

The hunter needs some grain to feed his family but he hasn't got anything to put it in. Shops and money haven't been invented yet. What can he do?

I am a farmer. I have lots of grain to make into food.

I am a hunter. I hunt animals for meat and keep their furs to make warm cloaks for the winter.

I make pots out of clay. I have more pots at home than I know what to do with!



Once people settled into permanent settlements they began to grow more than they needed. They also began to make things such as baskets, pottery and jewellery. This meant that they were able to exchange these goods for goods of equal value from other communities. This is called trade.



At first, trade would have taken place between nearby communities. They would have traded things like meat, wool, grain, pottery and anything else that one village was short of that another had in plentiful supply. Bartering would have been normal as people negotiated what was a fair swap.

As trade grew, people had to find ways of keeping track of what was being traded. The ancient Sumerians started using clay tokens. Historians think that there was a different token for each object that was traded. For example, if you bought six jars of grain from a trader, six jar tokens would be placed in a sealed clay ball. The buyer could then check the tokens to make sure the correct number of jars had arrived.

Soon, people started trading over larger distances. They also started trading things like oil, wine, silk, cloth and gold.

Writing was probably first invented to keep track of objects that were being bought and sold.



These clay tokens date from between 4000 BC and 3000 BC. Later, tokens were used to represent groups of objects, such as five goats or ten jars of grain.



The people of the Indus Valley civilisation used seals to help keep track of trade. These were small squares carved from soapstone that were pressed into clay. It is thought that these seals were used to help people identify the tradesman.

Trade was also a good way of spreading new ideas and technologies. The people of the Indus Valley civilisation, for example, were the first people to use cotton to make cloth. This cloth could then be traded and other civilisations would see how to make cloth too. Trade helped writing systems spread too, such as the cuneiform writing of the Sumerians or the very first alphabet of the Phoenicians.

We know that the Indus Valley traded with the Sumerians because their seals have been found in the Sumer region. This means that they traded over very long distances.



These are examples of Indus Valley seals. No one has yet been able to translate the Indus writing.

