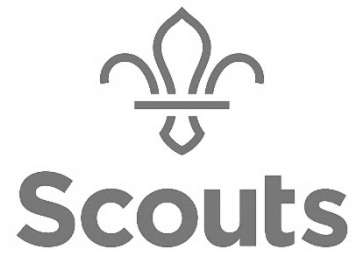


# It's a money old world



## The history of money

This resource is to accompany the activity 'It's a money old world', created in partnership with HSBC.

This activity helps everyone learn how money has changed through time and in different countries. It'll help the group think about the role that money has played in different societies, and what it represents today.

Print the stages and cut around the boxes or mix them up and show them on a screen. It's up to you whether to include the dates – you know your group (and their learning levels) best.

### **Barter (in the beginning)**

People traded items which had a practical value, including food (cattle, fish), clothing (fur, cloth), decorative items, tools, weapons, and services. This was called 'bartering', which means exchanging resources or services so both sides benefit.

What could you exchange today?

### **Cattle (9000-6000 BC)**

Cattle means sheep, camels, and other livestock as well as cows. Throughout history and across the globe cattle were used to trade. Later, people began to barter using grain and other vegetable or plant products in many cultures.

Why would it be useful to exchange livestock? What would be the downsides? How much do you think a cow would be worth?

### **Cowrie shells (1200 BC)**

Large animals can be difficult to travel with. Cowrie shells, which are widely available in the shallow waters of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, were light and easy to carry. They were first used as currency in China; they were later used in India and in some parts of Africa.

The cowrie shell is the most widely and longest used currency in history. One of the reasons for this is that they are almost impossible to forge (make pretend, worthless copies of). Today, coins in Ghana have a cowrie shell on them to remember this part of history!

What is another benefit of cowrie shells? For example, they're easy to transport.

### **First metal money and coins (1000 BC)**

People in China were inspired to make pretend (imitation) cowrie shells from bronze and copper. These were the earliest forms of metal coins. The coins later developed into round coins made of base metals (common, less expensive metals). The coins contained holes so that they could be put together on a chain.

Why would it be useful to put money on a chain?  
What would a modern equivalent of this be?

### **Modern coins (500 BC)**

Outside of China, the first coins (as we know them today) came from Lydia, which is part of present-day Turkey.

The Lydians were the first people to mint (make) coins that had their unique value written on it. Their coins had a stamp to represent where they came from and how much they were worth. Their coins were also the first to use symbolic animals. They often had lions, as symbols of kings, strength, and protection.

These new coins were made from precious metals such as silver, bronze, and gold, and were called 'staters'. They usually weighed the same as 220 grains of wheat.

What animal would you have on your own coin? What would they represent?

### **Leather money (118 BC)**

Leather money was used in China. They would use one-foot-square pieces of white deerskin with colourful borders. Lots of people say this is the first recorded type of banknote. The value of this particular deerskin was 40,000 'cash', a word which referenced the name of a type of old metal coin.

What do you think it would have been like to have one-foot-square pieces of leather to pay for things?

What colours would you use on your banknotes?

### **Paper currency (AD 806)**

Merchants in China used to carry a long string with metal coins attached so they could keep track of how much they had.

When their coins got too heavy to carry, they would leave it with a trustworthy agent (like a bank today). In exchange for the coins, the agent would write on a piece of paper how many coins that merchant had. The merchant could then take that paper and exchange it for goods with a seller. The seller could go to the agent and exchange the note for the strings of coins.

Then, people started making paper notes in factories called the 'jiaozi'. The factories would print paper money using wooden blocks covered in ink. Each colour of ink used had its own kind of paper that would be difficult to reproduce. Early paper currency would often only be accepted in particular regions (places) and would not be accepted after three years of being printed.

What does that remind you of today?

### **Wampum (AD 1535)**

Wampum are small white and black (or purple), round-shaped beads. They're made from whelk and quahog shells. The word 'wampum' means white.

These beads are made into bracelets and belts or threaded on strings. They're used in important discussions, to record events and promises people make, to tell stories, to give as gifts, and as something that can be traded.

The colours and patterns woven into the belts and bracelets have different meanings. White is often used for positive messages and purple is often used for negative messages (or used to create patterns). What might this practice look like today?

### **Decimalisation in the UK (AD 1971)**

The UK used a system of coins with pounds, shillings, and pence. There were 12 pennies in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound. The history of the system went back to Anglo-Saxon times and beyond.

The government made the system more modern by switching to the money we use today, where there are 100 pennies in a pound.

What do you think it was like having to change the way you counted money?

### **Plastic and digital payments (today)**

Today we often use digital technology to make payments. People can use their phone, card, or watch to transfer funds. Even if no actual money is exchanged, you see the amount of money go down in one account, and go up in another.

With digital technology, we make transactions that represent money, rather than exchanging actual notes or coins.

What does this remind you of?

