

PICKLES PAST AND PRESENT

AN ANCIENT EDIBLE

Pickles are part of the American way of life. Americans eat pickles with sandwiches and burgers. They eat salads and relishes made with pickles. And they eat pickles straight from the jar. But Americans didn't invent the pickle. The crunchy snack was eaten long before America was discovered.

Pickle history began around 2030 BC. People carried cucumber seeds from India to the Tigris River Valley of the Middle East and planted them there. Cucumber vines flourished. Soon the vines were growing throughout Europe. What does this have to do with pickles? Well, pickles start out as cucumbers. Because people in ancient times didn't have refrigeration, they sought a way to keep food from spoiling. They discovered that storing cucumbers in salty water worked. Today we call salt-rich water *brine* and the process of preserving foods *pickling*.



SNACK OF THE FAMOUS

Many famous people in history loved pickles. Presidents who developed a passion for pickles included George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams. Some famous people believed pickles had amazing health benefits. The Egyptian queen, Cleopatra, believed eating pickles made her beautiful. The Roman emperor, Julius Caesar, fed pickles to his troops. He believed pickles provided physical and spiritual strength.

Actually, pickles do have health benefits. During his famous 1492 voyage, Christopher Columbus rationed pickles to his sailors to keep them from getting *scurvy*, a deadly illness. Today, pickles are considered a good snack because they are fat free and low in calories.

PICKLES IN AMERICA

By the mid 1600s, the crunchy pickled cucumber had made its debut in America. Dutch farmers were growing large amounts of cucumbers near what is now New York City. The farmers sold the cucumbers to peddlers. The peddlers pickled the cucumbers in barrels and sold them to early settlers. The pickles were very popular.

Today, many varieties of pickles are manufactured. Dill-flavored pickles are most popular, followed by sweet pickles. Each year, Americans consume about 2.5 billion pounds of pickles. That's 20 billion pickles! How many pickles do you think you eat each year?

Write the answers.

1. Why were pickles invented? _____
2. Explain the meaning of this sentence: By the mid 1600s, the crunchy pickled cucumber had made its debut in America. _____

3. Explain why pickles were important to each person:
Cleopatra: _____
Christopher Columbus: _____
George Washington: _____
4. What is the difference between *brine* and *pickling*? _____

5. How did Dutch farmers contribute to the popularity of pickles? _____

6. What two flavors of pickles are most popular today? _____

Answer Key

“Pickles Past and Present” (RI.4.10, RI.5.10)

1. People in ancient times were looking for a way to keep their food from spoiling.
2. Americans were eating pickles by the mid 1600s.
3. Cleopatra: She believed eating pickles made her beautiful.
Christopher Columbus: He rationed pickles to his sailors to keep them from getting scurvy.
George Washington: He liked the way pickles tasted.
4. Brine is a salt-rich solution. Pickling is a process of preserving foods.
5. Dutch farmers grew large amounts of cucumbers and sold them to peddlers who used the cucumbers to make pickles.
6. dill and sweet