

THE HISTORY OF CORN

Grades 3-5 • 60 minutes



OBJECTIVES

Students will explore the history of corn and the way that corn has changed as society has developed.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is corn?
- Where does it come from?
- How many types of corn are there?
- What other products use corn or corn by-products?

MA STATE FRAMEWORK(S)

3-LS3-2. Distinguish between inherited characteristics and those characteristics that result from a direct interaction with the environment.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Computer and projector, (or 1-1 computers) to show the video, [The History of Corn](https://youtu.be/i6teBcfKpik) (<https://youtu.be/i6teBcfKpik>)

PROCEDURE

Background

7,000 to 10,000 years ago, what we call corn (and much of the world calls maize) was a wild grass. The closest known relative is "teosinte", a wild grass, which scientists say is one one gene different from corn and is corn's closest living non-domesticated relative. The indigenous peoples in Mexico and Central America were the first to grow corn around 8000 years ago. From Mexico maize spread north into the Southwestern United States and south down the coast to Peru. About 1000 years ago, as indigenous people migrated north to the eastern woodlands of present day North America, they brought corn with them. When Columbus made contact with people living in North and South America, corn was a major part of the diet of most native people. But up to this time, people living in Europe did not know about corn. Today we have colorful flint corn, which is mainly used for feed, sweet corn which is what most are used to eating, dent corn, flour corn, pod corn, flint corn, and popcorn. (Popcorn is a flint corn with small hard kernels. When they are heated, natural moisture inside turns to steam. The trapped steam builds up pressure and the kernel explodes to reveal the fluffy air-filled endosperm.)

Warm Up

Ask everyone to say their name and their favorite food. Discuss ingredients of those foods. Probably almost everything has some trace of corn. Show a variety of products that include corn in the ingredients, including less obvious things like: soda, chewing gum, candy, pudding, flour tortillas, refried beans, etc.

THE HISTORY OF CORN

Page 2



PROCEDURE, cont.

Activity

Watch the video, "The History of Corn".

After watching the video, discuss the following prompt adapted from TedEd: There are many positives and negatives around how much we rely on corn. After doing additional investigating, do you think humans rely on corn too heavily, or is corn an ideal crop which has helped advance human societies?

EXTENSIONS and VARIATIONS

Explore the different types of corn and make a corn bulletin board or presentation. Have groups of students research dent corn, flint corn, popcorn, sweet corn, pod corn and flour corn.

Nearly 20 percent of the world's food calories come from corn and it also is an ingredient in many of the products we use daily. Ask your students to conduct research to uncover some of the products we get from corn, for example, cornflakes, corn oil, corn syrup, fuel, fertilizer, plastics, cosmetics, and alcohol.

Pop some corn!