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The Story of Corn – Script and Guide for Storyteller

The Story of Corn

Central image: *Every strand of silk on a cob of corn is connected to a kernel.*

*“I wonder how different communities might be connected by corn.
I wonder how you and I are connected by corn.”*

Concrete materials ('story kit'):

- ◆ box containing 'story kit'
- ◆ cloth underlay
- ◆ teocintli
- ◆ sticks and bucket
- ◆ seeds
- ◆ corn cob – multimedia with strands of 'silk'
- ◆ suitcase
- ◆ world map
- ◆ Three Sisters (beans, squash, corn)
- ◆ chicken, pig, cow
- ◆ full shopping cart
- ◆ insect(s) and plant
- ◆ Honduras pictures

With box in front, storyteller places hands gently on box, saying:

This is the story of seeds, seeds that grow. Seeds that grow into plants, seeds that grow into ideas, seeds that grow into communities.

With box to the side, storyteller opens box, removes cloth underlay and carefully smooths it out, saying:

And this is the story of a special kind of seed, a travelling, changing, amazing seed.

Storyteller removes teocintli from box and places it near the top centre of the underlay, saying:

Our story begins long, long ago in the central highlands of Mexico, in a place called Oaxaca (Wa-ha-ca). It begins with this wild grass plant.



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The people who lived in this high valley spent hours in the plains and foothills gathering. They gathered plants for medicine and for fibre to weave clothes, plants for making twine or glue or paint, and of course, plants for food.

One day, someone noticed this wild seed plant with tiny seed bundles, each holding a single row of tightly packed, cube-shaped seeds on a cob-like stem. These seed bundles were easy to pick, easy to cook, and they tasted good!

Storyteller removes sticks and bucket from box and places them around the teocintli, saying:

The people took care of the wild plants and helped them grow. Each fall they chose seeds from plants with the largest bundles of the tastiest seeds, from plants that started earlier in the spring and lasted longer in the cold snaps of fall.

Storyteller removes seeds from box and places them in a row on each side of the teocintli, saying:

The people scattered these seeds in spring, working together to cultivate larger and larger patches of bigger and stronger plants. They called these plants 'teocintli,' meaning 'grain of the gods.' This grain became the most important food for the people and they ate it everyday. Through the year many stories were told about teocintli and festivals were held to honour and celebrate its growth and harvest.

Over time this wild grass plant with tiny bundles of seeds transformed into the plant we know today as...

Storyteller removes corn cob from box and places it in the centre of the underlay, saying:

...maize...or...corn.

Did you know that each strand of silk on a cob of corn is connected to a kernel? We have seen how a community of people can be connected by corn, working together to grow nutritious food and celebrating its abundance.

I wonder how different communities might be connected by corn. I wonder how you and I are connected by corn.



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Storyteller removes suitcase from box, places it beside the corn cob, stretches out a strand of silk and connects it to the suitcase, saying:

As teocintli grew and thrived in the high valleys of Mexico, travellers carried seeds as they journeyed far and wide. They planted these seeds in places with many different kinds of soil and many different climates. Dry places, wet places, hot places, cool places.

Storyteller removes world map from box, places it beside the corn cob, stretches out a strand of silk and connects it to the map, saying:

Today, corn grows on almost every continent in the world. The plants and their seeds may look a little different in different places because they have adapted to the conditions where they are growing. Corn is diverse, flexible, open to change, and it connects communities all over the world! Let's see how people in some of these communities have connected with this amazing plant...

Storyteller removes Three Sisters from box, places it beside the corn cob, stretches out a strand of silk and connects it to the Three Sisters, saying:

As people went from gathering wild seeds to growing their own crops, they looked for ways to produce the most abundant food for harvest. Among many of North America's First Peoples, planting corn with pole beans and squash became an important tradition. The sturdy stalks of corn supported the climbing beans and the shade of the squash vines trapped moisture for the growing crop. The bacterial colonies on the bean roots captured nitrogen from the air, and released it into the soil to meet the needs of the corn. These plants, thought to be special gifts from the Creator, are known as the Three Sisters. The First Peoples used companion planting to grow a generous supply of nourishing food and they created legends about the Three Sisters, sisters who would never be apart from one another, sisters who should be planted together, eaten together, and celebrated together.

Storyteller removes farm animals from box, places it beside the corn cob, stretches out a strand of silk and connects it to the farm animals, saying:

At first, people harvested corn only as food for themselves. Over time, people learned that they could also feed corn to the animals they were raising for meat. Farmers began to grow a new kind of corn plant with kernels that were not as tasty to people and that were not as nutritious. These plants could be grown very close together and produced many cobs of corn on each plant. Farmers could harvest a lot of 'feed corn' for



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livestock. Today people are learning that a diet of corn alone can hurt animals and they are questioning the practice of using so much land and water to produce feed corn.

Storyteller removes shopping cart from box, places it beside the corn cob, stretches out a strand of silk and connects it to the shopping cart, saying:

With so much of this new kind of corn being harvested, people began to find new ways to use it. They invented a sweet syrup, called high fructose corn syrup, and began to use it in many foods for people even though it is not a healthy addition to our meals. Corn makes its way into our bodies through foods and products like breakfast cereals, corn-fed animals, chewing gum, juices and soft drinks, jams, ketchup and mustard, candies, toothpaste, and medicines. Although corn is a food crop, it also appears in our lives in many other forms. It is used in car parts and tires, crayons, disposable diapers, ethanol car fuel, latex paint, soaps, and cleaners. Of 10,000 items in a grocery store, as many as 2,500 contain corn! Looking into a shopping cart, it is easy to see how you and I are connected by corn.

Storyteller removes insect and 'weed' from box, places it beside the corn cob, stretches out a strand of silk and connects it to the insect and 'weed', saying:

While farmers selected seeds to grow the strongest and most productive crops, insects and other plants affected the corn harvest. Farmers began to use chemicals to kill competing plants and scientists began mixing the genes of bacteria and corn to create plants that would resist insects. Many people are concerned about the safety of this corn for people and animals.

These stories (point to farm animals, shopping cart, insect & weed) show us how people have used corn's amazing adaptability and versatility in ways that do not always sustain, renew, and nurture people, plants, and animals in our world.

Let's turn to a story that shows us another way to connect with corn.

Storyteller removes picture of Honduran hills from box, places it beside the corn cob, stretches out a strand of silk and connects it to the Honduran hills, saying:

The people of Honduras rely on their corn crop for food, yet the climate is changing. When heavy rains and floods began to wash out their crops just before harvest, farmers came together with support from the Unitarian Service Committee. They, like the early gatherers of teocintl, began to select and plant seeds from corn plants that had shorter and sturdier stalks, plants that could stay rooted in the heavy rains and floods.



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Storyteller removes seeds and pictures of seed bank and natural pesticide from box, places them beside the corn cob, stretches out a strand of silk and connects it to the seeds and pictures of seed bank and natural pesticide, saying:

The farmers work together to share seeds and knowledge, developing varieties of corn that are well suited to the region where they live. They use local neem plants to make natural insecticides.

Storyteller removes picture of people from box, places it beside the corn cob, stretches out a strand of silk and connects it to the people, saying:

Women and men of all ages are bringing their ideas and offering the work of their hands to preserve and support a healthy food supply for their whole community.

Storyteller patiently points to all the strands radiating out from the cob of corn, saying:

Each strand of silk on a cob of corn is connected to a kernel. People are connected by the work they do together, the ideas they share, the stories and celebrations they create, and by the food they eat! People are connected by a travelling, changing, amazing seed.

Every April in Mexico's San Cristobal de las Casas, people celebrate the corn crop with a festival. They say, "This is a ceremony to remember that corn has made us who we are and has given us a link with all humanity. And when the first rain comes, we give thanks for that."

www.ontariocorn.org
www.matrifocus.com

www.culturalsurvival.org
www.historyforkids.org
www.pulseplanet.com

A Zillion Uses for Corn
The Story of Agriculture, Corn, and the Corn Goddesses Who Grew With Them (Amy Martin)
The People of the Corn (Christina Santini)
Corn
People of the Corn

King Corn (DVD)
The Gift (DVD)