FROM THE AMERICAS TO EUROPE, FROM THE SACRED TO THE SUBLIME: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHOCOLATE

by
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Level: middle school / grades 6-7
Course: Spanish language/culture

Rationale

All foreign language study includes a strong culture component with the purpose of exposing and explaining the history and habits, traits and traditions of world populations. "Cultural competency" is now accepted among foreign language educators as an essential communicative skill. At the middle school level it is critical for teachers to allow students the chance to experience a sense of belonging; to provide a safe environment in which to explore areas outside familiar surroundings, and to give them a variety of opportunities to be successful in their educational and social endeavors. Students this age are eager and curious to explore new places and relationships. They are beginning to understand the connection between cause and effect, historical events within meaningful and relative contexts, and to show interest in the stories of individuals and communities from other periods and other cultures. Themes which foster classroom unity through paired and group projects not only invite active and positive participation in the target language, but also help students acquire the skills necessary for sound research, critical thinking, and thoughtful reflection.

This lesson, apart from its naturally delectable appeal, has several goals:

1. to challenge students to look at the history of Old and New World foods;
2. to encourage students to research when, where, why, and by

whom these foods were first introduced, received, planted, harvested, used, and changed;
3. to learn how their introduction effected small communities as well as global economies; and
4. to increase vocabulary in target language.

Lesson Overview

A Brief History of Chocolate is designed for use in a middle school Spanish Language and Culture course. However, it can also be integrated with writing, history, math, science, economics, and /or health issues classes. Other New World foods —potato, corn, etc.— can be substituted for the one chosen here. The world globe is the stage for this lesson, with emphasis on the history of the cultivation and use of the cacao bean in the New World. Students trace its voyage from Mayan and Aztec civilizations to Spain, back to the New World again, and finally, to the finest European kitchens where it was transformed into the confectionery known today. Students explore the uses and abuses of one of the most intoxicating and intriguing of all New World foods. Geography and some history of Latin America, Europe, and the United States are studied.

Objectives

Students will:

1. discuss as a group the findings in the assigned readings and from them create time-lines and concepts maps.

2. apply resource skills and different learning styles to record, gather and access information about the discovery and development of the cacao bean, as well as its travels and transformations around the globe.

3. read and research the connections between communities and individuals and their preference and treatment of a popular food.

4. demonstrate oral, aural, and writing skills by reading, inventing, and sampling recipes from both Old and New Worlds, and by reproducing songs, rhymes, and poems that correspond to the topic.

Time Needed

Ten 40 minute class periods.

Materials

A pocket folder for each student with 10 pages of blank paper stapled together as a tablet for their notes; handouts included in this document (#1-#8a) which describe the discovery and development, culture and cuisine, mythology and manufacture of chocolate; atlases and a globe; art supplies for designing and mounting poems and recipes; wooden *molinillo* or whisk, and cooking chocolate (available in Mexican and Latin American specialty stores). Easy access to a library and computer lab is recommended but not essential.