

Chocolate: From the Maya to Milton Hershey

PART I. MILTON S. HERSHEY

If possible, do this activity on September 13. Begin by distributing Hershey's Kisses to your students. Explain that September 13 is Milton Hershey's birthday (1857–1945). Read all or part of James Buckley's book *Who Was Milton Hershey?* to your class. Point out that Hershey's first two businesses failed, but he kept trying and eventually succeeded in establishing a company that is known today for its chocolate bars. There is even a community named Hershey, Pennsylvania, where the Hershey's headquarters is located.

PART II. CHOCOLATE, AN ELITE FOOD

Put the following words and phrases on the board and ask your students what they have in common:

Silk

Royal purple

Lima beans

Chocolate

Explain that these things were so rare and expensive that only royalty or sometimes the very wealthy were allowed to have them—or, in the case of lima beans, they came to take on a special social significance. In ancient China only the emperor's family was allowed to wear silk. In Byzantium only royalty was allowed to use a rare dye made from sea snails called Tyrian or royal purple. An emperor's child was said to be “born in the purple.” In the Moche civilization of Peru, only the elite warrior class could eat lima beans. A Mayan legend tells us that even the gods didn't want humans to have chocolate (cacao beans). In fact, the god who

gave it to humans got in trouble with the other gods. Cacao was reserved for the elite among the Maya. They also used it in religious ceremonies.

Assign students to write 1–2 paragraphs about things that are special, off-limits, or so rare they are incredibly expensive in our day. Students should also write about one thing they recommend *should* become special or off-limits except for the most wealthy or famous people in our society. They should explain why this item would make a good choice for being exclusive.

Next, read *Blue Frog: The Legend of Chocolate* by Dianne De Las Casas to your class. According to the legend, why didn't the humans on earth have chocolate? How did they get it?

Ask students to share their writing or simply their best ideas about elite foods or other commodities. Serve hot chocolate during the discussion. Let students know that the cacao bean and chocolate came from the Americas and eventually spread to the rest of the world. South American-style hot chocolate tastes a little different from what many of your students are used to. What spices do students think you added that aren't found in North American hot chocolate? How do they like this version? Point out that drinks and treats in the United States are often much sweeter than those in other parts of the world.

Here is a suggested recipe, although there are others online. Keep in mind that the chili powder is key, so add it even if you are not a fan of hot spices. Of course, you can adjust the amount of chili powder to taste. Just be sure it's sufficiently noticeable to give the hot chocolate a little kick so that students can experience a beverage similar to the kind the Maya drank.



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MAYA-STYLE HOT CHOCOLATE

1-1/2 gallons milk

6 cups water

8 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips
(about 5 12-oz. bags)

1/2 cup sugar

3 tablespoons vanilla extract

3 tablespoons ground cinnamon

2–3 teaspoons chili powder
(check the taste to get it right)

1/2 teaspoon nutmeg

Mix and cook the ingredients on medium heat in a large saucepan on the stovetop, stirring steadily, till the chocolate chips have melted. Do not let it boil. Another option is to cook it in a slow cooker on low heat for 2 hours, but it will need to be stirred every 20–30 minutes. This recipe makes enough for about 25 people.

RESOURCES:

Buckley, James. *Who Was Milton Hershey?* New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 2013.

Burleigh, Robert. *Chocolate: Riches from the Rainforest.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002.

De Las Casas, Dianne. *Blue Frog: The Legend of Chocolate.* Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2011.

Frydenborg, Kay. *Chocolate: Sweet Science & Dark Secrets of the World's Favorite Treat.* New York: HMH Books for Young Readers, 2015.

Hershey's Company website

<http://www.hersheys.com/>

Milton S. Hershey biography (includes a video)

<http://www.biography.com/people/milton-hershey-9337133>

The Story of Chocolate (National Confectioners Association: Chocolate Council)

<http://www.thestoryofchocolate.com/index.cfm>

<http://www.thestoryofchocolate.com/who/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3309&navItemNumber=3259>

