

# Potato: A Tale from the Great Depression

By Kate Lied / ISBN: 0-7922-6946-2

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## Lesson by

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## Lesson Description

After reading and discussing a story about a family during the Great Depression, students differentiate between goods, services, barter, and money. Students are led through several rounds of a barter activity that incorporates math skills. Through this activity, students learn about the difficulties of using barter to satisfy wants.

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## Age Level

7-9 year olds

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## Content Standards

### National Standards in Economics

- **Standard 1:** Productive resources are limited. Therefore, people cannot have all the goods and services they want; as a result, they must choose some things and give up others.
  - Benchmark 3, Grade 4: Goods are objects that can satisfy people's wants.
  - Benchmark 4, Grade 4: Services are actions that can satisfy people's wants.
  - Benchmark 8, Grade 4: People whose wants are satisfied by using goods and services are called consumers.
- **Standard 5:** Voluntary exchange occurs only when all participating parties expect to gain. This is true for trade among individuals or organizations within a nation, and among individuals or organizations in different nations.
  - Benchmark 2, Grade 4: The oldest form of exchange is barter – the direct trading of goods and services between people.

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- **Standard 11:** Money makes it easier to trade, borrow, save, invest, and compare the value of goods and services.
  - Benchmark 2, Grade 4: Money makes trading easier by replacing barter with transactions involving currency, coins, or checks.
- **Standard 13:** Income for most people is determined by the market value of the productive resources they sell. What workers earn depends, primarily, on the market value of what they produce and how productive they are.
  - Benchmark 2, Grade 4: People can earn income by exchanging their human resources (physical or mental work) for wages or salaries.

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## Concepts

Barter  
Consumers  
Goods  
Income  
Money  
Services  
Wants

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## Objectives

Students will:

1. Differentiate between goods and services.
2. Explain a consumer's role in buying goods and services.
3. Describe and give examples of wants.
4. Define barter.
5. Explain that people make trades using money and using barter.
6. Define income.

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## Time Required

60 – 90 minutes

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## Materials

- A copy of *Potato: A Tale from the Great Depression* by Kate Lied (ISBN: 0-7922-6946-2)
- A paper lunch bag for each student filled per instructions in the preparation section below
- Approximately 60 small items that children might like, such as pencils, erasers, paper clips, stickers, small toys, sticky notes, note pads, miniature candy bars and ink pens, which will be placed in lunch bags
- A pencil and a piece of paper for each student
- Visual 1
- A copy of Handout 1 for the teacher
- A copy of Handout 2 for each student
- A potato
- CD player and CD

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## Preparation

- Prepare one lunch bag for each child as follows:
  - In approximately 1/3 of the bags put three different items.
  - In approximately 1/3 of the bags put two of the same item.
  - In approximately 1/3 of the bags put only one item.

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## Procedures

1. Show students the front cover of the book *Potato: A Tale from the Great Depression*. Discuss the following:
  - What is the little girl holding? (*a basket of potatoes*)
  - What do you think she is going to do with the potatoes? (*eat them, store them, sell them*)
  - Where did the little girl get the potatoes in her basket? (*from a farm, from the ground where potatoes grow, from a farmer*)
  - If the little girl had bought the potatoes, where would she have gotten the money to buy them? (*Her parents could have given her money. She could have worked for the money to pay for the potatoes. She could have worked in exchange for the potatoes. She could have picked the potatoes from her garden.*)

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2. Show the book's pictures to the class, and ask the students to predict what will happen in the story based on the pictures. *(Answers will vary. This is a story about a family. This family went on a trip. This family grows potatoes. This family traded potatoes for groceries.)*
3. Explain that during the Great Depression it was difficult for people in the United States to get and keep jobs. Because people could not work at jobs, they weren't able to earn income. Income is payment people receive for the resources they provide in the market. When people work they receive wages. *(Note: People also earn income as rent, profit, or interest.)* People use the income they earn to buy things to satisfy their wants. **Wants** are desires that can be satisfied by consuming goods and services. Discuss the following:
  - How do members of your family earn income? *(Answers will vary but may include working in a store, building houses, growing food for others, driving a delivery truck, taking care of sick people.)*
  - Can you think of ways that you might earn income? *(Answers will vary but may include allowances for doing chores, mowing lawns, and baby-sitting.)*
  - Can you think of times when you wanted money to satisfy a want? *(Answers will vary but may include wanted money to buy a candy bar, a toy, a new shirt, a video game.)*
4. Explain that **consumers** are people whose wants are satisfied by using goods and services. **Goods** are objects that can satisfy people's wants. **Services** are actions that can satisfy people's wants. Teachers, bankers, and farmers provide services. Car mechanics, doctors, and dry cleaners also provide services.
5. Discuss the following:
  - How do you know that you are a consumer? *(Answers will vary but may include I buy candy, I buy clothes, I mail letters.)*
  - What are some goods that you consumed today? *(Answers will vary but may include pencils, paper, cars, plastic forks.)*
  - What are some services that you used today? *(Answers will vary but may include teacher's teaching, bus driver's driving, nurse's medical care.)*

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6. Read *Potato: A Tale from the Great Depression* to the students. Discuss the following:
  - Who is this story about? (*Clarence, Agnes, and their daughter Dorothy*)
  - What happened to Clarence? (*He lost his job and, as a result, the bank took the family's house away.*)
  - Who were the consumers in the story? (*Clarence, Agnes, and Dorothy*)
  - What wants did Clarence, Agnes, and Dorothy have? (*The family wanted food, clothing, and a place to live.* )
  
7. Explain that when Clarence lost his job, he could not afford to repay the loan on his house. Banks earn income by providing loans to consumers. If consumers cannot repay the money they borrow, the banks are able to take the goods bought by consumers away from the consumers. The bank took Clarence and Agnes' house away from the family because they could not make payments on the loan for the house. Ask the students what happened to the family when the bank took the house. (*The family had to move out of the house.*)
  
8. Remind students that Clarence wasn't able to find a job and keep a job so that he could earn income.
  - What did Clarence do to solve the problem of not being able to find a job? (*Someone told Clarence and Agnes there were jobs in Idaho picking potatoes. Clarence and Agnes traveled there to earn an income.*)
  - How did the farmer help Clarence and Agnes? (*The farmer told Clarence and Agnes that on their own time at night they could pick up leftover potatoes.*)
  - What did Clarence and Agnes do with the income they made during the day? (*Clarence and Agnes bought gas with the money they earned from picking potatoes during the day.*)
  - What did Clarence and Agnes do with the leftover potatoes they picked up at night? (*They packed all of their potatoes into the borrowed car and went back home where they traded the potatoes for goods and services.*)
  
9. Remind the students that Clarence and Agnes did not earn enough income to buy all of the goods and services they wanted so they traded goods and services they had for other goods and services. Explain the following:
  - Trading goods and services for other goods and services without using money is called **barter**.
  - Can you think of a time when you bartered to get something that you wanted? (*Answers will vary but may include trading lunches, trading toys, or trading some type of cards.*)

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- Give examples of goods and services for which Clarence and Agnes traded potatoes. (*groceries, a pig, clothes*)
10. Remind students that barter is the exchange of goods and services for other goods and services. Explain that they are going to participate in a barter activity. Tell the students that each of them will be given a bag with different goods in it. They may keep what is in their bag, or they may trade it with another student. Explain that they will only be able to trade with those students who sit next to them or directly in front or back of them. They may not leave their seats, so they can barter only with those nearest them.
  11. Give each student a piece of paper and a pencil. Tell them to count the number of trades they make during each round by making a tally mark for each trade on the piece of paper. Allow three minutes for students to make trades.
  12. Display Visual 1 and discuss the following:
    - How many of you made a trade? Have students who made trades in Round 1 raise their hands. (*Answers will vary.*)
    - How many trades did you make? (*Answers will vary.*) Use tally marks on the board to determine the total number. (*Answers will vary.*) Record the total number of trades in Row 1, Column 2 of the table on Visual 1.
    - Why were you able to make a trade? (*Others wanted what I had. They liked what I had. They had something I wanted. Both sides have to gain for a trade to be made.*)
    - Why did some of you trade more than one time? (*The person who had what I wanted most didn't want what I had. I had to trade for something else and then trade for what I wanted most. I had more than one item in my bag so I was able to trade more than once.*)
    - Why were some of you unable to make a trade? (*No one wanted what I had. No one had anything that I wanted more than what I had in my bag.*)
    - Was it easy or hard to make trades? (*Answers will vary.*)
  13. Explain that students will have three more minutes to trade. This time they may leave their seats, but they must make trades only with students whose desks are in their row. Students may trade the item(s) they received in Round 1 for a new item if they want to. Remind students to record each trade they make in this round on a different spot on their paper using a tally mark. Allow three minutes for students to trade. Have students return to their seats and discuss the following:
    - How many of you made a trade in Round 2? Have students who made trades in Round 2 raise their hands. (*Answers will vary.*)

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- How many trades did you make? Use tally marks on the board to determine the total number. (*Answers will vary.*) Record the total number of trades in Row 2, Column 2 of the table on Visual 1.
  - Were more trades made in this round than in Round 1? (*Answers will vary but it is likely that more trades were made in Round 2 than in Round 1.*) Why? (*There were more students to trade with in Round 2 than in Round 1. There were more items available in Round 2 than in Round 1.*)
14. Compare the number of trades made in Round 2 to the number of trades made in Round 1. Use greater than (>), less than (<), and equal (=) signs to write mathematical sentences on the board using the numbers that are in the table. For example, if in Round 1 seven trades were made, and in Round 2, 12 trades were made, write  $12 > 7$  on the board, and "read" the sentence to the class.
15. Explain that students will have three more minutes to trade. This time they can trade with anyone in the classroom. Explain that students who traded in Rounds 1 and 2 may trade items they received in those rounds if they want to. Allow three minutes for students to make trades. Have students return to their seats and discuss the following:
- How many of you made a trade in Round 3? Have students who made trades in Round 3 raise their hands. (*Answers will vary.*)
  - How many trades did each of you make? Use tally marks on the board to record the number of trades. (*Answers will vary.*) Record the total number of trades in Row 3, Column 2 of Visual 1.
  - Why were you able to make a trade? (*Others wanted what I had. They liked what I had. They had something I wanted. Both sides have to gain for a trade to be made.*)
  - How many of you did not make a trade? (*Answers will vary.*)
  - Were more trades made in this round than in Round 1? (*Answers will vary, but it is likely that more trades were made in Round 3 than in Round 1.*) Why? (*There were more students to trade with in Round 3 than in Round 1. There were more items available in Round 3 than in Round 1.*)
  - Why were some students unable to get something they wanted? (*Answers will vary but may include nobody wanted what I had to trade, people would not give up certain items, people didn't want what I had.*)
  - Do you think Clarence and Agnes had trouble bartering their potatoes? (*No, people probably wanted potatoes to eat, and therefore, Clarence and Agnes had something that people wanted. In the story, Clarence and Agnes got goods and services so they must have found people willing to trade those goods and services for potatoes.*)



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16. Compare the number of trades made in Round 3 to the number of trades made in Round 1. Use greater than ( $>$ ), less than ( $<$ ), and equal ( $=$ ) signs to write mathematical sentences on the board using the numbers that are in the table. For example, if in Round 1, seven trades were made and in Round 3, 12 trades were made, write  $12 > 7$  on the board and "read" the sentence to the class.
17. Compare the number of trades made in Round 3 with the number of trades made in Round 2. Use greater than ( $>$ ), less than ( $<$ ), and equal ( $=$ ) signs to write mathematical sentences on the board using numbers that are in the table. For example, if in Round 2, seven trades were made and in Round 3, 12 trades were made, write  $12 > 7$  on the board and "read" the sentence to the class. Ask students to explain why the number of trades in each round differed. *(More trades were made in Round 3 because more people were trading, so more choices were available for students to make. More people were able to satisfy their wants when more items were available.)*
18. Tell students that the items they bartered for are theirs to keep.
19. Clarence and Agnes had wants. Remind students that wants are desires or wishes that can be satisfied by consuming goods or services. In order to barter for groceries and clothing to satisfy some of the family's wants, Clarence had to find someone whose wants could be satisfied by getting potatoes. Clarence bartered potatoes with the store owner. Clarence wanted groceries and other items that the store owner would trade for potatoes. The store owner probably did not have time to grow potatoes so he could satisfy his want to have potatoes to sell to other patrons by trading groceries for potatoes with Clarence. Both Clarence and the store owner were satisfied by the trade they made. Discuss the following:
  - Why were you not always able to get what you wanted when you were bartering? *(Not everyone wanted the item that was being offered. Some people already had that item. Trades could not be made when both traders could not be satisfied with the barter.)*
  - When Clarence traded with the pig farmer for a pig, how did each side benefit? *(Clarence got a pig that satisfied his want for food. The pig farmer probably did not have time to grow potatoes to eat so trading a pig for potatoes satisfied his wants. Both parties were better off because of the trade.)*
  - Do members of your family barter to get the things they want each day? *(Probably not because it is too time consuming and difficult.)*
  - How do you and members of your family get the things you want each day? *(buy them using money, debit cards, coins, credit cards, checks)*



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20. Explain that people use money, debit cards, credit cards, and checks because it makes getting goods and services from others much easier than bartering. **Money** is anything used as a final payment for goods and services. People accept money in payment for work they do and as payment for other goods and services they sell because they know they can use it to buy other goods and services.
21. Explain that when people go to the store to buy things, they take money with them. They may take debit cards and checks because these things represent money that people have in banks. Store owners will accept them as payment for goods and services. People also use credit cards. Credit cards do not represent money that people have in bank accounts. By using a credit card, people are able to buy things now and pay for them later. Discuss the following:
- Could you use the items you have in your barter bags to buy lunch in the school cafeteria or a new toy at the toy store? (*No, because the cafeteria workers and toy store workers would not accept them as payment.*)
  - What do you do in order to have lunch at school? (*bring it from home, pay for it with money.*)
  - What happened at the end of the potato story that helped Clarence and his family satisfy their wants? (*Clarence got a job. The family moved to Washington, D.C., and then to Hawaii.*)
22. Point out that Clarence earned income at the job he got at the end of the story. The family was able to satisfy its wants by using that income to buy goods and services.

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### Closure

23. Review the important content in the lesson by discussing the following:
- Who are consumers? (*People whose wants are satisfied by using goods or services.*)
  - Who were the consumers in the potato story? (*Clarence and Agnes*)
  - What are wants? (*Economic wants are desires that can be satisfied by consuming a good, service, or leisure activity.*)
  - Name some wants that you have. (*a new bike, new shoes, a candy bar, a video game, an MP3 player*)
  - What were some wants that Clarence, Agnes, and Dorothy had? (*food, clothes, and groceries.*)
  - What is barter? (*The direct trading of goods and services between people without the use of money.*)

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- When do you use barter? (*Answers will vary.*)
- What are goods? (*Goods are objects that satisfy wants.*)
- Name some goods that the family in the book used. (*car, gas, a pig, clothes*)
- Name some goods that you use. (*pencils, paper, desks, shoes, clothes*)
- What are services? (*Services are actions that can satisfy people's wants.*)
- Name some services the family in the book used. (*Answers will vary but may include farmer's farming, store clerk's assistance, bank's banking services.*)
- Name some services you use. (*Answers will vary but may include teacher's teaching, lunchroom cooks' cooking, doctor's medical care.*)
- What helps to make it easier for us to buy goods and services? (*Money makes it easier to buy goods and services because everyone will accept it as payment for goods and services.*)

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## Assessment

24. Explain to students that they are now going to play a game called hot potato. Tell students to sit in a circle on the floor. Explain that hot potato is a game played by passing a potato around a circle while music is playing. When the music stops playing the person holding the potato has to answer a question. Give a student the potato and tell the student that when the music starts he or she should pass the potato to the student on his or her right. That student, in turn, should pass the potato to the student on his or her right and so on. When the music stops the student holding the potato will have to answer a question about wants, goods, services, barter, or money. Play a practice round to make certain students understand the directions.
25. Begin the game. After several seconds, stop the music and ask the student holding the potato one of the questions on *Handout 1: Hot Potato*. Continue the game until all questions have been used. Note: Expected answers are on Handout 1 in italics.
26. Distribute a copy of *Handout 2: A Tale of My Wants* to each student. Tell them to read and follow the directions on the handout.

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## Visual 1: Number of Trades

Round	Number of Trades
1	
2	
3	

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## Handout 1: Hot Potato

1. What do we call desires and wishes that can be satisfied by consuming goods and services? *Wants*
2. What was Agnes doing when she traded potatoes for groceries? *Bartering*
3. What do we call people who satisfy their wants by using goods and services? *Consumers*
4. What are you called when you satisfy your wants by using goods and services? *A consumer*
5. What do we call objects, like a ball for Dorothy, that satisfy people's wants? *Goods*
6. Name a good that you used today. *Answers will vary.*
7. What do we call actions that people do for us that satisfy our wants? *Services*
8. Name a service that you used today. *Answers will vary.*
9. Instead of bartering, what do people use to get the goods and services they want? *Money*
10. What do we call the money Clarence earned for the work he did? *Income*

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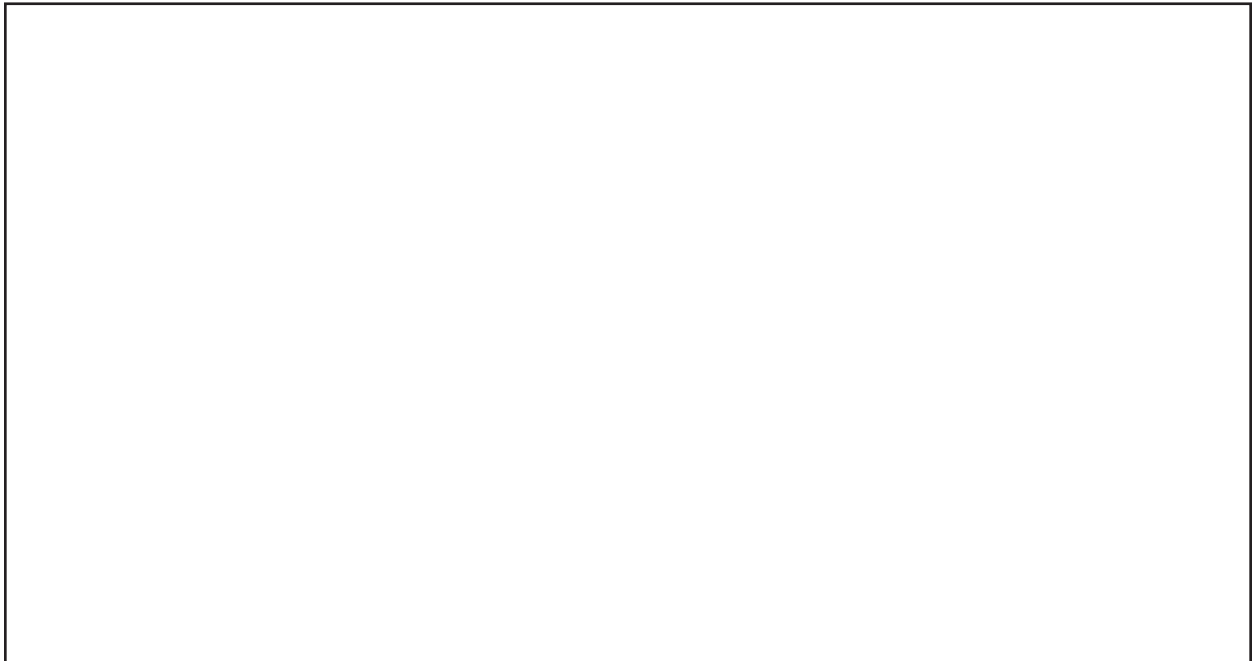
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## Handout 2: A Tale of My Wants

In the box below, draw pictures of three goods you used today. Write the name of each good under your picture of that good.



In the box below, draw pictures of three different services you have used in the last week. Write the name of each service under your picture of that service.



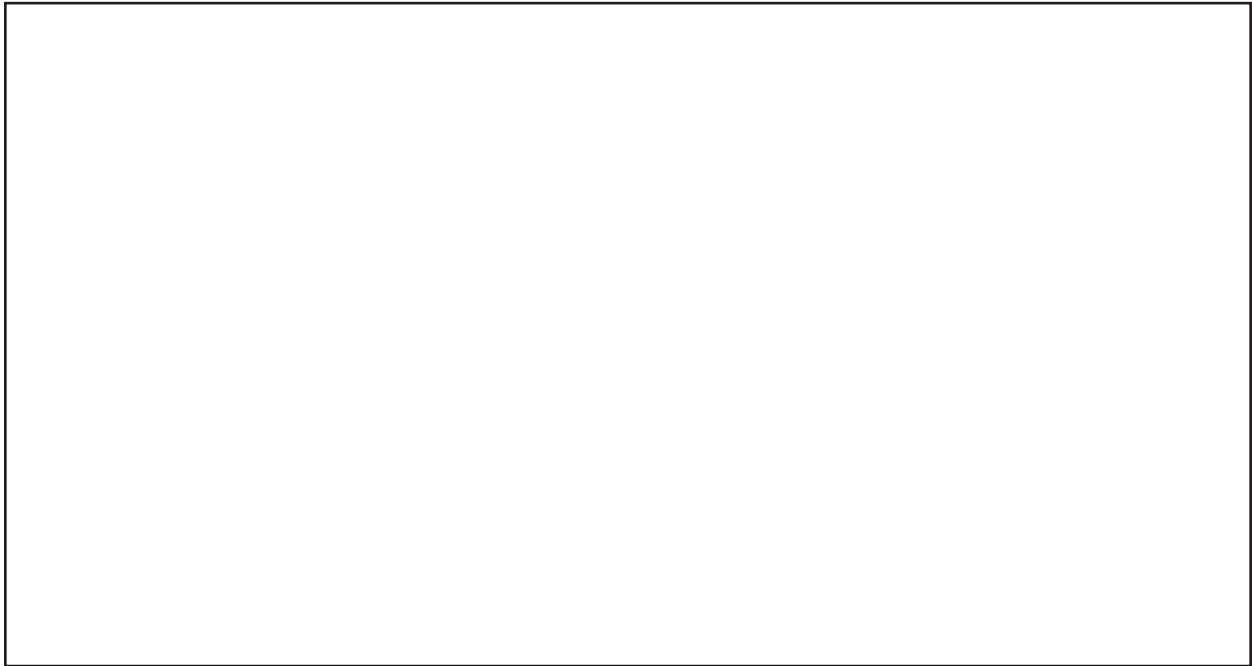
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## Handout 2: A Tale of My Wants (continued)

Draw a picture of a time when you bartered for a good or a service. Write a sentence that tells what you bartered. Write a sentence that tells why you wanted the good or service. Write a sentence that tells if you were satisfied with the trade.

Draw your picture here:



Write your sentences here:

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