



Heroes of Progress, Pt. 17: Malcom McLean

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Lesson Overview

Featured article: [Heroes of Progress, Pt. 17: Malcom McLean](#) by [Alexander C. R. Hammond](#)

About 70 years ago, a North Carolina man figured out a way to drastically reduce the time and expense of shipping goods overseas. Malcolm McLean is not a household name, but his innovation of containerized shipping transformed the world. Read this article to learn more about McLean's straightforward idea that led to an explosion of global trade that has benefitted billions of people.



Warm-up

- What do you know about global trade? Do you know where the things you use every day like your tennis shoes, your phone, or the piece of fruit you had with lunch come from? How did these products get to you?

As a class, create a K-W-L chart. When you're finished with this lesson, come back to the chart and fill in the right column.

K: What do you KNOW about global trade?	W: What do you WANT to know about global trade?	L: What did you LEARN about global trade?

- What do you know about shipping containers? Have you ever seen metal shipping containers on a semi-truck, on a train, or stacked on a ship? Watch this [video](#) to learn more about this important 20th-century innovation. Then answer these questions:
 - Before container ships, how was cargo loaded onto and off of ships?
 - What were some major problems with the traditional method of cargo handling on ships?
 - How did cheaper shipping lead to globalized manufacturing?

Questions for reading, writing, and discussion

Read the [article](#), then answer the following questions:

- What does the term "containerization" mean in the context of 21st-century commerce?
- What formative experience demonstrated to McLean that the loading process of ships, as it existed during the 1930s, was wasteful and time-consuming?
- What were the advantages of McLean's containerized shipping system that debuted in 1956? List at least three advantages.
- How has McLean's innovation of containerized cargo ships impacted the global economy? Fill in the chart below:

McLean transformed global commerce by developing standardized intermodal shipping containers. What were the impacts?

Impact on shipping costs (be specific)	
Impact on shipping times (be specific)	
Impact on consumers worldwide	
Impact on poverty rates in export-oriented economies (e.g., China)	
Impact on the volume of world trade	

Extension Activity/Homework

• **Create a Supply Chain Presentation**

Choose a favorite product that you use on a regular basis that does not originate in your home country. It could be a food, such as strawberries grown in Chile, a laptop built in China, or a jacket manufactured in Bangladesh. Look at the product's label to determine its origin.

A lot of information about the origins of popular products is available online. Conduct independent open-source research to trace the supply chain of your item. To determine likely export and import points, you may want to use the [Marine Traffic website](#).

Create a Google Slides or PowerPoint document that shows the supply chain of your favorite product from overseas. Be as specific as possible. Include where it was made or grown, the people and companies that built it, and the time it took from origin to its final destination-you. Include relevant images on each slide.