



Social Studies Exemplary Text Student Handout

If you asked modern scientists to name the world’s greatest achievements in genetic engineering, you might be surprised by one of their low-tech answers: maize.

Scientists know that maize, called “corn” in the United States, was created more than 6,000 years ago. Although exactly how this well-known plant was invented is still a mystery, they do know where it was invented—in the narrow “waist” of southern Mexico. This jumble of mountains, beaches, wet tropical forests, and dry plains is the most ecologically diverse part of Mesoamerica. Today it is the home of more than a dozen different Indian groups, but the human history of these hills and valleys stretches far into the past.

From Hunting to Gathering to Farming

About 11,500 years ago a group of Paleoindians was living in caves in what is now the Mexican state of Puebla. These people were hunters, but they did not bring down mastodons and mammoths. Those huge species were already extinct. Now and then they even feasted on giant turtles (which were probably a lot easier to catch than the fast-moving deer and rabbits.)

Over the next 2,000 years, though, game animals grew scarce. Maybe the people of the area had been too successful at hunting. Maybe, as the climate grew slowly hotter and drier, the grasslands where the animals lived shrank, and so the animal populations shrank, as well. Perhaps the situation was a combination of these two reasons. Whatever the explanation, hunters of Puebla and the neighboring state of Oaxaca turned to plants for more of their food.

Mann, C. C. (2009). Chapter 2. *Before Columbus: The Americas of 1491*. New York: Atheneum.

This is an example of exemplary text found in *Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Appendix B Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks*. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf

Social Studies Exemplary Text Teacher Resource

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EFL 5
Word Count 259

Teacher introduces the text with minimal commentary and students read it independently. Teacher then reads passage aloud. Give a brief definition to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in text). Teacher guides the students through a series of text-dependent questions. Complete the performance task as a cumulative evaluation of the close-reading.

Text-Dependent Questions

1. When does the text say maize (or corn) was created?
2. What was the job of the Paleoindians?
3. Why didn't the hunters kill mastodons and mammoths?
4. What happened to the game animals?
5. What are some of the reasons the passage claims the animals grew scarce?
6. What did the people do for food instead?
7. Does the development of maize seem to have come from necessity? Why or why not?

Performance Tasks for Informational Texts

Based on this passage and what you have learned about other indigenous people, in what ways would the evolution of man have been different without the invention of maize? [RH.9-10.3]

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