



The Myth of Pure Culture

Reading Worksheet — Level C | tahricteaches.com

Where does your food really come from? You might be surprised. The **tomato** — an important part of Italian cooking — actually came from South America. The chili peppers in Thai and Indian food? Also from South America. The potatoes that Irish people loved so much they built their diet around them? From Peru. For most of history, different parts of the world had almost no **contact** with each other. People on different **continents** lived in completely separate worlds, like islands in a giant ocean.

More than 500 years ago, a man named Christopher Columbus sailed from Spain to the Americas. This changed everything. For the first time in thousands of years, Europe, Asia, and Africa — called the Old World — and the Americas — called the New World — began to **exchange** plants, animals, and ideas. Historians call this the Columbian Exchange. It was one of the biggest events in human history.

The results were enormous. **Horses**, which had disappeared from the Americas 10,000 years earlier, returned with the Europeans. Potatoes and tomatoes traveled to Europe and became important **staple foods**. **Coffee**, which came from Ethiopia in Africa, spread to the Middle East and then to the whole world. Each culture began borrowing from the others — often without knowing it. Today, we think of many of these things as "traditional" parts of a culture, but they all came from somewhere else.

This is what historians mean when they say that "cultural purity" is a **myth**. No culture has ever stayed completely separate and unchanged. Every food, language, and tradition has been influenced by contact with other people. The next time you eat pasta with tomato sauce, drink a cup of coffee, or add chili to your food, remember: you are eating a little bit of world history.



A. Vocabulary Matching

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|-----------------------|--|
| 1. contact | a. one of the seven large areas of land on Earth, such as Asia or Europe |
| 2. continent | b. communication or connection between people or places |
| 3. exchange | c. a story or idea that many people believe but is not actually true |
| 4. staple food | d. the act of giving something and receiving something else in return |
| 5. myth | e. a food that people eat regularly as a main part of their diet |



B. True or False

1. T F Tomatoes originally came from South America.
2. T F Chili peppers were first grown in Asia.
3. T F Christopher Columbus sailed from Spain to the Americas.
4. T F The "Columbian Exchange" connected Europe and the Americas.
5. T F Horses had disappeared from the Americas before Columbus arrived.
6. T F Coffee originally came from Italy.
7. T F The Irish potato originally came from Peru.
8. T F A "pure" culture is one that never borrowed anything from other cultures.



C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: contact continent exchange staple food myth

1. Asia is a _____, which means it is one of the large areas of land on Earth.

2. Rice is a _____ in many Asian countries because people eat it almost every day.

3. Before 1492, the Americas had very little _____ with Europe or Asia.

4. The Columbian _____ moved plants, animals, and ideas between the Old World and the New World.

5. The idea of a "pure" culture is a _____ — no culture has ever existed in complete isolation.

D. Comprehension Questions

1. What is the Columbian Exchange? Explain it in your own words.

2. Give TWO examples of foods that are strongly associated with a country or culture but originally came from somewhere else.

3. What does the article mean when it says "cultural purity is a myth"?

E. Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a food that is famous in your country or culture? Where do you think it originally came from? Does knowing this change how you feel about it?

2. Do you think it is good or bad that cultures mix and borrow from each other? Give a reason for your answer.



Answer Key

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A. Vocabulary

1-b, 2-a, 3-d, 4-e, 5-c

B. True or False

1-T, 2-F, 3-T, 4-T, 5-T, 6-F, 7-T, 8-F

C. Fill in the Blanks

1-continent, 2-staple food, 3-contact, 4-Exchange, 5-myth

D. Comprehension Questions

1. The Columbian Exchange was the movement of plants, animals, and ideas between the Americas (the New World) and Europe, Asia, and Africa (the Old World) after Columbus arrived in 1492. It changed food, culture, and history all over the world.
2. Possible answers include: tomatoes in Italian cooking (from South America); chili peppers in Indian/Thai cooking (from South America); potatoes in Ireland (from Peru); coffee in Arab and European culture (from Ethiopia); horses in North American indigenous culture (from Europe via Columbus).
3. The article means that no culture has ever stayed completely separate and unchanged. Every culture has borrowed foods, words, animals, and ideas from other cultures over centuries. So the idea of a "pure" culture — one that is entirely original and unchanged — is not historically true.