

CHOCOLATE

Learning Objective:

To explore the origins of the cocoa bean



Do you know what the
essential basic ingredient
for chocolate is?

Think, pair, then share your ideas.



Cocoa beans
(also known as cacao beans)



Cocoa pods

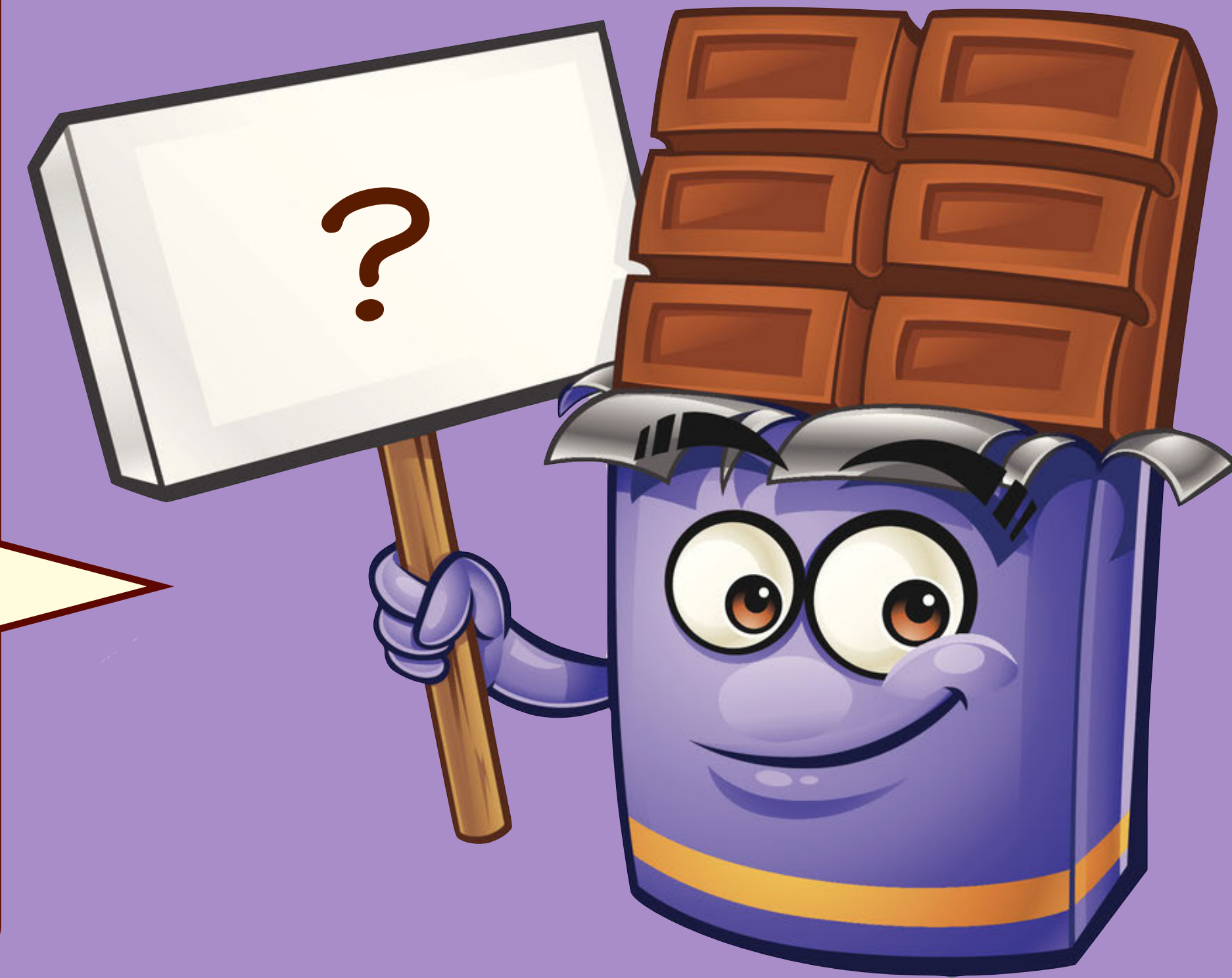


Cocoa tree

The basis for any chocolate product is the cocoa bean, which grows in pods on cocoa trees.



How long do you think
people have been using
cocoa beans to make
chocolate?



Think, pair, then share your ideas.



The earliest evidence of cocoa bean usage was found in Central America, dating back to around 1000BC! Unearthed pieces of broken pottery were tested and found to contain traces of caffeine and theobromine – both of which are found in cocoa beans. The broken pottery was a vessel used for liquid, and held some sort of chocolate drink made from cocoa!



The group of people living in Mesoamerica (modern day Mexico and Central America) between 2000BC and 1500AD were a tribe called the Maya. They used the cocoa beans to make a drink that they called 'xocoatl', which translates as 'bitter water'! It doesn't sound too appealing, does it?





Pouring the mixture to develop the froth.

Xocoatl recipe

1. Remove the cocoa beans from the pods.
2. Leave them to dry.
3. Roast the beans until they turn brown.
4. Remove the shells and grind the seeds into a paste.
5. Mix the paste with water, chilli peppers and cornmeal.
6. Pour back and forth from pot to pot until a froth appears on top.
7. Serve and enjoy!



This drink was highly prized by the Maya, who called it the 'food of the gods'. Many artefacts have been found which show pictures of people gathering, preparing and consuming this valued beverage, as well as the actual tools they used to make it.

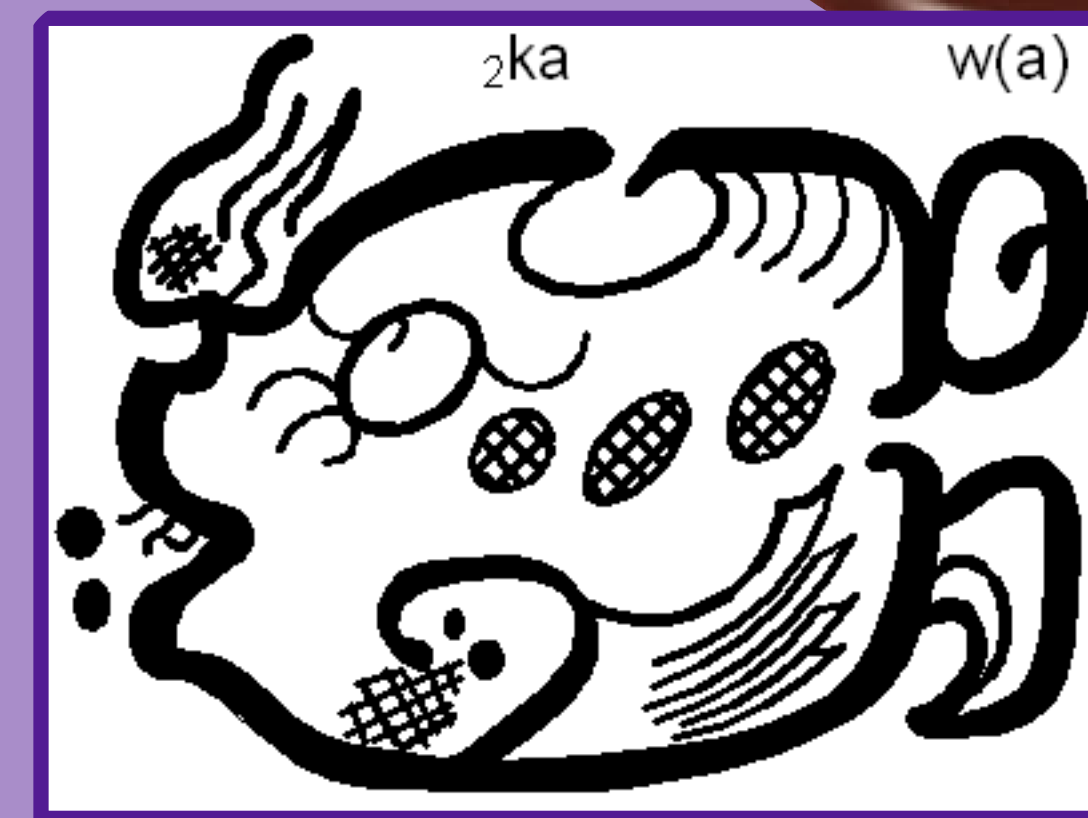


Mayan plate showing a woman grinding cocoa.



A metate and mano (the smaller stone) - the tools used to grind the beans.

The Mayan people believed that xocoatl had healing and medicinal properties, and so everyone drank it, regardless of their status in society. It also played a very important part in the Maya's social and spiritual life - it was consumed as part of religious ceremonies and marriages.



Maya glyph (picture word) for cocoa





Over time, the power of the Mayan empire lessened, and by 1200AD another tribe became dominant in Mesoamerica - the *Aztecs*. They learnt about the cocoa bean from the Maya, but could not grow it themselves, as they lived further north-west, where the climate was too dry for the trees to grow.



Quetzalcoatl, the god of learning

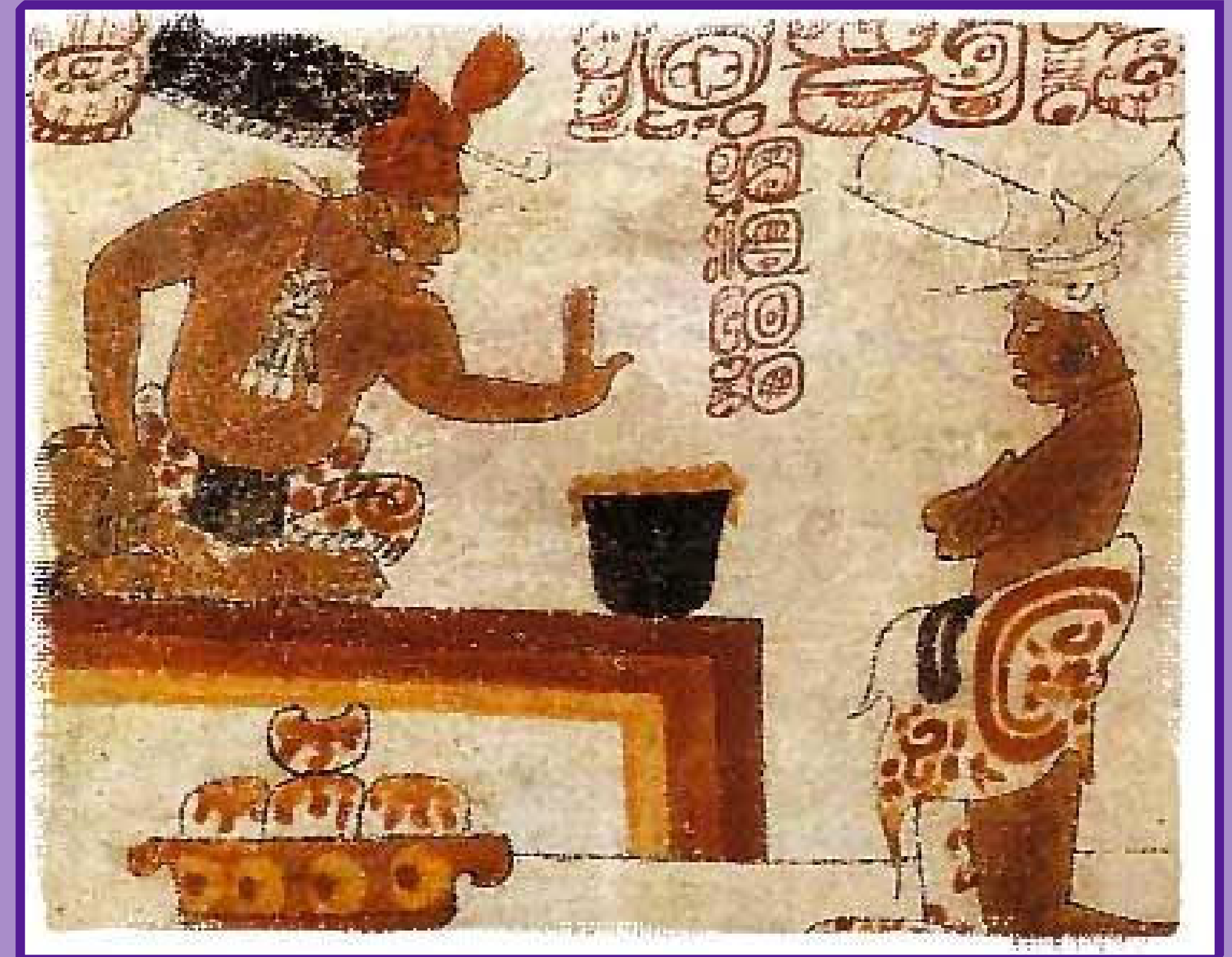
The Aztecs believed that the god Quetzalcoatl had given humans the knowledge of the cocoa bean and how to produce xocoatl when he came down to Earth on the rays of a morning star! This legend made the cocoa bean all the more valuable to the Aztecs.





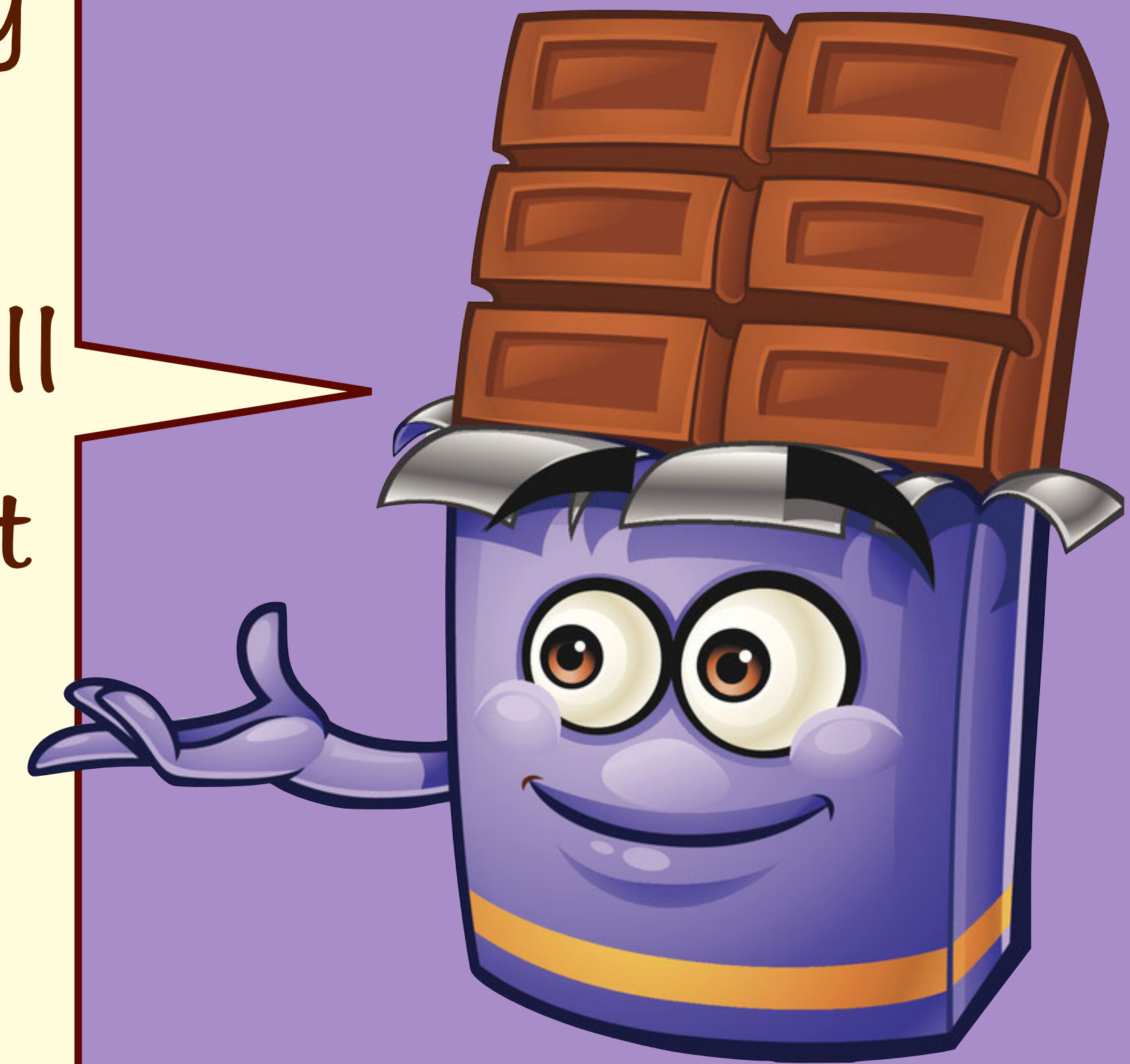
By 1400AD, the Aztec empire had grown so powerful that they were able to demand 'tributes' (taxes) from the other tribes who lived in the surrounding areas. These tributes took the form of cocoa beans! This meant that even though the Aztecs couldn't grow their own cocoa beans, they always had a supply of them.

The Aztecs saw xocoatl as a luxury item, and so only the richest and most important people were allowed to drink it. The wealthiest Aztecs had it served in golden goblets, which were thrown away after a single use!



A wealthy man telling his slave to stay away from the xocoatl!

In time, the cocoa bean became so highly prized that it was used as a form of currency (money). The richest Aztecs still consumed their cocoa as a beverage, but poorer members of society used their precious few beans to purchase essentials like food and clothing.





Let's see what you could get for your beans...

- 1 cocoa bean = large tomato
- 2 cocoa beans = chicken egg
- 3 cocoa beans = ripe avocado
- 30 cocoa beans = rabbit
- 200 cocoa beans = male turkey
- 600 cocoa beans = child slave
- 2000 cocoa beans = adult slave

For the Aztecs,
money really did
grow on trees!





The use of cocoa as a currency increased the trade routes throughout Mesoamerica. Cocoa beans, especially those of high quality and therefore more value, were kept in locked boxes. Some imaginative Aztecs even made counterfeit (pretend) cocoa beans!

Are you ready to find out
more about the different
ways the Maya and Aztecs
used the cocoa bean?



Plenary:



How do the Maya and Aztec attitudes and beliefs about the cocoa bean compare with our modern day view of chocolate?

Think, pair, then share your ideas.

Back

www.planbee.com