



“Chocolate”

Reading Comprehension – Informational Passages

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer questions about the passage below.



Chocolate — there’s nothing quite like it, is there? Chocolate is simply delicious. What is chocolate? Where does it come from?

Christopher Columbus was probably the first to take cacao beans from the New World to Europe in around 1502. But the history of chocolate goes back at least 4,000 years! The Aztecs, who lived in America, thought that their bitter cacao drink was a **divine** gift from heaven. In fact, the scientist Carolus Linnaeus named the plant *Theobroma*, which means “food of the gods.”

The Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez went to America in 1519. He visited the Mexican emperor Montezuma. He saw that Montezuma drank cacao mixed with vanilla and spices. Cortez took some cacao home as a gift to the Spanish King Charles. In Spain, people began to drink Cortez’s chocolate in a drink with chili peppers. However, the natural taste of cacao was too bitter for most people. To sweeten the drink, Europeans added sugar to the cacao drink. As a sweet drink, it became more popular. By the 17th century, rich people in Europe were drinking it.

Later, people started using chocolate in **pastries**, like pies and cakes. In 1828, Dutch chocolate makers started using a new process for removing the fat from cacao beans, and getting to the center of the cacao bean. The Dutch chocolate maker Conrad J. van Houten made a machine that pressed the fat from the bean. The resulting powder mixed better with water than cacao did. Now, some call van Houten’s chocolate “Dutch chocolate.”

It was easy to mix Dutch chocolate powder with sugar. So other chocolate makers started trying new **recipes** that used powdered chocolate. People started mixing sweetened chocolate with cocoa butter to make solid chocolate bars. In 1849, an English chocolate maker made the first chocolate bar. In the 19th century, the Swiss started making milk chocolate by mixing powdered milk with sweetened chocolate. Milk chocolate has not changed much since this process was invented.

Today, two countries - Brazil and Ivory Coast - account for almost half the world’s chocolate. The United States imports most of the chocolate in the world, but the Swiss eat the most chocolate per person. The most chocolate eaten today is sweet milk chocolate, but people also eat white chocolate and dark chocolate.

Cocoa and dark chocolate are believed to help **prevent** heart attacks, or help keep them from happening. They are supposed to be good for the circulatory system. On the other hand, the high fat content of chocolate can cause weight gain, which is not good for people’s health. Other health claims for chocolate have not been proven, but some research shows that chocolate could be good for the brain.

Chocolate is a popular holiday gift. A popular Valentine’s Day gift is a box of chocolate candies with a card and flowers. Chocolate is sometimes given for Christmas and birthdays. Chocolate eggs are sometimes given at Easter.

Chocolate is **toxic** to some animals. An ingredient in chocolate is poisonous to dogs, cats, parrots, small rodents, and some livestock. Their bodies cannot process some of the chemicals found in chocolate. Therefore, they should never be fed chocolate.