

## READING CHALLENGE

# How Chocolate Travelled the World

*From a bitter drink in the jungle to the sweet bars we love today — the 3,000-year journey of chocolate*

<b>Level</b>	A2 (Elementary)
<b>Age Group</b>	Teens (11-16)
<b>Topic</b>	True Stories
<b>Duration</b>	~15 minutes
<b>Skill</b>	Reading

You probably eat chocolate every week. Maybe you have a chocolate bar after school, or drink hot chocolate on a cold day. Chocolate is one of the most **popular** foods in the world. Every year, people eat about 7.5 million tonnes of it. But chocolate has not always been a sweet treat in a shiny wrapper. For most of its history, chocolate was a **bitter** drink, and only the richest and most powerful people could have it. The story of how chocolate went from a **sacred** drink in the jungles of Central America to the candy bars in your local shop is one of the most interesting food stories in history.

## The First Chocolate Lovers

The story of chocolate begins about 3,000 years ago in the tropical forests of Central America. The Olmec people, who lived in what is now southern Mexico, were probably the first to use cocoa **beans**. They crushed the beans and mixed them with water to make a drink. We do not know exactly how their chocolate tasted, but it was probably very different from the chocolate we know today. After the Olmecs, the Maya people continued the tradition. The Maya loved chocolate. They called it "xocolatl," which some people believe means "bitter water." The Maya drank chocolate at meals, at ceremonies, and at special events. They believed cocoa was a gift from the gods. Cocoa beans were so important that the Maya even used them as money. You could buy a rabbit for about 10 cocoa beans, or a slave for about 100 beans. That is how valuable chocolate was.

## The Aztec Empire and Chocolate

When the Aztec **empire** became powerful in the 1300s and 1400s, they also fell in love with chocolate. But the Aztecs could not grow cocoa themselves because they lived in the highlands of central Mexico, where the climate was too dry and cold. So they got their cocoa beans through **trade** with other peoples, or they demanded cocoa as a tax from the lands they controlled. The Aztec emperor Montezuma II was famous for his love of chocolate. It is said that he drank 50 cups of chocolate a day from golden cups. Aztec chocolate was very different from ours. They drank it cold, not hot. They mixed cocoa **powder** with water, chilli peppers, vanilla, and sometimes cornmeal. They poured the drink from one cup to another to make it foamy. The drink was dark, spicy, and bitter — no sugar at all. The Aztecs believed chocolate gave you energy and strength. Warriors drank it before battle. It was a **luxury** — only nobles, warriors, and rich merchants could drink it regularly.

## Chocolate Comes to Europe

In 1519, the Spanish explorer Hernan Cortes arrived in Mexico. He met the Aztec emperor Montezuma and tasted chocolate for the first time. Cortes was interested, but he did not like the bitter taste very much. However, he saw how important cocoa was to the Aztecs. After the Spanish **conquered** the Aztec empire, they started sending cocoa beans back to Spain. When cocoa beans first arrived in Spain, people did not know what to do with them. But soon, someone had a clever idea: add sugar. The Spanish mixed cocoa with sugar, cinnamon, and vanilla, and heated the drink. This new **recipe** was delicious. Sweet, warm, and rich — it was completely different from the cold, spicy Aztec version. Spanish nobles loved it. For almost 100 years, Spain kept the secret of chocolate to itself. But slowly, chocolate spread to other European countries. It reached Italy in the 1600s, then France, England, and the rest of

Europe. In every country, chocolate was a drink for the rich. A cup of hot chocolate cost a lot of money. In London, special "chocolate houses" opened where wealthy men met to drink chocolate, talk about politics, and do business.

## The Chocolate Revolution

For hundreds of years, chocolate was only a drink. Nobody had ever eaten a solid piece of chocolate. That changed in the 1800s thanks to several important **inventions**. In 1828, a Dutch chemist named Coenraad van Houten invented a special press. This machine could separate cocoa butter (the fat in cocoa beans) from cocoa powder. This was a huge step. The powder could be used to make a lighter, smoother chocolate drink. And the cocoa butter could be used to make solid chocolate. In 1847, a British company called J.S. Fry and Sons used cocoa butter, cocoa powder, and sugar to create the first modern chocolate bar. It was not perfect, but it was the beginning of something big. Then, in 1875, a Swiss man named Daniel Peter had another brilliant idea. He mixed cocoa with condensed milk, a **ingredient** invented by his neighbour Henri Nestle. The result was milk chocolate — smoother, sweeter, and creamier than dark chocolate. People loved it. A few years later, another Swiss chocolatier, Rodolphe Lindt, invented a process called "conching." This involved mixing chocolate for hours and hours until it became very smooth and silky. Before conching, chocolate was rough and sandy. After conching, it melted on your tongue. Modern chocolate was born.

## Chocolate Becomes Affordable

In the early 1900s, chocolate was still quite expensive. But new **factory** technology changed that. Companies like Cadbury in England, Nestle in Switzerland, Hershey in America, and many others started making chocolate in large factories. They could produce thousands of chocolate bars every day. Prices went down, and suddenly ordinary people could afford chocolate too. Milton Hershey was especially important in America. He built a huge chocolate factory in Pennsylvania in 1903 and created the Hershey bar, which became one of the most famous chocolate bars in the world. He even built an entire town around his factory, called Hershey, Pennsylvania. The town had streets called Chocolate Avenue and Cocoa Avenue. During World War I and World War II, chocolate bars were included in soldiers' ration packs because they were small, light, and full of energy. This helped make chocolate even more popular around the world.

## Where Cocoa Comes From Today

Today, cocoa beans grow in tropical countries near the equator. The biggest producer is Ivory Coast in West Africa, followed by Ghana, Indonesia, Ecuador, and Cameroon. Africa produces about 70 percent of the world's cocoa. Cocoa trees need hot, wet weather and shade from taller trees. The cocoa pods grow directly on the trunk and branches of the tree. Each pod contains about 20 to 50 cocoa beans surrounded by sweet white pulp. Farmers **harvest** the pods by hand, cut them open, and take out the beans. The beans are then fermented for several days, dried in the sun, and packed into sacks for export. Most cocoa farmers work on small farms, not big **plantations**. Many of them earn very little money. A cocoa farmer in West Africa might earn only one or two dollars a day. Some farms have also been criticised for

using child labour. This is a big problem that organisations and chocolate companies are working to fix. Fair trade programmes try to make sure farmers get a better price for their cocoa.

## Chocolate Today

Today, the chocolate industry is worth more than 130 billion dollars a year. Switzerland eats the most chocolate per person — about 10 kilograms per person each year. Germany, Austria, and Belgium are also big chocolate lovers. There are thousands of types of chocolate: dark chocolate, milk chocolate, white chocolate, chocolate with nuts, chocolate with fruit, chocolate with sea salt, and many more. Some chocolate bars cost less than one euro. Others, made by hand from rare cocoa beans, can cost 50 euros or more. In recent years, many people have become interested in "bean to bar" chocolate. These are small companies that buy cocoa beans directly from farmers and make chocolate from start to finish in their own workshops. They focus on quality, flavour, and fair prices for farmers. It is a bit like the craft beer movement, but for chocolate.

## From the Jungle to Your Hand

The journey of chocolate is amazing when you think about it. It started as a bitter, sacred drink in the jungles of Central America 3,000 years ago. The Olmecs, the Maya, and the Aztecs all treasured it. Spanish explorers brought it to Europe, where people added sugar and made it sweet. Dutch, British, and Swiss inventors turned it from a drink into a solid bar. American factories made it cheap enough for everyone. And today, cocoa beans from West African farms travel across the ocean to become the chocolate bars, cakes, ice cream, and hot drinks that billions of people enjoy. Next time you eat a piece of chocolate, remember: you are eating a food that emperors drank from golden cups, that warriors took into battle, and that people once used as money. That small piece of chocolate in your hand has travelled a very long way — not just from the shop, but through 3,000 years of human history.

## Vocabulary

Term	Definition
<b>bean</b>	a seed from a plant, used to make food or drinks
<b>bitter</b>	having a strong, sharp taste that is not sweet
<b>harvest</b>	to pick or collect crops from the fields when they are ready
<b>recipe</b>	a set of instructions for making a particular food or drink
<b>luxury</b>	something expensive that is nice to have but not necessary
<b>plantation</b>	a large farm where one type of crop is grown, such as cocoa or sugar
<b>ingredient</b>	one of the things used to make a food or drink
<b>factory</b>	a large building where products are made using machines
<b>empire</b>	a group of countries or lands controlled by one ruler or government
<b>trade</b>	the activity of buying and selling goods between people or countries
<b>invention</b>	a new thing that someone has made or designed for the first time
<b>conquer</b>	to take control of a country or area by force
<b>powder</b>	a dry substance made of very small, fine pieces
<b>sacred</b>	very important in a religion; connected to God or the gods
<b>popular</b>	liked or enjoyed by many people

## Comprehension Quiz

### 1. Which ancient people were the first to use cocoa beans?

- A) The Romans
- B) The Egyptians
- C) The Olmecs
- D) The Chinese

### 2. How did the Aztecs drink their chocolate?

- A) Hot with milk and sugar
- B) Cold with chilli peppers and spices
- C) Mixed with fruit juice
- D) As a solid bar

### 3. Who brought cocoa beans from the Americas to Spain?

- A) Christopher Columbus
- B) Marco Polo
- C) Spanish explorers like Hernan Cortes
- D) Portuguese sailors

### 4. What did Coenraad van Houten invent in 1828?

- A) The chocolate bar
- B) The cocoa press that separated cocoa butter from cocoa powder
- C) Milk chocolate
- D) White chocolate

### 5. Which country produces the most cocoa beans in the world today?

- A) Brazil
- B) Mexico
- C) Indonesia
- D) Ivory Coast

## Answer Key

#	Answer	Question
1	C	Which ancient people were the first to use cocoa beans?
2	B	How did the Aztecs drink their chocolate?
3	C	Who brought cocoa beans from the Americas to Spain?
4	B	What did Coenraad van Houten invent in 1828?
5	D	Which country produces the most cocoa beans in the world today?