

Corn in Legend and Myth

Skills: Language Arts, Social Studies

Objective: Students will compare myths and legends about corn and use their creative abilities to act them out.

Background

Corn is a grass, native to the Americas. The exact origin is unknown, but tiny ears of corn have been discovered at ancient village sites and in tombs of early Americans. Evidence of corn in central Mexico suggests it was used there as long as 7000 years ago, where it was domesticated from wild grass. Cultivated corn is known to have existed in what is now the southwestern US for at least 3000 years. In the United States, many of the various Native American tribes have traditionally grown corn—also known as maize—and used it for both food and utilitarian purposes. Eastern tribes shared their knowledge of corn production with early European settlers, an act which saved many from starvation.

Early American colonists dried corn and ground it as meal for flour. They used the ground corn in porridge, cake and bread. Fresh, or sweet corn, the kind we like to eat as corn on the cob, was not developed until the 1700s. Before then corn was only used in its dried form.

Along with wheat and rice, corn is one of the world's major grain crops. It is the largest grain crop grown in the US. About 9 percent of all the corn grown is used to produce food for humans. These foods include corn meal and other food products such as cooking oils, margarine, and corn syrups and sweeteners (fructose). Sixty four percent of all corn grown is used as feed for livestock.

Corn cobs have been used in the manufacturing of nylon fibers and as a source for producing degradable plastics. Ethanol, a renewable fuel made from corn, has shown the possibility of becoming a major renewable fuel for the world's automotive industry.

Corn can be produced in much of Oklahoma, but primary production is in the Panhandle area. In Oklahoma, corn is harvested for either grain or silage with most of the grain going to dairies, animal feeding operations, and poultry operations. In an average year, around 25 million bushels are grown for grain in Oklahoma, with a yield of 130 bushels per acre. One bushel of corn is equal to 56 pounds.

Corn is pollinated by wind and is typically planted in 30-inch rows. A single seed (or kernel) of corn may produce a plant which yields more than 600 kernels of corn per ear. On one acre of land, anywhere from 22,000 to 35,000 individual plants may be grown.

Hybrid corn is developed to produce from one to two ears per plant. Ears per plant is often determined by moisture availability. Through better soil

P.A.S.S.

GRADE 6

Reading—1.1a; 3.1b; 4.4b;
5.1b

Writing—2.6b

Oral Language—2.2

Social Studies—1.1; 3.2

GRADE 7

Reading—1.1; 3.1; 4.4b;
5.1b

Writing—2.6b

Oral Language—2.2

Social Studies—1.1; 4.2

GRADE 8

Reading—1.1; 3.1; 4.4b;
5.1a

Writing—2.7a

Oral Language—2.2

Social Studies—1.1; 2.2

Resources Needed

computer and/or resource
materials

miscellaneous materials
for dramatizations

Vocabulary

cultivate—to prepare land for the raising of crop

domesticated—adapted to living with human beings and serving their purpose

ethanol—a colorless, volatile, pungent liquid made from corn which can be burned as a fuel

maize—Native American name for corn. Also called Indian corn

pollinated—pollen placed on the stigma of a plant for the purpose of creating seeds, flowers, fruit

porridge—a soft cereal or meal boiled in water or milk until thick

silage—the remaining part of the plant after the corn ears have been harvested. It is collected, stored in silos, and used for feed

soil conservation—a protection from loss, waste, etc. of soil through efficient farming methods

utilitarian—the quality or property of being useful

conservation practices, fertilizer use, better seed quality, and water availability, corn yields have increased 125 percent since 1950.

Activities

1. Read and/or discuss background.
 - Discuss the vocabulary either before the discussion, as an introduction, or after the discussion, with a focus on context clues.
 - Ask students what they know about corn, early civilizations' dependence on it, and how corn influenced ancient beliefs, culture, and religion.
2. Divide students into groups of 3-4. Each group will use an online search engine or the library to find a myth/legend about the history of corn.
 - Students may select a myth or legend from the list included with this lesson or research to find their own myth or legend about corn.
 - Review “How Reliable are Your Sources?” included with this lesson.
 - Students research online or in the library to find the legend and record where it originated.
3. Students will work together in their groups to prepare a skit, rap, song, etc., to present the myth or legend to the class.
 - Presentations should be no longer than three minutes and involve every group member.
 - Groups should prepare costumes, visuals, and necessary props for their presentations.
4. Provide each student with the worksheet included with this lesson listing corn myths and legends. There is space provided for students to record additional myths and legends.
5. As a conclusion, students will complete a Venn diagram using background information, their research and worksheet information to compare the history of corn through myth and legend and the role of corn in our lives today.

Extra Reading

- Brown, Dale, ed., *Mound Builders and Cliff Dwellers*, Time-Life, 1992.
- Courlander, Harold, and Enrico Arno, *People of the Short Blue Corn: Tales and Legends of the Hopi Indians*, Henry Holt, 1996.
- Curry, Jane Louise, *The Wonderful Sky Boat: And Other Native American Tales from the Southeast*, McEldery, 2001.
- Hunger, Sally M., and Joe Allen, *Four Seasons of Corn: A Winnebago Tradition (We Are Still Here)*, Lerner, 1996.
- Johnson, Sylvia, *Tomatoes, Potatoes, Corn, and Beans: How the Foods of the Americas Changed Eating Around the World*, Atheneum, 1997.
- Parke, Marilyn, and Sharon Panik, *A Quetzalcoatl Tale of Corn (Legends From Mexico and Central America)*, Good Apple, 1992.
- Politi, Leo, *Three Stalks of Corn*, Aladdin, 1994.
- Sherman, Pat, and R. Gergory Christie, *The Sun's Daughter*, Clarion, 2005.

Name _____

Corn Myths and Legends

Name of Legend	Native American Culture	Place of Origin	Involvement of Humans and Animals	Religious Beliefs	Male-Female Roles
The Hermit, or the Gift of the Corn					
The Signs of Corn					
The Forgotten Ear of Corn					
How Corn Came to the Earth					
The Coming of Corn					
Corn and the Sauk and Mesquakie Indians					

How Reliable Are Your Sources?

When conducting research, make sure you use reliable information from legitimate sources. Reliable information is well-researched from sources that are well-respected and as objective, or neutral, as possible. The best way to find legitimate sources is to go to the library and use scholarly journals, reference books and other well-researched sources.

Another place to find information is the Internet. Conducting research on the Internet is convenient, but it can also be tricky. There are many thousands of Web pages that have little actual content and are mainly links to other pages, which may be links to other pages, and so on. Anyone can post anything to the Internet. To make sure you have found a reliable source of information, ask yourself these questions:

1. Who is responsible for the Web site? Is the Web page associated with a reliable organization, such as a university or a government agency? What interest does the organization responsible have in the information presented. For example, will the organization profit from the information presented?
2. Who wrote the information? If the author is not listed or has no credentials, it may not be a credible source. Pay attention to the author's credentials or experience. Is the source really an authority on this particular matter or someone with an impressive title that has no connection to the subject matter?
3. When was the information written? Is it current? Is it still relevant?
4. Are there other sources that agree with statements made on the site, or do other sources contradict this source? In that case you may need to search further. It's always a good idea to gather more than one source.
5. Are any sources cited? If the author does not document anything, then the information may simply be someone's opinion. If statistics used come from a survey, how was the data gathered? Who conducted the survey or poll? Was the sample representative of the population? How many were surveyed? What percent of the population?

When choosing between the library and the Internet keep in mind that up to 90 percent of the contents of college library collections are not on the Internet. Because of copyright laws it is too expensive to put all scholarly work on the Internet. This means that the most comprehensive source of information is still the library.

