As a direct result of the fur trade First Nations peoples throughout western Canada were exposed to European culture and its products. This contact undoubtedly affected the First Nations' way of life.

Your task through reading and interpretation of the reference material is to determine what impact exploration and the fur trade had on the First Nations peoples of the west.

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**Trade Items**

*David Thompson recorded the following description of trade with the Native peoples while he was working for the Hudson’s Bay Company in the late 1780’s:*

...everything is carried on by barter profitable to both parties but more so to the Indians than to us. We took from them furs of no use to them, and which had to pass through an immense distance of freight and risks before they could be sold in the market to London. See the wife of an Indian sewing their leather clothing with a pointed, brittle bone, or a sharp thorn, and the time and trouble it takes. Show them an awl or a strong needle, and they will gladly give the finest Beaver or Wolf skin they have to purchase it. When the tents remove, a steady, careful old man or two of them entrusted with the fire, which is carried in a rough wooden bowl with earth in it.....to the place of the (next) camp....a flint and steel saves all anxiety and trouble....tobacco was the great luxury and, like money, commanded all things. Iron heads for their arrows are in great request, but above all guns and ammunition.

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**Aboriginal Peoples: The First People**

There are several theories to explain how the First Nations and Inuit people arrived in North America. The most common is that they are descendants of people that came from Asia about 30 000 years ago. It is believed that they used a land bridge to cross from Siberia into Alaska, which had formed during the ice age. The ancestors of the Inuit came later - about 4 500 years ago.

Aboriginal peoples traveled across the continent and developed different customs and languages depending on where they settled. But when the Europeans arrived, the lives of all Aboriginal peoples changed forever. The Aboriginal people were eager to trade for European goods. Especially important were metal tools, pots and other items. Aboriginal peoples did not have iron-making technology, so needed to trade for them. Because the thing Europeans wanted most was furs, Aboriginal peoples became partners in the fur trade and in the exploration of Canada.
Aboriginal Peoples: Teachers and Friends

Aboriginal peoples made many contributions to European exploration, settlement and the development of the fur trade. They taught Europeans how to build canoes for transportation and they showed the fur traders the best trails and canoe routes.

Many Europeans would not have survived without the help of friendly Aboriginal peoples. Many people died of hunger and sickness. The Huron and Algonquin helped them by providing food, and they showed them how to boil spruce bark to cure scurvy.

The winters were long and cold. The First Nations and Inuit people showed the settlers how to live in the freezing climate. First Nations and Inuit women sewed mittens and leggings for the fur traders. The settlers were also taught how to snowshoe and toboggan, which was the only way to travel in the winter. The First Nations and Inuit also did a variety of jobs that the settlers were not able to do - or did not want to do. For example, the Homeguard Cree were in charge of mail delivery between the trading posts on Hudson Bay. Much of the territory had not yet been mapped. The Homeguard Cree knew the area and were good at finding their way.

Aboriginal Peoples: Backbone of the Fur Trade

The job of preparing the furs for transportation was done by Aboriginal women. Because this could be so much work, it took Aboriginal women away from their normal duties. It also led to polygamy - where one man would have many wives so she could prepare more furs for him.

The First Nations and Inuit also aided in the exploration of North America. There were no maps to help the explorers find their way through the wilderness. The First Nations and Inuit acted as guides. Explorers, fur traders and settlers relied on the information they provided. Maps were sketched on birch bark or drawn in the sand along the river banks, on the ground, or in the snow.

Especially important were the Iroquois. Originally from the east, they moved west with the fur trade, all the way to British Columbia. They were very valuable there because they knew how to make birch-bark canoes - something local First Nations people could not do.

The Iroquois were clever traders and always tried to get the best deal. They were also proud warriors, which sometimes got them into trouble with other First Nations peoples.
Sadly, the Aboriginal peoples of North America also suffered for their involvement in the fur trade. The fur trade created competition that led to wars between First Nations peoples. In the 1600s, the Iroquois wiped out their main rivals - the Huron, the Susquehanne and the Seneca - and became the most powerful First Nations people in the east.

Unfortunately, not even war could stop the greatest enemy of the Iroquois. As voyageurs moved through the continent, they brought with them European diseases such as smallpox. These diseases wiped out as much as 75 percent of First Nations peoples.

Adding to war and disease, traditional ways of life were further demolished as Aboriginal peoples turned to new ways of living and alcohol. It is only in recent times that First Nations and Inuit peoples have been able to begin to reclaim their culture and their place.

Using the information from above and your textbook complete the following chart with what each side (Aboriginal and European) gained from each other in the Fur Trade. Mark each item with a + or – to indicate if it was a positive or negative thing. Who do you think got the best deal??

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<th>Aboriginals</th>
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Who do you think got the best deal from fur trading: Europeans or First Nations? Explain your answer in a 5-7 sentence paragraph.