A crippling drought threatened the United States corn harvest in 2012 with widespread economic repercussions for North and South America. How did this crop become so critical to the Americas? This unit will examine the “roots” of corn and its origins in Mesoamerica. We will begin with the Maya version of corn agribusiness and move to a brief discussion of the importance of corn in today’s world. Along the way we will examine the dominance of “king” corn as a Maya cultural touchstone and diet staple. Students will be shown the art, deities and literature of the Maya—with corn an integral part of all aspects of their daily life. We will conclude with a discussion of this theme: similarities and differences concerning corn among the ancient and modern Mayas and the importance in America today.
Unit Objectives: Using the pre-class activity (see attached document), students will identify where they find corn in their every day lives -- from lunch to sweetened beverages to ethanol. The results of the survey will then be used to link the present day importance of corn to the past. Students will examine works of art and be able to identify the symbolism in each work, identify the Maya corn god, and address the importance and history of corn for the Mayas. Unit concludes with linking the importance of corn in Maya life to American life.

Essential Questions:

How essential is corn to the ancient and present day Maya civilizations?
How did this importance manifest itself in Maya daily life, art and literature?
Does corn occupy the same central place in modern American life and agriculture?

Unit Lesson Outline

Corn Identity: From Teosinte to Doritos and Ethanol

Pre. I: Relying on previous knowledge: Students are given a copy of “Corn in My Community” and are asked to complete it before lesson. Begin class based on their findings. If not possible, give to students when class begins and then review it at the conclusion of the unit and begin discussion with guiding question: What and where do we find corn? Optional start (and highly recommended): Give each student Doritos and ask about its origin.

I. Brief History of Corn
   A. Teosinte
   B. Genetic engineering of corn
   C. Movement from Mexico to North and South America

II. Corn in the Maya Kingdoms
   A. Creation Myth (Popol Vuh) and gods
   B. Depiction in Art (Text of Mary Miller describing statue of Pakal of Palenque)
   C. Kingship

III. Corn in the New World
   A. Columbian Exchange (View clip: When Worlds Collide)
   B. Corn’s Legacy in American Life
      1. Review opening exercise Corn in My Community
      2. Read news story about 2012 drought and corn crop and ethanol
   C. Discussion of poem by Gaspar Pedro Gonzalez
      1. Conclude with discussion connecting the corn of the Maya and the Americans
Teacher needs:
“Corn in My Community” handout
“Corn Identity” PowerPoint, teacher version – CONTACT YALE PEABODY MUSEUM FOR PRESENTATION
“Corn Identity” PowerPoint, student version – CONTACT YALE PEABODY MUSEUM FOR PRESENTATION
Copies of these news stories:
Clip about the Columbian Exchange from *When Worlds Collide*

Doritos

Students will need:
Pens, Pencils
Copy of the student version of the PowerPoint “Corn Identity” (this is the original version of the PowerPoint but with blanks; teacher shows master copy on the white board) – CONTACT YALE PEABODY MUSEUM FOR PRESENTATION
Completed copy of “Corn in My Community” handout

Resources:
Food Lesson Plan from “When Worlds Collide”
[http://agron-www.agron.iastate.edu/Courses/agron212/readings/corn_history.htm](http://agron-www.agron.iastate.edu/Courses/agron212/readings/corn_history.htm)
History of Corn
Corn in the American Diet
Domestication of maize
[http://www.spiritofmaat.com/announce/gecornmex.htm](http://www.spiritofmaat.com/announce/gecornmex.htm)
Genetically modified corn in México
[http://learn.genetics.utah.edu/content/variation/corn/](http://learn.genetics.utah.edu/content/variation/corn/)
Evolution of corn – University of Utah Genetic Science Learning Center
Corn in the US from Iowa Corn Growers Association
Petition for rain
[http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1999/2/99.02.09.x.html](http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1999/2/99.02.09.x.html)
Source of Popol Vuh
News story about 2012 drought and corn crop
When Worlds Collide-PBS video
[http://www.pbs.org/kcet/when-worlds-collide/education/lesson-5.html#video1](http://www.pbs.org/kcet/when-worlds-collide/education/lesson-5.html#video1)
Images from the Yale University Art Gallery
Primary Sources:
Images from the National Gallery of Art
Images from the Yale Art Gallery
A passage from the Popol Vuh
Portait head of Pakal, Palenque, Mexico, c. 650-683, stucco, from Museo Nacional de Antropologia-INAH, México

Secondary Sources:
Newspaper reports about drought affecting corn crop (Washington Post January 2013)
• https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/final-2012-drought-report-shows-corn-harvest-took-hardest-hit/2013/01/13/a66113d2-5c45-11e2-88d0-c4cf65c3ad15_story.html

Short power point on the history of corn, incorporating images from the recent trip to Chiapas and from the lectures at Yale.

Vocabulary:
Corn
Maize
Teosinte
Palenque
Popol Vuh
Selective Breeding
Mesoamerica
Yumil Kaxob
Nixtamalization
Pakal
Bonampak

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