

Culture of Corn

Age Group: 6th Grade

Time: 30 minutes

Materials:

- “Story of Corn” PowerPoint
- World map
- Corn Symbols (pins)
- Air Popper
- Popcorn
- Grinding stone (Metate)
- 6 ears of Indian Corn
- *The Biography of Corn* by L. Michele Nielsen

Description:

After a short PowerPoint presentation about the “Story of Corn”, students will then participate in a discussion about the origins and journey of corn throughout history, while enjoying some popcorn. Next, a discussion about the importance of corn in Mexican culture will lead into an activity where the students grind corn themselves using the traditional Mexican method of making masa with a metate.

Objectives:

Students will be able to...

- Understand the origin of corn.
- Recognize the importance of corn in many cultures, especially those in Mexico.

Environmental Education Guidelines:

- Questioning & Analysis
- Knowledge of environmental processes and systems:
 - The living environment: Heredity and evolution
 - Humans and their societies: Individuals and groups, culture, and global connections.
 - Environment and society: Human/environment interactions, Places, Resources, Technology

Major Life Science Themes:

- Change over time
- Adaptation
- Diversity
- Structure & Function

Background information:

Nielsen, L.M. (2007). *How did that get here? #12: The biography of corn*. New York: Crabtree Publishing Company.

Review the above book to get an understanding of the “Biography of corn”. This 32 page book is aimed at readers age 7-14, providing a synopsis of the origin of corn and its journey throughout history, along with pictures to illustrate this journey.

Vocabulary:

- Metate- A mortar, a ground stone tool used for processing grain and seeds. In traditional Mesoamerican culture, metates were typically used by women who would grind calcified maize and other organic materials during food preparation (e.g., making tortillas).
- Masa- Spanish for dough, but in Mexico it sometimes refers to cornmeal dough (**masa de maíz** in Spanish). It is used for making tortillas, tamales, pupusas, arepas and many other Latin American dishes. The dried and powdered form is called **masa de harina** or *maseca*; it is reconstituted with water.

Source: www.wikipedia.org

Safety:

None

Instructional Sequence:**Story of Corn** (10 minutes)

- PowerPoint presentation: “Story of Corn”

History of Corn (18 minutes)

- Eat popcorn, the oldest type of corn cultivated by the early Mesoamericans.
- Discuss the origins of corn using the world map and pictures from *Biography of Corn* book. Attach corn symbols to the map as you discuss corn’s journey through history.
 - Mexico and Central America: origin of corn. Cultivated as early as 5000BC by Mesoamericans.
 - Caribbean Islands, North and South America- Corn was valuable as a trade commodity among the ancient peoples. In North America, it was important to many Native American tribes. It was the woman’s job to grow and harvest corn.
 - Spain- Columbus and the other Spaniards brought corn back to Europe in the late 1400’s.
 - Africa- Corn spread to Africa from Europe. It was an important food for slaves.
 - The world- Today corn is a staple crop in 85% of the world’s countries.
- Discuss the importance of corn in Mexican history and culture.
 - Mexicans refer to themselves as “corn people”
 - Show images of metate and how corn is ground, even today.
- Activity: Grinding corn with metate
 - Let the students try grinding corn the traditional way. Imagine doing this every morning to make masa for tortillas to feed your family!

Clean up (2 minutes)

- Clean up

Assessment/Evaluation:

In their journals, students draw a map of corn's origin and journey throughout history. On the map, have them include important cultural artifacts, symbols or words alongside the cultures/areas that have used corn.