Goods on the Move

Trade, production, and technology in medieval society

AWH.C.12.6 "Examine transformations in medieval society. Identify major developments in banking, manufacturing at scale, and international trade. Describe the impact of innovations, such as the compass, gunpowder, and Wootz steel."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three developments that helped goods move or be produced on a larger scale, circle three ways technology changed trade or warfare, and number one effect of each change. Use your marks to trace how a change in one place affected people elsewhere.

From Workshop to Distant Market

1. Imagine a merchant in the 1300s planning a shipment from India toward Mediterranean ports. Indian metalworkers produced Wootz steel by heating iron with carbon in sealed crucibles. Skilled smiths could forge this high-carbon steel into strong, sharp blades, which buyers valued across regions. Wootz production had begun centuries before the medieval period, but its long-distance trade connected craftspeople, merchants, and consumers during it. A shipment might change hands several times before reaching a buyer. Each exchange carried more than an object: it created demand for specialized work far from the place where the blade would be used.

2. In Mediterranean cities such as Venice, merchants needed ways to pay partners without hauling every coin across dangerous routes. Money changers and bankers offered credit and recorded debts. Bills of exchange let merchants arrange payment in another city, though fees and trust still mattered. Meanwhile, cloth makers in towns such as Florence organized spinning, weaving, dyeing, and finishing across many workers and workshops. Water-powered fulling mills could speed one step in preparing woolen cloth. This was production on a larger scale than one craftsperson working alone, not a modern factory. Credit helped merchants buy materials and sell finished cloth far away.

3. Moving these goods depended on changing technologies as well as labor. The magnetic compass, first developed in China, spread across trade networks and helped sailors keep a heading when familiar coastal landmarks were out of sight. It did not eliminate storms or the need for other navigation skills. Gunpowder also originated in China and spread across Eurasia. By the late medieval period, armies used it in cannons that could batter walls, pushing rulers to rethink defenses and pay for costly weapons. Together, these innovations reshaped sea travel, warfare, and the opportunities and risks of international trade.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Wootz steel was made before the medieval period. How did its trade affect people in different regions during that period?

2. How did credit and the way Florence made cloth work together to help merchants sell cloth far away?

3. How did the compass change conditions for sea trade, and what difficulty did it not remove?

4. What challenge did gunpowder cannons pose to rulers, and how could that challenge affect their spending?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

An inland town makes wool cloth and wants to reach overseas buyers. In 4 to 5 sentences, propose a chain of actions using one banking practice, one way to increase production, and one innovation from the passage; explain one obstacle that would remain.

ANSWER KEY

Goods on the Move

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.12.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three developments that helped goods move or be produced on a larger scale, circle three ways technology changed trade or warfare, and number one effect of each change. Use your marks to trace how a change in one place affected people elsewhere. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Wootz steel was made before the medieval period. How did its trade affect people in different regions during that period?	**Long-distance trade connected Indian metalworkers with merchants and distant buyers, creating demand for specialized work far from where the blades were used.**
2	How did credit and the way Florence made cloth work together to help merchants sell cloth far away?	**Credit helped merchants buy materials and arrange payments, while many workers and workshops, aided by fulling mills, produced cloth on a larger scale for distant sale.**
3	How did the compass change conditions for sea trade, and what difficulty did it not remove?	**It helped sailors keep a heading beyond sight of coastal landmarks, but storms remained a danger.**
4	What challenge did gunpowder cannons pose to rulers, and how could that challenge affect their spending?	**Cannons could batter walls, so rulers had to rethink defenses and pay for costly weapons.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Town merchants could borrow from bankers to buy more wool before buyers pay for cloth. They could divide spinning, weaving, and dyeing among workshops and use a fulling mill to prepare more cloth for sale. A coastal shipping partner could use a compass to maintain a heading on an overseas voyage. The town could then sell cloth to distant buyers and use the proceeds to repay its debt. Storms could still delay ships, leaving the merchants with fees and a loan to repay.

Accept other accurate chains that connect a banking practice, larger-scale cloth production, and an innovation to overseas sales. The response must also identify a plausible remaining obstacle, such as storms, fees, or the need for trust.