



# SPHERE

Teaching Civic  
Culture Together

## TRADING FOR LIBERTY!

# The Civic and Economic Power of Free Trade

BY: DR. TRAVIS TOWNE

### Lesson Focus

This lesson explores how trade shaped both liberty and prosperity in colonial America. Students will experience the difference between free and restricted trade, analyze primary sources, and connect the colonists' demand for economic freedom to broader ideas of independence and self-government.

### Key Learning Objectives

- Define and explain key economic and civic vocabulary such as mercantilism, free trade, salutary neglect, and popular sovereignty.
- Analyze excerpts from Enlightenment Thinkers and the Founding Fathers on the importance of free trade and economic liberty.
- Connect colonial struggles for free trade to broader concepts of liberty and self-government.
- Explain why economic independence was seen as essential to political independence.

### Essential Questions for Student Reflection

- Why was free trade such an important part of colonial life and liberty?
- How did British restrictions like mercantilism and tariffs affect colonial choices and freedoms?
- How does the idea of free trade connect to America's founding principles?
- In what ways did Enlightenment Thinkers connect economic freedom with political freedom?

## Suggested Flow of Activities

### 15–20 MIN: INTRODUCTION & PRIMARY SOURCES

- Open with the “Classroom Trade Rule” activity.
- Have students read and discuss selected quotes from the Navigation Acts of 1660, the Declaration of Independence and *The Wealth of Nations*.
- Guide students to make connections between the government's control of trade to loss of liberty and prosperity.

### 25–35 MIN: BARTER PUZZLE ACTIVITY – TRADING FOR LIBERTY!

- Students participate in a barter puzzle that illustrates mutually beneficial trade vs. restrictive policies.
- Ask students to reflect on how freedom to trade helps self-governing communities thrive and encourages growth for everyone.

### 5–10 MIN: CLOSING & EXIT TICKET

- Students will consider the possibility that trade wasn't just about money, it was about freedom.

### TEACHER TIPS:

- Simplify mercantilism without losing the core juxtaposing the idea that colonies enrich the mother country with the idea that colonists want the freedom to prosper.
- Stress that economic freedom equals civic freedom, e.g., not just about money, but voice and choice.
- Use modern trade parallels to make connections relevant for students.