Who Made Corn? Investigation

Name::_____

Activity #1: Look Closely at Farming

Directions: Look at the two pictures of farming.

Picture 1 TItle: _____
What do you notice?

Picture 2 Title : _____
What do you notice?

Which picture looks more like “farming” to you? Why?

What makes something “farming”?

Activity 2: *Ixum: A Mayan Story About the History of Corn*

1.What does corn represent in the story, not just as food, but in people's lives?

2.How is this story different from how we usually learn about farming or food?

3. What does this story teach about the relationship between people and the land?

4. How is your local land similar or different, and how might that change how people grow or care for food?

5. What foods do you and your family gather, grow, or make, and why are they important?

Activity 3: How Will You Grow Your Corn?

Directions: In this activity, you will act like a farmer from the past. Your job is to decide how to grow and improve your corn over time.

1. Describe Your Land

Look closely at your land. Circle at least THREE:

Climate

- Warm and sunny
- Cold or short growing season
- Lots of rain
- Very dry

Land & Soil

- Rich soil
- Poor or rocky soil
- Flat land
- Hilly or uneven land

Conditions

- Windy
- Calm and stable
- Near water (river/lake)
- Far from water

B. What Does Your Land Allow?

Think about the land you circled.

- Plants here would need to be able to…

- Plants here might struggle if they…

C. Decide What Matters Most

Choose TWO priorities based on your land:

- Survive harsh weather
- Grow quickly
- Produce a lot of food
- Need little water
- Grow in poor soil
- Stay standing in wind
- Be reliable year after year

Why do these priorities make sense for your land?

2: Your First Crop

You are choosing which plants to save seeds from.

A. Choose What to Grow

Pick TWO traits to focus on:

- Bigger kernels (more food)
- Softer kernels (easier to eat)
- Kernels that stay on the plant (easier to harvest)
- Plants that grow well in your environment
- Faster growing plants
- Plants that survive bad weather

B. Explain Your Choices

Why did you choose these traits? Think about your land from Step 1.

C. What Might Change?

What do you think your corn will be like after this generation?

- **It will be better at…**
-
- **It might not be as good at…**

Step 3: A Problem Appears

Your corn has started to change—but now you face a new challenge. *Problems happen because of your land and your earlier choices.*

A. Choose Your Problem

Pick ONE problem your corn is facing:

- Not enough water
- Plants falling over in wind
- Not enough food (low yield)
- Plants grow too slowly
- Seeds fall off before harvest

Tip: Think about your land from Step 1 and the choices you made in Step 2.

B. Solve the Problem

Choose ONE trait to improve:

- Drought resistance *(helps plants survive with less water)*
- Strong roots *(helps plants stay in the ground and get nutrients)*
- More kernels *(produces more food)*
- Faster growing plants *(ready to harvest sooner)*
- Shorter plants *(less likely to fall over in wind)*
- Kernels that stay on the plant *(less crop is lost before harvest)*

C. Explain Your Thinking

- Why is this a problem in your land?

- How does your choice help solve the problem?

D. What Is the Tradeoff? **What might you be giving up with this choice?**

Step 4: Different People, Different Corn

Now, compare your corn with another group.

A. Compare With Another Group

- What is different about their land or choices?

- How is their corn different from yours?

B. Explain the Differences

- Why does your group have different corn?

- How did land and decisions shape those differences?

C. Think Bigger **There is not just one “best” kind of corn.**

- Why might different kinds of corn be useful in different places?

Activity 5: What Kind of Corn?

Activity: What Kind of Corn Is This?

Corn Types to Choose From:

Sweet Corn
Flint Corn
Flour Corn
Popcorn
Chapalote (Mexico)

Scenario 1

The wind never really stops where this community lives. Summers are short, and cold weather comes quickly. Families know they have limited time to grow their crops before frost returns, so every decision matters.

Each year, they carefully save seeds from plants that survive these conditions. Their corn has hard outer kernels, stands up well in the wind, and can be dried and stored for long periods of time, helping them get through the winter.

What kind of corn is this?

How do you know?

Scenario 2

In a warm region with a long growing season, a community prepares meals every day using ground corn. Grinding corn is part of daily life, and families rely on it for many different foods.

They grow a type of corn that is soft, easy to grind, and produces a fine flour. This makes it a dependable food that can be used in many ways.

What kind of corn is this?

How do you know?

Scenario 3

At the end of summer, a family gathers in their field to harvest corn. Children laugh as they peel back the husks and eat it right away, enjoying its sweet taste.

This corn is grown to be eaten fresh. It is juicy and tender, but it does not last long after it is picked, so it is not used for storage.

What kind of corn is this?

How do you know?

Scenario 4

As the fire crackles at the end of the day, a group prepares a snack. They place dried corn kernels into a clay pot and hold it over the heat. Soon, the kernels begin to burst open with a popping sound.

This corn is small, hard, and reacts to heat in a surprising way, creating a food that is both fun and useful.

What kind of corn is this?

How do you know?

Scenario 5

In northern Mexico, a farmer looks out over dry land under a hot sun. Rain does not come often, and pests can damage crops. Growing food here takes careful knowledge and experience.

Over many generations, this community has grown a type of corn that can survive these harsh conditions. The ears are slender, and the kernels are often reddish or brown. This corn is well adapted to its environment and has been passed down over time.

What kind of corn is this?

How do you know?

Scenario 6

Two neighboring communities visit each other's fields at harvest time.

One group lives in a dry, hot region where water is limited. The other lives in a cooler place with more rain and a longer growing season. As they compare their crops, they notice the corn looks different, grows differently, and is used in different ways.

What kind(s) of corn might each group grow?

How do you know?

Scenario 7

As winter approaches, a community begins preparing their food stores. They know that once the cold arrives, growing food will not be possible for months.

They grow corn that can be dried, stored, and used over time. It may not taste the sweetest or be eaten fresh, but it is dependable and helps them survive through the winter.

What kind of corn is this?

How do you know?

Scenario 8

A group of farmers plan their fields together before planting. They are not just thinking about corn, they are thinking about how all their crops will grow together and support each other.

They plant corn alongside beans and squash, knowing each plant plays a role. They choose corn that grows well in this system and helps keep the land productive year after year.

What kind of corn might they choose?

How do you know?