

UNIT 2 WORLD GEOGRAPHY LESSON 1

Summary

- In this lesson, students will read "A-maize-ing Grain" (pp. 4-9) to understand the important role of corn in the history and culture of early Native American civilizations.

Social Studies Background

Corn, also called maize, is an edible grain. Although corn originated in the Americas, it has spread to become one of the most widely grown crops around the world.

Corn is a tall annual grass. It has a long stem and narrow leaves. Male flowers grow in the tassel at the top of the stem. They pollinate the ears, or the female parts that grow as spike-like fruit up the stem. Each ear averages about 800 seeds, or kernels, in 16 rows.

Much corn is yellow or white. But corn kernels can also be red, black, blue, pink. Sometimes the kernels even have spots or stripes.

Over thousands of years, people have developed many different varieties of for corn. Early Native Americans developed plants with bigger kernels for eating. They also developed flour corn for baking and flint and dent corn, which is used for animal feed as well as making sweeteners and cornstarch.

Because corn is so versatile, it is now found in everything from jelly beans to baby diapers. It is also one of the biggest food crops for people and animals around the world.

ENGAGE

Encourage students to flip through the article and turn and talk with a partner to discuss what they see. Invite students to ask questions or share what they already know about Native Americans and corn.

EXPLORE

Instruct students to examine the illustration on pages 4-5 of their Readers. Point out that this drawing shows different ways people use corn today. Brainstorm ideas about how early Native Americans might have used corn in their daily lives.

EXPLAIN

Point out that corn began as a wild grass called teosinte. It grew in Mexico more than six thousand years ago. **Ask:** *What was teosinte like?* (Each plant had one small ear with one or two rows of small, pointed seeds.) Have students turn and talk to discuss how Native Americans changed teosinte into a more useful product. Encourage them to discuss how people all over North and South America came to depend upon corn for their survival. Challenge students to identify ways corn was honored in different Native American cultures. (Aztec: put popcorn in hats and necklaces; Inca: decorated palace gardens with gold and silver corn statues; Pueblo: performed corn dances; tribes everywhere: developed legends about corn)

ELABORATE

Point out to students that there are many different parts to a culture. One of the most significant is language. Invite students to complete the National Geographic activity "Recording a Dying Language" (www.nationalgeographic.org/media/maries-dictionary-recording-dying-language/) to learn how one Native American woman is documenting her tribe's language before it is lost forever. The activity includes instructional ideas in English and Spanish.

EVALUATE

Have students complete the **Content Assessment** for this lesson. Encourage them to share and compare their results in small groups.

Name _____

Date _____

CONTENT ASSESSMENT: The Americas, Lesson 1

Describe three important connections between corn and Native American cultures.

What do you think was the most significant impact corn had on Native American cultures? Why?

© 2018 National Geographic Society. All rights reserved. Teachers may copy this page to distribute to their students.