.

The lesson plan presented here addresses Ohio's content standards. It affords teachers the opportunity to provide instruction for multiple benchmarks and grade-level indicators. Ohio's *Academic Content Standards: K-12 Social Studies* (2003) incorporates the study of the Silk Road under the People in Societies standard at the seventh grade. Cultural diffusion is incorporated under the Geography standard and trade routes are encompassed under the Economics standard at the same grade level.

The Silk Road lesson also makes use of the constructivist learning approach. As Edward Jadallah (2000), who teaches at the University of Maine in Orono, points out, "The leaning experience must involve students in a process of exploring, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing knowledge into a frame of reference that they then use to interpret and understand the new knowledge and continue their learning by building on prior knowledge" (p. 222). Travel along the Silk Road is not an experience many seventh-grade students will have had. However, if students can relate the exchanges that took place many years ago with exchanges they already know about, profound understanding rather than rote memorization can take place. "The ability to identify and explain examples, nonexamples, and exceptions . . . represents a deeper conceptual understanding" (Jadallah, 2000, p. 223). The lesson has students compare the Silk Road (new knowledge) with the Internet (prior knowledge) to facilitate their understanding of cultural exchange.

Teachers of middle school students may have to find ways to motivate those students to learn about a topic that many would consider a rather arcane subject. Dan

Rea (1999), associate professor of education at Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, has cited educational research in proposing how to engage middle school students in “serious fun.” Writing in *Middle Level Learning*, Rea outlined four strategies for making social studies relevant to this cohort of students:

Strategy 1 (Personal Needs): Relate the learning task to students’ personal needs, interests, concerns, or goals. . . .

Strategy 2 (Prior Experiences): Relate the learning task to prior knowledge and experiences. . . .

Strategy 3 (Real Experiences): Provide real life experiences related to the learning task. . . .

Strategy 4 (Vicarious Experiences): Provide vicarious experiences related to the learning task (Rea, 1999, pp. M3-M4).

The lesson plan addresses Strategy 2 with a Venn diagram and Strategy 4 with a virtual field trip option.

Rea also outlined four strategies for making social studies more interesting to middle level learners. These included:

Strategy 1 (Curiosity): Stimulate student curiosity by using novelty, variety, discrepancy, suspense, surprise, and mystery. . . .

Strategy 2 (Challenge): Challenge students with thought-provoking questions and open-ended problems. . . .

Strategy 3 (Choice): Encourage student choice by allowing options, preferences, and alternatives. . . .

Strategy 4 (Creativity): Allow students opportunities to explore, create, design, fantasize, and play with information (Rea, 1999, p. M3).

The Silk Road lesson plan addresses Strategy 1 with anticipatory sets and Strategies 3 and 4 with the post-assessment task options.

Lesson Plan

This lesson explores the cultural exchanges along the Silk Road. The exchanges studied took place over many centuries, from the “Pax Sinica” of the Han Dynasty (140 B.C.E – 87 C.E.) through the beginnings of European sea trade dominance in the 1500’s C.E. The lesson is designed to provide an overview of these exchanges, and for that reason it draws heavily from more extensive lessons that are referenced in the lesson and the works cited page. Those lesson links provide more detailed explorations and class projects related to aspects of Silk Road geography and culture.

Lesson Summary:

The first day of the lesson introduces students to an overview of the Silk Road and then focuses on the location and physical geography of the Silk Road. On the second day of the lesson, students will explore the concept of cultural exchange and use the Jigsaw cooperative learning technique to explore examples of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road.

Ohio Standards Connections:

People in Societies Benchmark A (grades 6-8). Compare cultural practices, products and perspectives of past civilizations in order to understand commonality and diversity of cultures.

- Grade Level 7 Indicator 2. Explain how the Silk Road trade . . . affected the cultures of the people involved.

Geography Benchmark D (grades 6-8). Explain reasons that people, products, and ideas move from place to place and the effects of that movement on geographic patterns.

- Grade Level 7, Indicator 5. Describe the geographic factors and processes that contribute to and impede the diffusion of people, products and ideas from place to place, including:
 - a. Physical features; b. Culture; . . . d. Trade; e. Technological innovations.

Economics Benchmark B (grades 6-8). Explain why trade occurs and how historical patterns of trade have contributed to global interdependence.

- Grade Level 7, Indicator 2. Describe . . . the establishment of trade routes in Asia . . . and Europe; the products and inventions that traveled along these routes (e.g., spices, textiles, paper, precious metals and new crops)

Social Studies Skills and Methods Benchmark B (grades 6-8). Organize historical information in text or graphic format and analyze the information in order to draw conclusions.

- Grade Level 7, Indicator 2. Compare multiple viewpoints and frames of reference related to important events in world history.

NOTE: While the lesson activities address all of the listed grade-level indicators, the post-assessment focuses on People in Societies and Geography.

NCSS Curriculum Standards Connection:

Standard III. People, Places, and Environment: *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.*

Performance Expectation (Middle Grades)

h. examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas . . .

Materials and Resources:

1. Atlas (one per group)
2. Attachments A - I
3. Overheads of Attachments A - I
4. “What Was the Silk Road?: An historical overview”
(www.silkroadproject.org/silkroad/overview.html)
5. Student readings:
 - The Silk Road Encounters (www.silkroadproject.org/teachers/sourcebook.pdf.)
 - Silk Road sports and games reading (www.silk-road.com/toc/index.html)
 - Belief Systems Along the Silk Roads
(<http://www.askasia.org/teachers/lessons/plan.php?no=48&era=&grade=&geo=>)
6. Silk Road PowerPoint (www.ocss.org/lessons/Silk_Road.html)
7. Optional: Google Earth, presentation computer, student computer(s)

Vocabulary:

- Silk Road
- Culture
- Cultural exchange
- Internet

Pre-Assessment (Attachment A):

Ask students to answer the following questions:

- What was the primary purpose of the Silk Road?

- Describe the regions of Asia that served as the starting and ending points of the Silk Road.
- Describe at least three specific geographic challenges that faced travelers along the Silk Road.
- Define “cultural exchange” and describe how the Silk Road promoted cultural exchange.

Post-Assessment:

Have students demonstrate an understanding of how the Silk Road was utilized and cultural exchanges along this trade route by preparing a report. Have students select one report format from the list below to complete the assignment. Regardless of the format chosen, grade reports based on the following criteria:

- a) Writing mechanics (spelling, grammar, sentence structure and paragraph structure).
- b) Descriptions of at least 3 geographic challenges travelers faced.
- c) Explanation of the Silk Road location and purpose.
- d) Use of at least 5 specific geographic names.
- e) Definition of “cultural exchange.”
- f) Descriptions of at least 3 specific examples of cultural exchanges in cultures along the Silk Road (See Post-assessment Rubric, Attachment B).

Report Format List:

- a) Letter home from a Silk Road traveler
- b) Song about the Silk Road
- c) Tri-fold brochure
- d) News report / newspaper article

e) Diorama

f) Illustrated map

Instructional Procedures Day 1:

1. Anticipatory Set:

Display images of a desert, an ocean, high mountains, rocky terrain, and weapons

(Attachment C). Pose the question: Which of these things do you think posed the greatest challenge to travelers and traders traveling to China from Europe in the 1300's? Explain why it is the most challenging. Discuss answers and explain that travelers to China faced each of these challenges.

2. What was the Silk Road?

Read aloud the introductory page providing an overview of the Silk Road

(www.silkroadproject.org/silkroad/overview.html). Have students use the Data

Collection Sheet (Attachment D) to record the purpose of the Silk Road, the approximate beginning and ending points (China to Mediterranean) of the Silk Road, and types of exchanges that took place along these trade routes.

3. The Geography of the Silk Road:

In this section, students will examine the topography of the Silk Road region. Have students use textbook maps, atlases, or online sources, and work in small groups to identify topographical features, water bodies, and deserts. Direct the students to record these on the Map Handout (Attachment E). Ask student groups to draw a trade route from Xian to Antioch that would present the fewest geographic challenges for travelers. Assign groups segments of the Silk Road to present (e.g. Xian to Tashkar). Have groups draw their segment on a projected map and present the geographic challenges faced by

travelers. Display the map showing the Silk Road(s) (Attachment F) and discuss the advantages of each route. Sample questions include: Do the routes displayed match any of the routes you created? Why do you think there are multiple routes, instead of just one route? What advantage would there be in stopping at several towns along the way? If you were a Silk Road traveler, what tools, and resources do you think would be most important to have on your journey?

Virtual Field Trip Option:

Use the Silk Road PowerPoint images to introduce segments of the trade route from Xian to Antioch. Each segment includes an oblique-angle depiction of the topography along with a photograph of the same region. Have students draw the major routes from Xian to Antioch on their copies of the Map Handout (Attachment E).

Technology Extension:

Google Earth is a free tool that allows users to view locations from multiple scales and at multiple angles, pulling from satellite photography. The viewer will also allow for digital “flyovers” of a path. Teachers can take their students on a digital flyover of one section of the Silk Road, and zoom into locations to see buildings, roads, and other human features as they appear today. Another useful feature is to change the view angle from overhead to oblique to fly through the mountains to gain an appreciation of the ruggedness of the terrain along the Silk Road(s). Screenshots of the tour are available in the accompanying PowerPoint, and the entire tour can be found online at www.ocss.org/lessons/Silk_Road.html.

Instructional Procedures Day 2:

1. Anticipatory Set:

Display examples of modern cultural exchanges from the students' community, or from global examples such as an American fast-food restaurant in China, a mosque in America, an Latin music celebrity, and the Internet (Attachment G) Samples are also available at www.ocss.org/lessons/Silk_Road.html. Conduct a brainstorming session to identify things these images share in common. Conclude the session by reviewing brainstormed items focused on cultural exchange. Have students define "cultural exchange" using a Frayer model graphic organizer (Attachment H)

2. Cultural exchange activity

Write the term "cultural exchange" on the board along with the following categories: technology/ideas, music, sports and games, arts, belief systems. Explain that students will be working in small groups to cooperatively examine cultural exchanges that took place along the Silk Road trade routes. Using a modified Group Investigation Technique (Sharan & Sharan, 1992) have each group work on a category then present their findings to the class. Have students record information from group reports for each category on the Data Collection Sheet (Attachment D). Assign groups and provide each group with copies of readings from the Silk Road Encounters web site www.silkroadproject.org/teachers/sourcebook.pdf. Alternately, groups can access this information directly online if there is access to a computer lab.

Sports and Games – www.silk-road.com/toc/index.html

Topics in www.silkroadproject.org/teachers/sourcebook.pdf.

Belief Systems – pages 23-27

Arts– pages 29-31

Ideas and techniques – pages 33-34

Music – pages 35-41

Have groups prepare to present their two examples to class. Lead a discussion about the examples from each topic and record each on a projected copy of the Data Collection Sheet. Alternately, groups can select a content expert to travel to other groups to share examples. The content expert from group A moves to group B. the expert from group B moves to group C. Experts rotate until all groups are visited by experts for each topic. Have each student record examples on their individual Data Collection Sheet.

2. Summary/Closure

Explain that the cultural exchanges of the Silk Road were the first steps to what is now a globalized trade and information network. The Internet illustrates many factors that are part of this globalization and helps drive further exchanges. Introduce the Venn diagram (Attachment I) and instruct students to use the information from the lesson to summarize cultural exchanges from the Silk Road. Next, have students identify factors that are similar between the Silk Road exchanges and exchanges facilitated by the Internet (e.g. exchanging styles of music and exchanging and improving on technologies). Close by explaining the post-assessment assignment.

Differentiated Instructional Support:

- A. Use modeling clay to create a topographic map to assist kinesthetic and tactile learners.
- B. Reduce and photocopy images from the PowerPoint to accompany maps and data collection sheet.
- C. Provide students with a photocopy of the “What Was the Silk Road?” reading to highlight as the teacher reads it aloud.

D. Provide students with a partially-completed Venn diagram and/or Frayer model.

Extensions:

Day 1 – The Silk-Road Foundation – maps (<http://www.silk-road.com/toc/index.html>)

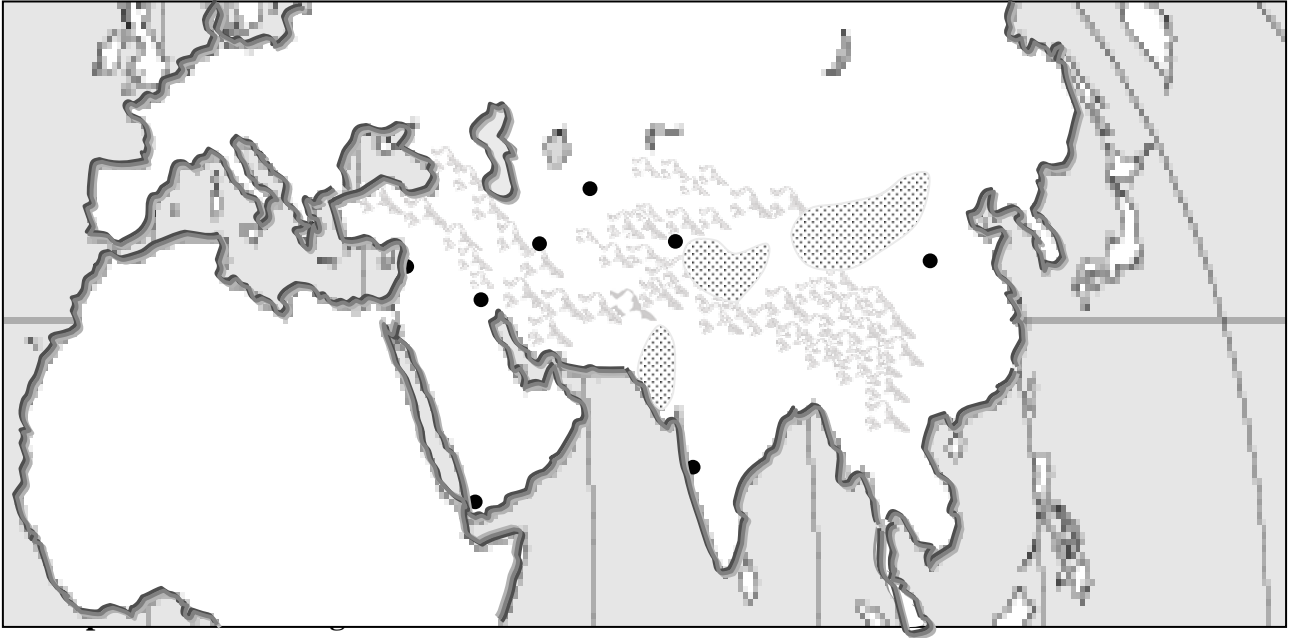
Day 2 – Silk Road Encounters lessons (<http://teachers.silkroadproject.org/>).

Trading Along the Silk Road

(<http://www.askasia.org/teachers/lessons/plan.php?no=51&era=&grade=&geo=>).

Attachment A

Pre-Assessment Sheet



1. What was the primary purpose of the Silk Road?
2. Describe the regions of Asia that served as the starting and ending points of the Silk Road.
3. Draw the location of the Silk Road on the map above.
4. Describe at least three specific geographic challenges that faced travelers along the Silk Road.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
5. Define “cultural exchange”
6. Describe how the Silk Road promoted cultural exchange.

Attachment B

Post-Assessment Rubrics

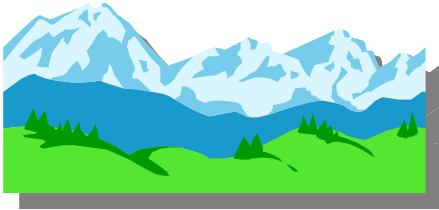
Writing Rubric

	1	2	3
Writing mechanics: spelling, grammar, sentence structure and paragraph structure, etc.	Significant errors in mechanics or writing conventions seriously detract from the ability to comprehend the content presentation.	Errors in mechanics or writing conventions distract from the presentation of content or comprehension.	Minimal errors that are noticeable, but do not distract from the presentation of content.

Content Rubric

	1	2	3	4
Descriptions of at least 3 geographic challenges travelers faced.	Attempts to provide at least 1 correct geographic challenge.	Provides 1 correct geographic challenge with adequate description.	Provides at least 2 correct geographic challenges with adequate description.	Provides at least 3 correct geographic challenges with adequate description.
Explanation of the Silk Road location and purpose. Appropriate use of at least 5 specific geographic names.	Location and purpose of the Silk Road are explained. Place names are not used appropriately.	Location and purpose of the Silk Road are explained and at least 1 - 2 specific place names are used appropriately.	Location and purpose of the Silk Road are explained and 3 - 4 specific place names are used appropriately.	Location and purpose of the Silk Road are explained and at least 5 specific place names are used appropriately.
Definition of "cultural exchange." Descriptions of at least 3 specific examples of cultural exchanges in cultures along the Silk Road.	Definition is incomplete or may not reflect the definition used in class. At least 1 example of cultural exchange along the Silk Road is included, but is incorrect.	Definition is complete and reflects the definition used in class. At least 1 correct example of cultural exchange along the Silk Road is described.	Definition is complete and reflects the definition used in class. At least 2 correct examples of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road are described.	Definition is complete and reflects the definition used in class. At least 3 correct examples of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road are described.

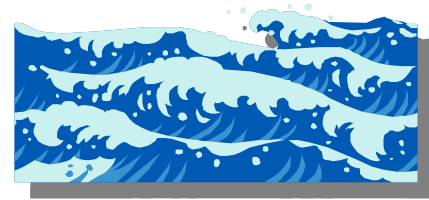
Challenges Faced By Silk Road Travelers



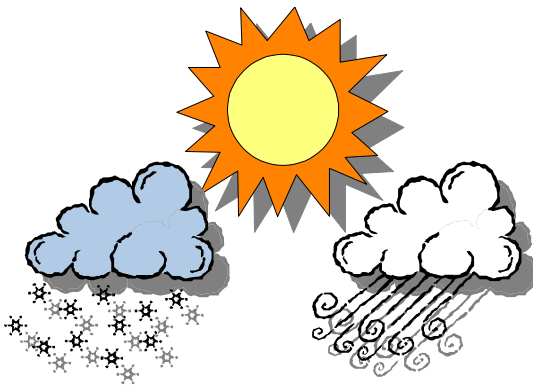
Mountains



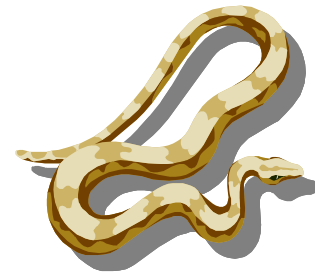
Deserts



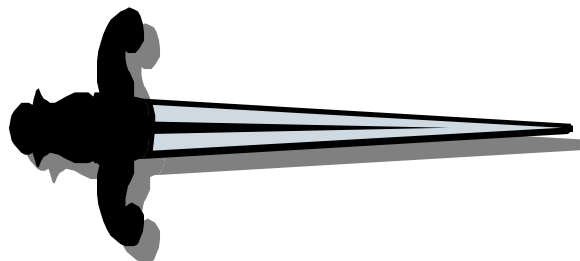
Oceans/Seas



Extreme Weather



Dangerous Wildlife



Conflict With Cultures Along the Silk Road

Attachment D

Data Collection Sheet

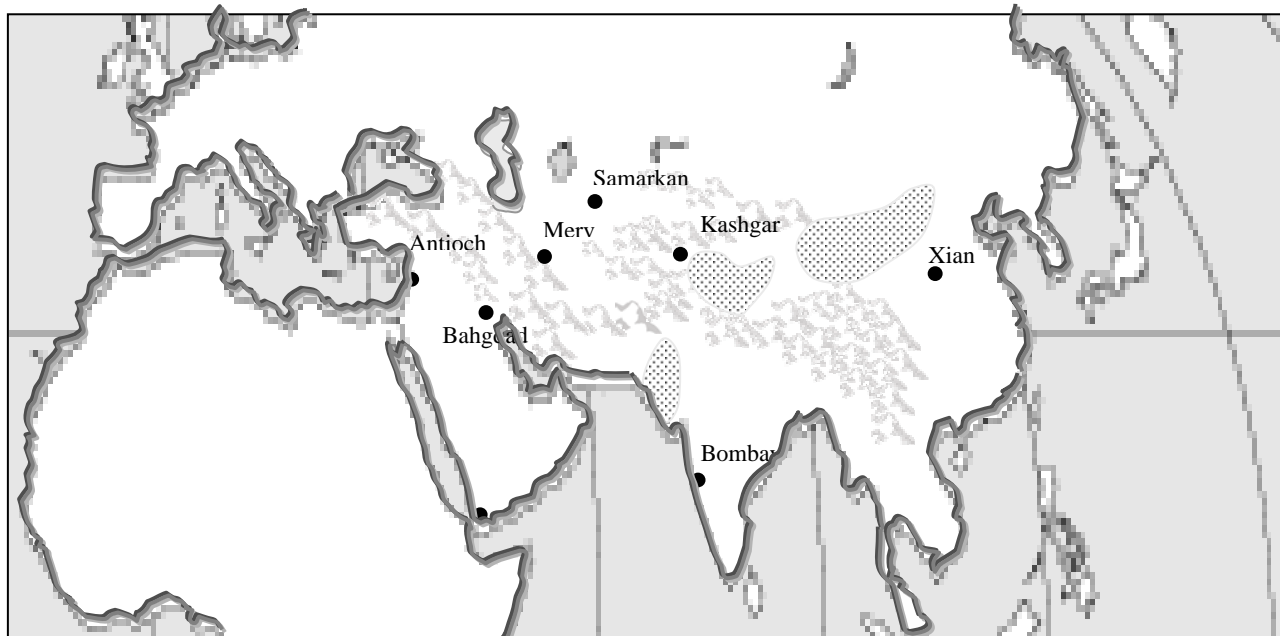
Purpose of the Silk Road _____

The Silk Road began in _____ and extended to _____.

What was exchanged? _____

<i>Category of Cultural Exchange</i>	<i>Example 1</i>	<i>Example 2</i>
Technologies/Ideas		
Music of the Silk Road		
Sports and Games		
Arts		
Belief Systems		

Map Handout



Instructions:

1. Identify the following locations on your map by placing each letter in the correct location. Use maps from your textbook, an atlas, or Internet resources for reference.

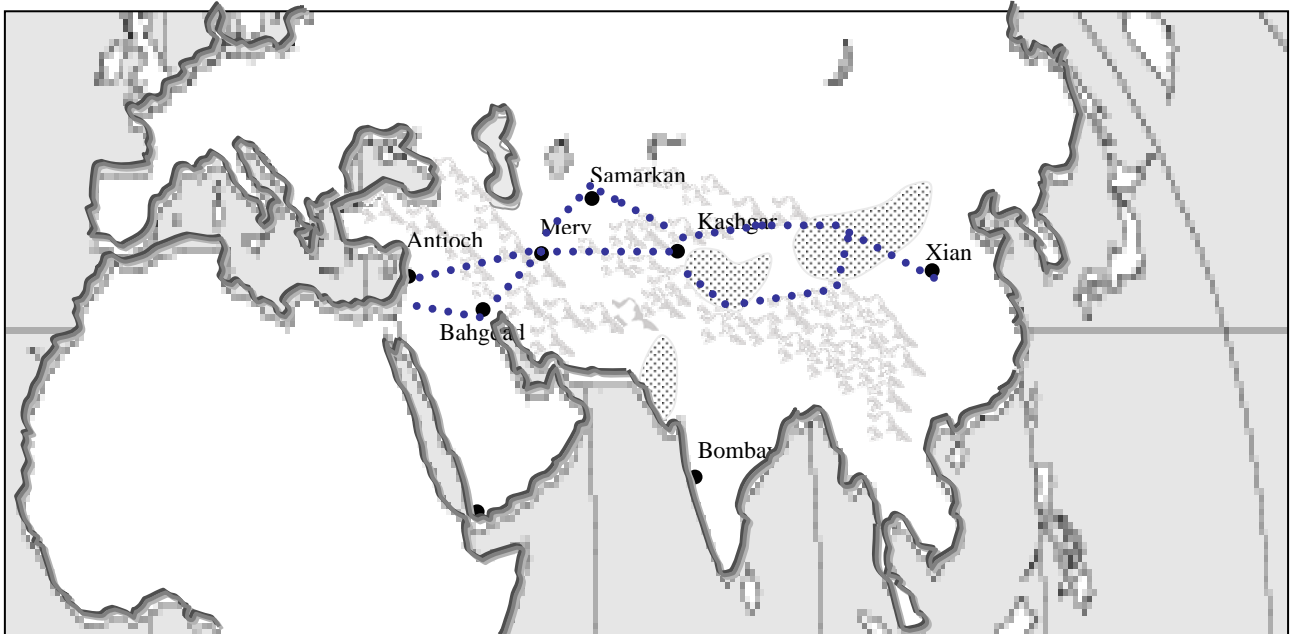
A. Tian Shan Mountains
B. Hindu Kush Mountains
C. Himalayan Mountains
D. Altai Mountains
E. Zagros Mountains

F. Gobi Desert
G. Takla Makan Desert
H. Great Indian Desert
I. Indian Ocean
J. Pacific Ocean

K. Red Sea
L. Black Sea
M. Caspian Sea

2. Draw a trade route that would connect Xian (Shee-Ahn) to Antioch using a route that avoids, as much as possible, travel through mountains and deserts. Since you are going to be traveling by caravan, avoid large bodies of water as well. Be prepared to explain your route's advantages.

Silk Road(s): Two Commonly Used Trade Routes

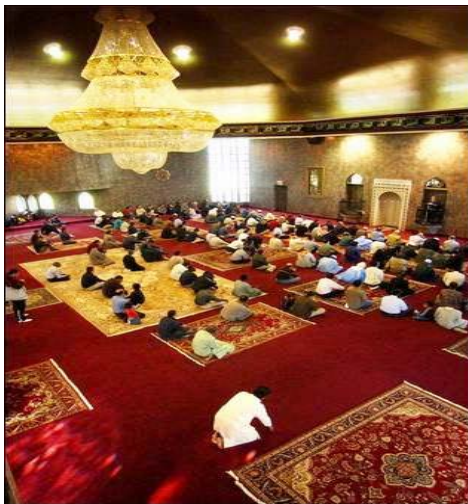


The Silk Road was really a combination of land trade routes extending from China to the Mediterranean Sea. There were sea routes as well, but they were not usually considered to be a part of the Silk Road.

The city of Xian, in China, was the most common destination for Silk Road travelers. There were numerous cities along the Mediterranean that served as the western end-point, but Antioch was common destination. The two major routes were determined by the need to avoid major geographic challenges, including deserts and mountains. A second consideration was goods and resources that travelers could trade with civilizations along the way.

Attachment G

Cultural Exchange



Men pray during a service at the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati.

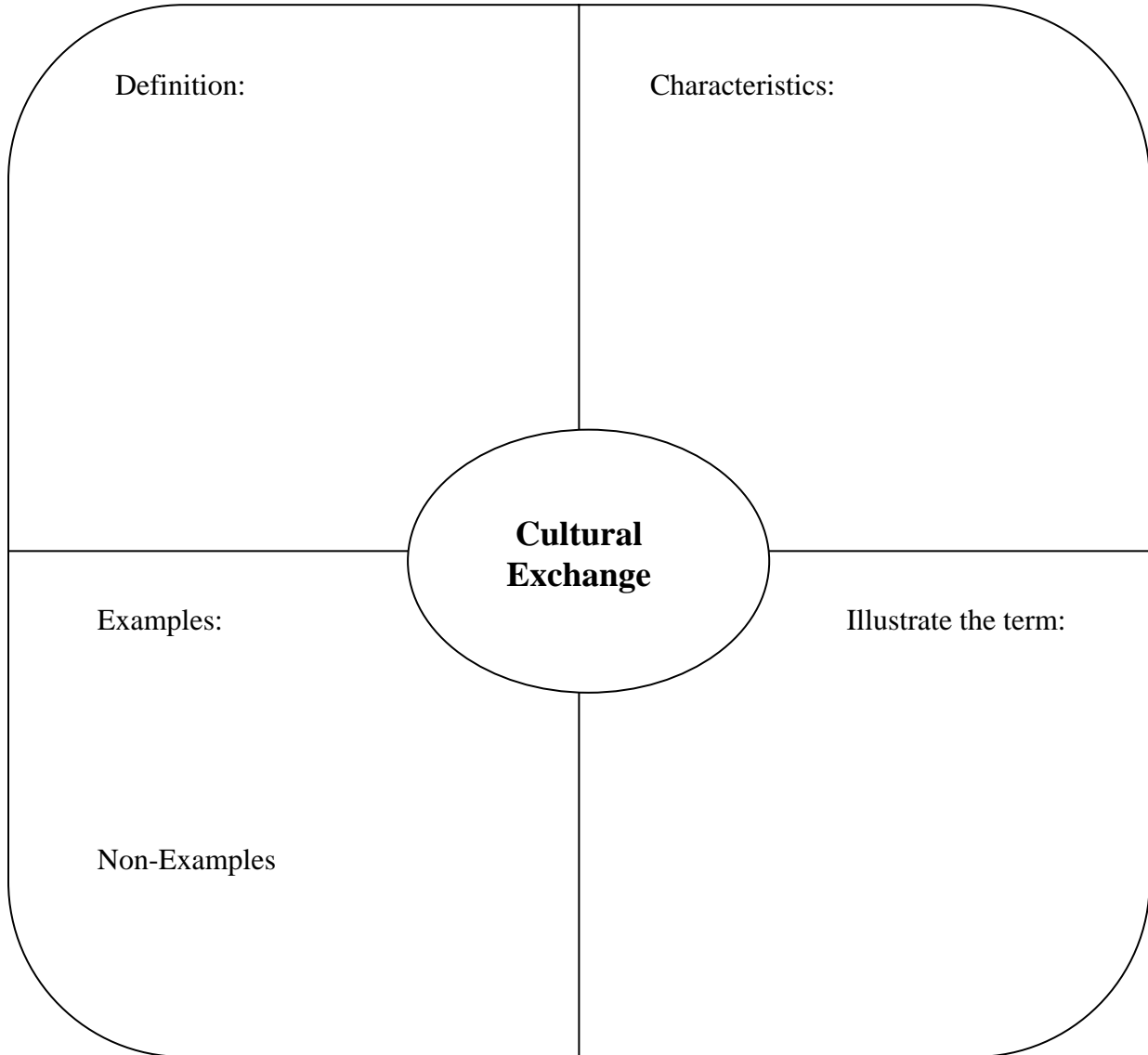
Source: <http://news.enquirer.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051118/NEWS01/511180441/1077>



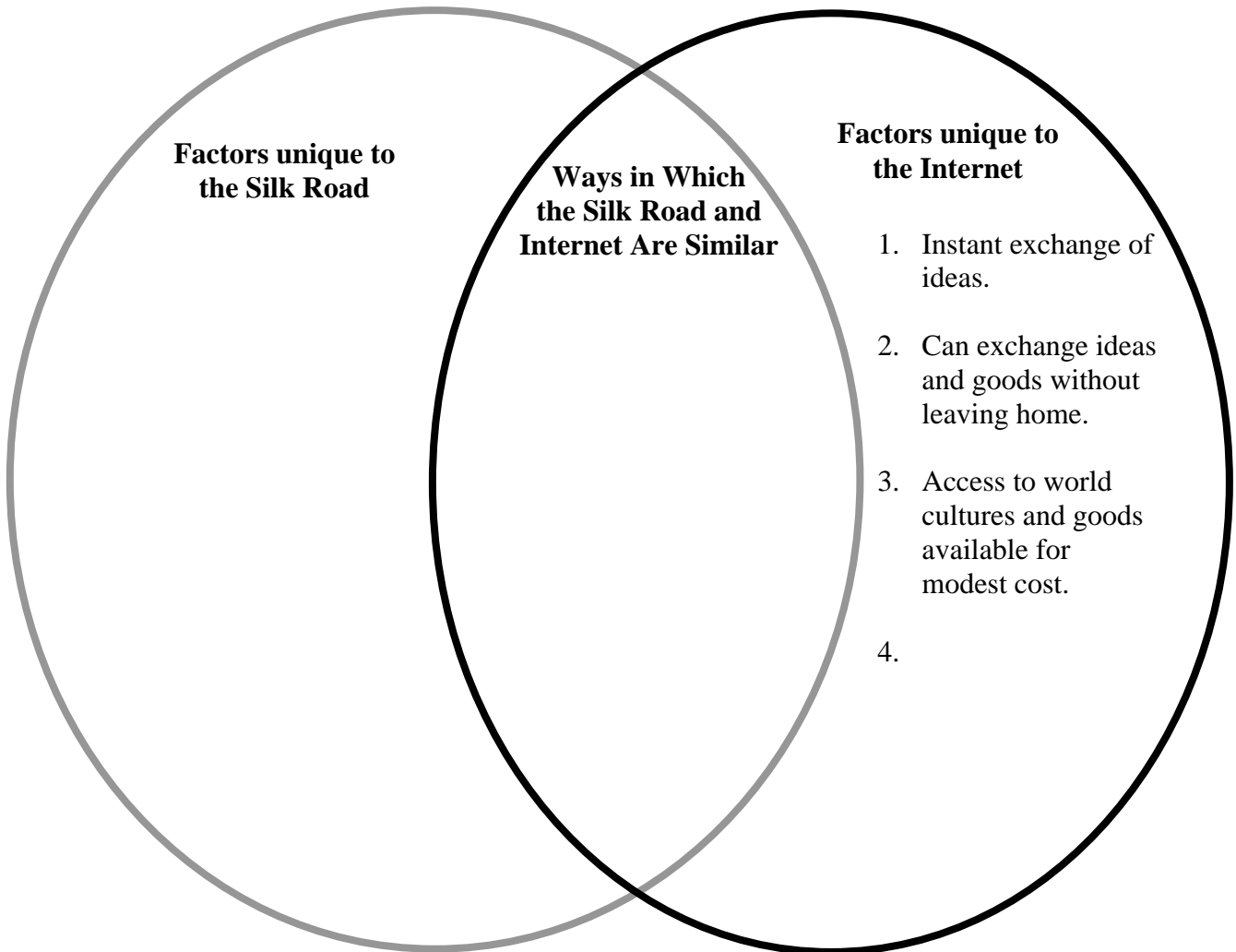
Source: http://goingglobal.corante.com/archives/mcdis_ru.jpg

Attachment H

**Defining Cultural Exchange:
Frayer Model (modified) Graphic Organizer Handout**



**Venn Diagram Handout:
Comparing Cultural Exchange with the Silk Road and the Internet**



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