

Fur Trade in a Box

Interactive Script



Written by Shelley Bird and Melissa Gray
Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada

Fur Trade In a Box Interactive Script

Part 2: The Rivalry

“Should I Stay or Should I Go?”

Main Messages:

- An introduction to the two company characters.
- Differences between the Hudson’s Bay Company and North West Company.

Props needed

Tyson the buffalo puppet
Gerry the beaver puppet
Assumption sash for NWC
Plaid shirt for NWC
Vest for HBC
Neckerchief for HBC
Geographical map of Canada
Picture of York boat
Picture of Voyageur canoe

Teacher: Pick four students. One student gets the neckerchief and the vest (Hudson’s Bay Company); one student gets the plaid shirt and Assumption sash (North West Company); the other two students are new puppeteers for Gerry the Beaver and Tyson the Bison. Tyson the Bison is the first to speak.

Tyson: The buffalo puppet is a “know-it-all bison” - he is very smart and thinks a lot of himself.

Gerry: The beaver puppet is an “eager beaver” - would like to learn but is easily confused.

Hudson’s Bay Company: Wears the vest and wraps the neckerchief around the neck. The HBC character is very proper and snobby. He is also a “ghost” from the past, who is still in the fur trade era (200 years ago).

North West Company: Wears the plaid shirt and wraps the Assumption sash tightly around the waist. The NWC character is easy going and fun. He is also a “ghost” from the past, who is still in the fur trade era (200 years ago).

Part 2: The Rivalry “Should I Stay or Should I Go?”

Tyson: Okay, where were we? Oh yes, I remember now. We had just finished talking about people coming from across the Atlantic Ocean looking for beavers to make the fancy hats. Let me move onto the great fur trade rivalry.

Gerry: The riva-what? I thought we were going to learn about the fur traders? I want to know more about the beaver hunters.

Tyson: Easy little fella, we are! Rivalry means competition. Long ago there were these two fur trade companies who were competing for the same thing.

Gerry: You mean like hockey teams? He shoots, he scores and another beaver bites the dust!

Tyson: Well, you got the competition part right, but they were trying to be the store to sell the most goods. They came all the way to Rocky Mountain House and set up fur trade posts side by side.

Gerry: Ooh! Kind of like having McDonalds and A&W side by side?

Tyson: Wow, give the beaver a prize, he’s finally catching on! Now, these two companies hated each other with a passion!

Gerry: *(Talk to class and whisper.)* Just who you want for a neighbour in the wilderness! Kind of like those lazy buffalo, standing around all day and eating grass while us beavers are busy working.

Tyson: Do you want a piece of me pancake tail? *(Talk to class.)* Excuse us for a minute, how about we let the fur traders tell their story. I’ve got a crazy beaver to deal with!

Puppeteers can break and step aside while the HBC and NWC characters continue.

HBC: Hello there! I work for the greatest company of all time. The Hudson’s Bay Company!

NWC: *(Talk to class and whisper.)* He thinks he’s pretty special!

HBC: In 1670, the great explorers Radisson and Groseilliers claimed this land for Prince Rupert. They claimed exclusive trading rights to all land drained by rivers that flowed into the Hudson Bay!

NWC: This just means that they were only thinking of themselves. They decided everyone should come to them and only them to trade.

Tyson: (*Talk to class.*) The land they claimed as theirs was most of what we call Canada today but they called it Rupert's Land. Take a look on the map.

Puppeteers and actors can break while teacher continues.

Teacher: I need two students to help me unroll this map of Canada. (*Show geographical map of Canada and follow rivers from Hudson Bay outward to get an idea of the size of the watershed called Rupert's Land. It covered most of Northern Ontario and Quebec, all of Manitoba, most of Saskatchewan, half of Alberta and a large portion of the North West Territories.*)

Continue after everyone has seen the map.

Gerry: Wow! That's a lot of land. I know my beaver ancestors lived in those rivers but were there no other people here yet?

Tyson: There had been people in these areas for thousands of years before the European traders arrived. The Aboriginal peoples traded far and wide with each other, so this made it easy for the traders to set up trade networks.

HBC: Yes, some Aboriginal people came to trade with us at a place called York Factory, located on the west side of the Hudson Bay. They traded with their own people and with other Aboriginal groups and then they brought the furs to us. They travelled great distances to trade with us. We were very successful until those yellow-bellied sapsuckers, the Nor'Westers, came along! (*Point at the NWC.*)

NWC: We sapsuckers were very smart! Our company travelled great distances to bring the trade to the Aboriginal peoples. We travelled through the Great Lakes and across the country to reach them in their homelands. We set up trading posts that were handier for them.

HBC: Why would you risk your necks to go out and find them? Look at us, we could sit at York Factory, earn our weekly pay and wait for them to come to us.

NWC: Well, you sure are lazy but you won't get rich working for the Bay! We formed a partnership called the North West Company. If we work hard to sell more and collect more furs, we will make more money. This gives us reason to go out and find the trade. We have now set up fur trade posts from the Great Lakes across the country to Rocky Mountain House on the North Saskatchewan River.

HBC: (*Talk to class.*) He makes it sound like they are the only ones! The Hudson's Bay Company also has many posts!

NWC: Oh right, only so you poor Bay men could keep up to the competition!

HBC: Really! We were just expanding our network of fur trade posts!

NWC: Right beside ours?

HBC: Bring it on! (*Hold your fists up to NWC as if to fight.*)

Gerry: (*Step in between the HBC and NWC.*) Easy fellas! Tyson maybe you could continue while they work things out.

Tyson: (*Talk to class.*) These fur traders are ghosts from over 200 years ago. In their time the two companies travelled west along the North Saskatchewan River. Right before the Rocky Mountains, the North West Company set up a post called, Rocky Mountain House. The Hudson's Bay Company who also built a post, Acton House, followed them closely.

NWC: The key word being FOLLOWED!

HBC: It was a natural stopping point on the river. It wasn't like we wanted you skunks as neighbours! So there! (*Stick your tongue out at the NWC.*)

Tyson: (*Talk to class.*) This is true. The rivers in those days were like the highways of today. They were the major trade routes but instead of trucks, boats carried the trade items. Can someone show us where the Hudson Bay is compared to Rocky Mountain House, and where Montreal is compared to Rocky Mountain House? Which company had to travel further?

Puppeteers and actors can break while teacher continues.

Teacher: (*Using the geographical map have one or two students point out York Factory, Montreal and Rocky Mountain House.*)

Continue after everyone has seen the map.

Gerry: Whoa! That's a pretty serious road trip!

Tyson: A serious RIVER trip; remember there were no roads in those days. The North West Company travelled by canoe and the Hudson's Bay travelled by York boat.

Puppeteers can break while teacher continues.

Teacher: (*Show the pictures of the two boats. After everyone has seen them give the NWC the canoe to hold and the HBC the York boat to hold.*) **What boat do you think would be easier to use on the river? What boat do you think would be easier to use on a lake?**

Continue after everyone has seen the two pictures.

Gerry: (*Point to the canoe picture.*) Oh, I know about those. The North West Company used canoes along the river highways. The canoes that floated down the North Saskatchewan River would have been about 6 meters long and have a crew of 6 to 8 men.

Puppeteers can break while teacher continues.

Teacher: *(Have class measure out 6 metres.)*

Continue after class has measured out 6 metres.

NWC: And what fine fast boats the canoes are! Much better than those slow York boats.

HBC: *(Hold the York boat picture high in the air.)* These York boats can carry a lot more trade goods than your little canoes.

Gerry: *(Talk to class.)* This was true. York boats were usually about 8 to 12 meters long - that's as long as a school bus - and also had a crew of 6 to 8 men. They also had a sail that they could use when out on a lake, but the biggest problem with York boats was that they were HEAVY!

Tyson: Wow Gerry, I'm impressed. How do you know so much about boats?

Gerry: The boats are made of wood and they are used on water. Anything to do with wood and water is a beaver's business my friend.

NWC: *(Talk to class.)* Since we are still on the topic of boats why don't I tell you about all the hard work that went into moving them. We are extremely strong men. Did you know this?
(Flex your arm muscles.)

Gerry: I agree any man or beast that spends most of his time on the river has got to be pretty strong and very special! Get it Tyson? *(Nudge Tyson in the arm.)* Beavers live in the river, meaning I'm strong and special!

Tyson: You're special all right Gerry. But the traders were they special? Or crazy? Now, the Hudson's Bay Company may have wanted to stay at York Factory but the North West Company forced them to go out in search of trade. There may have been many differences between the two companies but there were many similarities between the men who worked for them.

End of Scene.