

Overview

This lesson introduces students to Newfoundland’s historic cod economy. Students will examine how the production of dried and salted codfish shaped life in outport communities, how merchants and fishermen relied on one another, and how global economic connections influenced everyday life.

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Lesson Objective

1. **Demonstrate** an understanding of how economic decisions impacted individuals and societies.
2. **Analyze** trade relationships and their effects on local communities.
3. **Explain** the role of Baccalieu (salted cod) in daily outport life.

[DOWNLOAD QUIZZES](#)

Part 1

People, Place & Economy / Time, Continuity & Change

Baccalieu: Salted Cod & Global Trade

- **Global Commodity:** “Baccalieu” was Newfoundland’s term for salted cod — similar to bacalhau, bacalao, and baccalà abroad. It was a major food source in Catholic Europe and the Caribbean.
- **Worldwide Demand:** Large quantities of Newfoundland salted cod were exported to to England, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and South America.
- **Cultural Influence:** Foods, language, and cultural practices in NL reflect centuries of connection to European and Caribbean markets.

The Truck System

- **Credit-Based Trade:** Instead of cash, families traded fish for credit on supplies to survive winter (flour, salt, kerosene, clothing).
- **Merchant Power:** Merchants controlled prices and supplies, resulting in dependency and economic inequality.
- **Fishermen’s Dilemma:** A good fishing season might still result in limited credit if merchants set low prices for fish or high prices for goods.
- **Cycle of Debt:** Many families remained tied to a merchant for generations.

Outport Life & Daily Economic Decisions

- **Seasonal Workload:**
 - **Spring** – repairing boats, preparing gear
 - **Summer** – catching, salting, drying fish
 - **Fall** – packing fish into barrels
 - **Winter** – living off the season’s credit
- **Family Labour:** Children helped split, salt, and turn fish on flakes; women were central to curing and drying fish.
- **Geographic Realities:** Access to sheltered coves, flakes, and drying grounds determined where fishing families settled and how much they could produce.

Continuity & Change

Outports evolved as global markets shifted, but the cultural memory of the cod economy remains strong today.

Weather & Risk

Storms, fog, or poor fishing years impacted not just local families, but international supply chains.

Economic Inequality

The truck system shaped class structures; merchants prospered while labourers faced instability.

Societal Change

New technologies, engines, and better trade options eventually challenged the old merchant system.

Global Interdependence

Newfoundland was deeply reliant on European goods, while Europe relied on Newfoundland's salted cod as inexpensive protein.

Suggested Activity: Human Timeline

Interactive format: whole-group movement + role cards

You need: 10 printed "event cards" (listed below, [download here](#)) + rope/tape line on floor

How it Works

1. Lay a rope/tape line across the room = "The Year".
2. In a random order, students get one card each:
 - Winter credit of supplies arrives with outport merchant
 - Mend nets and equipment
 - Active fishing season begins
 - Gut fish
 - Salt fish
 - Dry out the fish on flakes
 - Pack barrels
 - Stock food storage away
 - Outport merchant arrives to settle accounts
 - Outport merchant bring fish to St. John's merchant for international trade
3. Get the students to stand in order and justify why they're before/after another event. Either 10 students can stand in front of class and have the class discuss together what order to arrange them in, or break class into groups of 10 and get them to see what group can get the correct order first.



Quiz A

Multiple Choice (Circle the best answer)

- 1. What does “Baccalieu” refer to in Newfoundland history?**
 - a. A type of schooner
 - b. Salted and dried cod exported internationally
 - c. A traditional NL bread recipe
 - d. A winter trading festival
- 2. What was Newfoundland’s Baccalieu in high demand globally?**
 - a. It was cheap to produce
 - b. It was a long-lasting protein required during religious fasts
 - c. Newfoundland merchants advertised it heavily
 - d. It was used to make clothing
- 3. What was the truck system?**
 - a. A transportation system for exporting fish
 - b. A cash-based wage system
 - c. A credit system where families traded fish for supplies
 - d. A government subsidy program
- 4. Why were Newfoundland families dependent on merchants?**
 - a. Merchants supplied money directly
 - b. Cod was too heavy to transport alone
 - c. Merchants set prices for both supplies and fish
 - d. Families preferred not to use cash
- 5. Which region frequently imported Newfoundland Baccalieu?**
 - a. Russia
 - b. Caribbean
 - c. China
 - d. Alaska



Quiz A ANSWER KEY

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 - a. Russia
 - b. Caribbean**
 - c. China
 - a. Alaska



Quiz B

1. Explain how the truck system affected a fishing family’s economic choices.

2. Describe one way global trade influenced life in Newfoundland.



Settlement & Survival

Exploring Outport Life in Trinity Bay
Ireland's Eye, British Harbour, and
New Bonaventure

3. How did geography affect the Baccalieu trade?

4. Why was Baccalieu considered a global commodity?

5. Compare the benefits and drawbacks of the truck system for fishermen.



Quiz B ANSWER KEY

1. Explain how the truck system affected a fishing family's economic choices.

Sample: Families had limited freedom to choose buyers or prices because merchants controlled credit, pushing them into cycles of debt.

2. Describe one way global trade influenced life in Newfoundland.

Sample: Imported goods such as molasses, salt, and textiles shaped diet, culture, and daily living.

3. How did geography affect the Baccalieu trade?

Sample: Outports with good drying areas and sheltered coves produced better saltfish, making them central to trade.

4. Why was Baccalieu considered a global commodity?

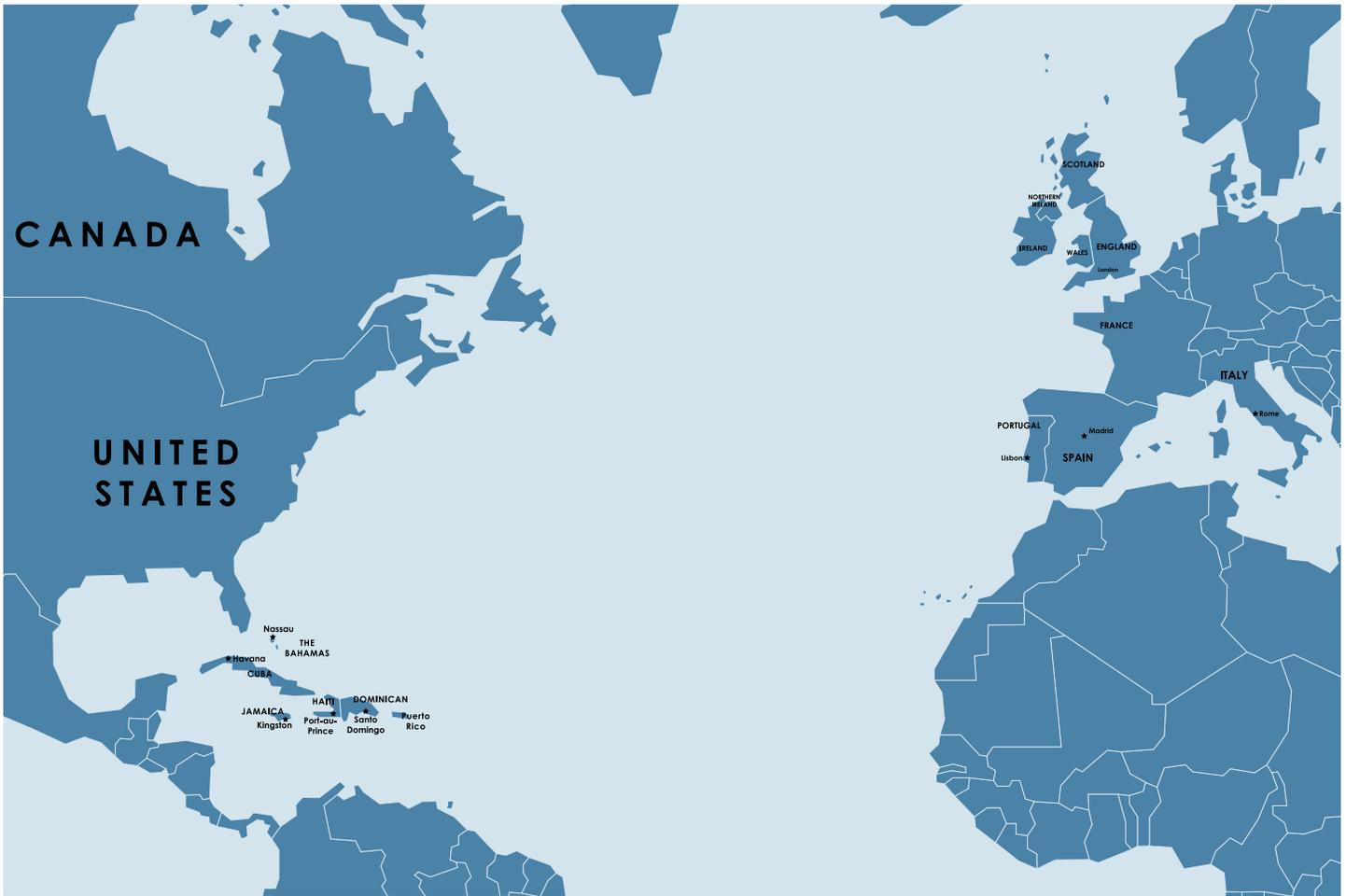
Sample: It fed millions internationally, especially in Catholic countries, creating worldwide dependence on NL fish.

5. Compare the benefits and drawbacks of the truck system for fishermen.

Sample: Benefit: steady supply of goods; Drawback: heavy debt and limited freedom.

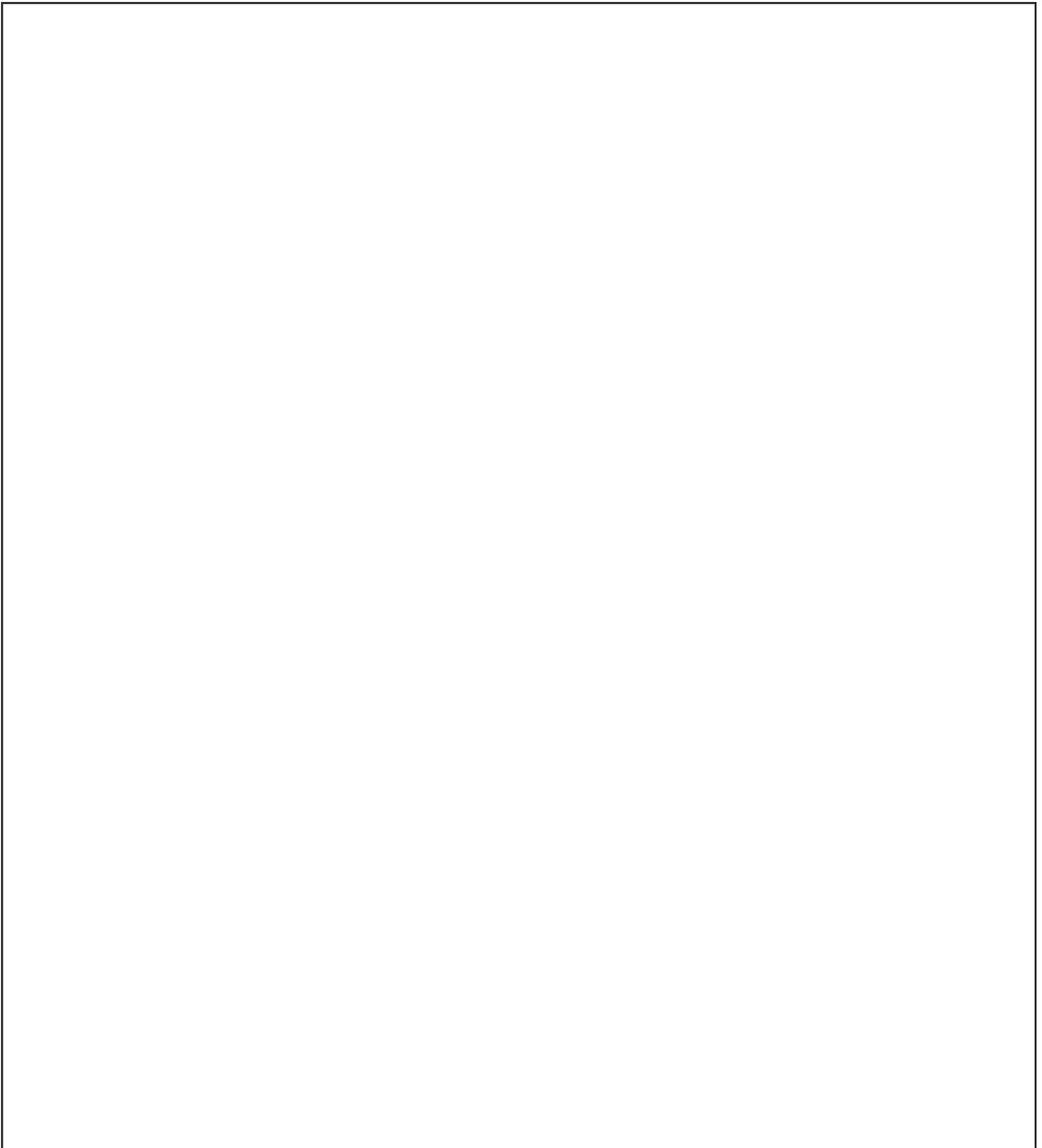
2. Mapping Challenge

Draw trade routes from Newfoundland to Portugal, Spain, Caribbean, and Italy. Add one historic fact about each connection.



4. Creative Design

Design a poster titled “Baccalieu: The Fish That Fed the World.” Include drawings of flakes, barrels, trade ships, and global destinations.



From Harbour to Home:
Life and Legacy in
Newfoundland's Outports



**Winter credit of
supplies arrives with
outport merchant**

Mend nets and equipment

**Active fishing
season begins**

Gut Fish

Salt fish

**Dry out the fish
on flakes**

**Stock food
storage away**

**Outport merchant
arrives to settle
accounts**

**Outport merchant
brings fish to
St. John's merchant for
international trade**

**Winter credit of
supplies arrives with
outport merchant**