

The Mystery of

CORN

MYSTERIOUS VOCABULARY WORDS

Nomadic

Adapted

Edible

Characteristic



Mystery #2

THE

HISTORY

OF CORN

KANSAS CORN
STEM

Mystery of Corn K-5 Reader | Mystery #2

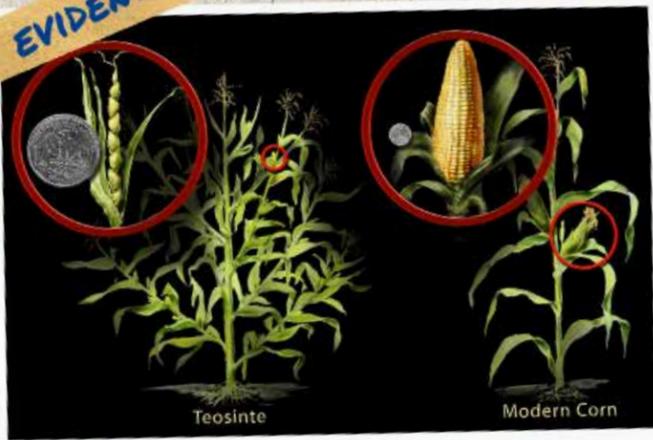
Is all corn the same? Where did corn come from? The history of corn can be quite a mystery! Let's investigate corn's origins and the different types of corn.

Top Secret Report from Agent X

We have gained valuable information about the mysterious origins of corn, also known as maize. According to our sources, it all started thousands of years ago with a plant called teosinte. How did this plant become the field corn we see today across the state of Kansas?

A SOURCE FROM THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (NSF) SHARED THIS ILLUSTRATION COMPARING TEOSINTE TO MODERN CORN.

EVIDENCE



Credit: Nicolle Rager Fuller, National Science Foundation

CHALLENGE
We must find the answers to the mystery in this reader!

- 1: _____ became maize/corn.
- 2: Corn's history began _____ years ago.
- 3: Ancient farmers in _____ were involved in creating corn.
- 4: Mayans created _____ that tracked corn planting and harvest.

HISTORY OF CORN

People began domesticating teosinte plants over 9,000 years ago in southern Mexico (see pin on map), which was a part of Mesoamerica. Teosinte looked very different than the corn we see today. The ear on the teosinte plant was small and its kernels were very hard and difficult to eat. The plant was mostly used for their husks to make items such as baskets, sleeping mats and clothes.

Over the years, the teosinte plant was **adapted** to grow in different environments and to produce bigger ears with **edible** kernels. The grain developed into what is now known as corn, also called maize. Corn became widespread as the native people became **nomadic**, traveling and trading both to the south through Central America and to the north through Mexico into what is now the United States. Corn was very important to the Mayan and Aztec civilizations and to the native Americans. Archaeologists have found corn in the southwest U.S. dating back to 5,000 years ago.

MESOAMERICA is a historic region that extends from central Mexico through Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and northern Costa Rica.

TYPES OF CORN

FLINT CORN



Also known as Indian Corn

Used for fall decorations

Has a hard shell

Has many colors



POPCORN



Used as a snack food

Kernels pop when heated

Smaller cob

Deep yellow color



SWEET CORN



Tastes sweet

Used for humans to eat

Very juicy

Yellow or white kernels, or both



DENT CORN



Used as feed for livestock, fuel and other products

Dent in the kernel

Hard kernels

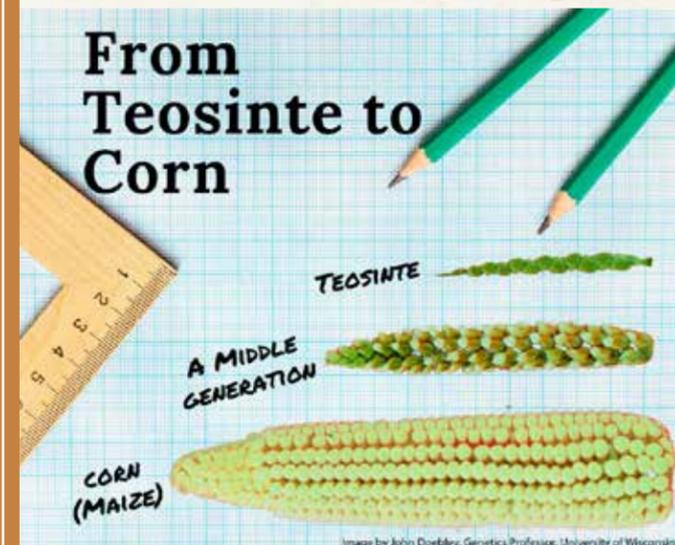
Yellow in color



Learn more about the four types of corn from Farmer Bill!



From Teosinte to Corn



How Did Corn Become Known Around the World?

When Christopher Columbus and other settlers from Europe came to America, they learned that their own crops wouldn't grow as well on American soil. The Native Americans taught them how to grow corn. The settlers liked it so much they sent it back to Europe for others to try.



The Mayans and Aztecs created some of the earliest known calendars to help with the planting and harvesting of corn.

CAREERS IN CORN

PHOTO: Sarah McNeil works for Bayer in Manhattan, Kansas. In their research plots around Kansas they develop stronger and healthier plants for the state of Kansas.



Plant Breeder

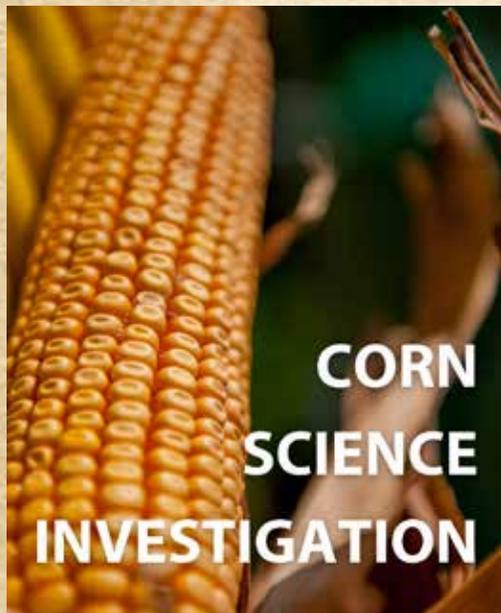
Plant Breeders like Dr. Sarah McNeil, use science and technology to study seeds. They find the best **characteristics** in a seed and combine those characteristics with other seeds to make a stronger, healthier plant. With the help of science, plant breeders can create plants that produce more grain, can grow in dry environments and even plants that insects won't want to eat.

CORN RESEARCH CAREERS

Plant Breeder (studies plants and seeds)
Geneticist (studies genetics)
Agronomist (studies soils and crops)
Entomologist (studies insects)



PHOTO: Dr. McNeil is pictured here in a field with her son.



Plant Breeding Activity

Materials Needed

- Paper corn kernels
- Paper ear of corn
- Paper trash can
- Scissors
- Glue

Activity

- Pretend you are a plant breeder!
- Your teacher will give you corn kernels, and a sheet with an ear of corn and a trash can printed on it.
- Place the corn kernels with desired characteristics and glue them on the ear of corn.
- Place the corn kernels with non-desired characteristics and glue them on the trash can.

The Mystery of Corn reader series is provided by:

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