

Enrich: Mesoamerica (6-4.3)

Directions: Read the article and complete the activity below

Edgar, Blake. "The Power of Chocolate - Archaeology Magazine Archive." Archaeology Magazine Archive, Nov.-Dec. 2015. Web. 28 July 2015.

The Power of Chocolate

When the Spaniards first arrived at the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan in 1519, among the lavish spectacles they witnessed was King Moctezuma being served more than 50 jars of foaming chocolatl. This drink, made from the seeds of the cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao*), was the precursor to what we now know as chocolate.



A Late Classic (A.D. 600–800) vase depicts a Maya lord being presented with a bowl of frothing cacao, or chocolate.

Cacao was central to their concept of political power and played a role in rituals of all sorts, including funerals and marriage celebrations. A 1545 document written in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs and other Central Mexican peoples shows that cacao was even used as currency—a turkey was worth 200 cacao seeds, a tamale was worth one, and the daily wage of a porter at the time was 100 cacao seeds.



The glyph, second from the bottom on the far right column, is the sign for cacao.

Despite its economic and cultural importance in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, archaeologists have until recently had only a hazy understanding of cacao's history. But within the past decade, detective work on dirty clay pots by chemists at the labs of the Hershey Company, the largest producer of chocolate in the U.S., has pushed back the **antiquity** (date) of cacao beverages by 2,000 years to at least 1500 B.C., if not earlier. Understanding the early history of chocolate has led archaeologists to **speculate** (think) that cacao played a critical role in the economic, religious, and political development of people such as the Olmec, Maya, and ultimately even the Anasazi, or Ancestral Pueblo peoples of the American Southwest.



In the 1920s, cylinder vessels similar to those used in Mesoamerica to hold chocolate beverages were discovered at Pueblo Bonito (860–1128), the largest multistory masonry complex, or “Great House,” at New Mexico’s Chaco Canyon.

ACTIVITY: In the article, cacao is mentioned as a currency for several cultures. Create a T-Chart that shows at least 3 benefits and 3 consequences of using this type of currency.

<u>Advantages of cacao currency</u>	<u>Disadvantages of cacao currency</u>