Name: _____ Date: _____

Split Sticks That Kept the Books

Circle group

Long ago in England, people kept track of money with sticks. These were called tally sticks. A tally stick was a straight piece of wood with little cuts in it.

Here is how it worked. Say a person lent money to someone. A clerk cut notches in the stick. The size and place of the notches showed how much money was owed. Then the stick was split down its length. Each person kept one half. Both halves had the same notches.

This was a clever plan. A split stick was hard to fake. When the money was paid back, the two halves were put together. If the notches and the grain of the wood lined up, everyone knew the halves were real.

The king's treasury used tally sticks for hundreds of years. In 1834, workers burned a pile of old sticks in the stoves under the Parliament building in London. The fire spread and badly hurt the old buildings. Today the word tally still means to count.

Questions

1. What were tally sticks used for?

_____

_____

2. What did the notches show?

_____

_____

3. What happened to the stick after the notches were cut?

_____

_____

4. How did people know the halves were real?

_____

_____

5. Why was a split stick hard to fake?

_____

_____

6. What went wrong in 1834?

_____

_____

Words to know

tally: a count or record of how much
notches: small cuts made in the edge of something
clerk: a person who keeps records
grain: the lines and pattern that run through wood
treasury: the place where a ruler or country keeps its money

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Split Sticks That Kept the Books

Triangle group

Hundreds of years ago in England, people kept track of the money they owed by using sticks. These sticks were called tally sticks. A tally stick was a straight piece of wood with little cuts in it.

Here is how one worked. Say a person lent money to someone else. A clerk cut several notches into the stick, and the size and place of each notch showed how much money was owed. Then the stick was split down its length. Each person kept one half, and both halves carried the same notches.

This was a clever plan, because a split stick was very hard to fake. When the money was paid back, the two halves were put together again. If the notches and the grain of the wood lined up, everyone knew the halves were real.

The king's treasury used tally sticks for hundreds of years. In 1834, workers burned a big pile of old sticks in the stoves under the Parliament building in London. The fire spread and badly damaged the old buildings. Today the word tally still means to count.

Questions

1. What were tally sticks used for?

_____

_____

2. What did the notches on a stick show?

_____

_____

3. What happened to the stick after the notches were cut?

_____

_____

4. How did people know the halves were real?

_____

_____

5. Why was a split stick hard to fake?

_____

_____

6. What went wrong in 1834?

_____

_____

Words to know

tally: a count or record of how much
notches: small cuts made in the edge of something
clerk: a person who keeps records
grain: the lines and pattern that run through wood
treasury: the place where a ruler or country keeps its money

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Split Sticks That Kept the Books

Square group

Several hundred years ago in England, people recorded who owed money by using wooden sticks known as tally sticks. A tally stick was a straight piece of wood with small cuts carved into its surface.

Here is how one worked. Suppose a person lent money to somebody else. A clerk would cut notches into the stick, and the size and position of each notch indicated how much money was owed. The stick was then split along its length, and each person kept one half, with both halves carrying the same notches.

This was an ingenious system, because a split stick was extremely difficult to fake. When the money was repaid, the two halves were fitted together. If the notches and the grain of the wood lined up perfectly, everyone could be certain that the halves were genuine.

The king's treasury relied on tally sticks for hundreds of years. In 1834, workers burned a large pile of old sticks in the stoves beneath the Parliament building in London, and the fire spread and badly damaged the historic buildings. Even today, the word tally still means to count.

Questions

1. What were tally sticks used to record?

_____

_____

2. What did the size and position of each notch indicate?

_____

_____

3. What was done with the stick after the notches were cut?

_____

_____

4. How could people be certain that the halves were genuine?

_____

_____

5. Why was a split stick extremely difficult to fake?

_____

_____

6. What went wrong in 1834?

_____

_____

Words to know

tally: a count or record of how much
notches: small cuts made in the edge of something
clerk: a person who keeps records
grain: the lines and pattern that run through wood
treasury: the place where a ruler or country keeps its money

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Split Sticks That Kept the Books

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Split Sticks That Kept the Books

Easier · 166 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 2.6

1. To keep track of money that was owed.
2. How much money was owed.
3. It was split down its length and each person kept one half.
4. The notches and wood grain lined up.
5. A faker would have to make a half that matched in notches and grain.
6. Burning old sticks started a fire that hurt the Parliament buildings.

Triangle: Split Sticks That Kept the Books

This passage · 181 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 4.1

1. To keep track of money that was owed.
2. How much money was owed.
3. It was split down its length and each person kept one half.
4. The notches and the grain of the wood lined up.
5. A faker would need to make a half that matched in both notches and wood grain.
6. Burning old sticks in the stoves started a fire that damaged the Parliament buildings.

Square: Split Sticks That Kept the Books

Harder · 185 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 6.9

1. Who owed money and how much was owed.
2. How much money was owed.
3. It was split along its length and each person kept one half.
4. The notches and the grain of the wood lined up perfectly.
5. A faker would need to produce a half that matched in both notches and wood grain.
6. Burning old sticks started a fire that badly damaged the Parliament buildings.