The History of Pizza

Pre-reading

Questions:

• What do you know about this topic?

Definitions:

• Appetizer – a small amount of food served a short time before or at the beginning of a meal
• Consume – to eat or drink a large amount

Reading

Pizza has been pleasing taste buds for a very long time. In prehistoric times, people baked large pieces of bread on flat cooking stones. Later, in Italy, these flat pieces of bread were seasoned with herbs and called focaccia bread. To this day, many people like to eat focaccia bread as an appetizer or snack.

When Europeans came to the New World, they were introduced to tomatoes, which they then took back to their home countries. The Italians needed something to add to their bread-filled diet. The people of Naples, Italy, were the first to put tomatoes on focaccia bread. At first, people were hesitant to use tomatoes. They thought this red fruit may be poisonous.

The world’s first pizzeria, Port’ Alba, opened in 1830. Pizzas were baked in an oven lined with lava from a local volcano. The first pizza delivery occurred in 1889 when an Italian restaurant owner was asked to create a special dish for the guest of honor, Queen Margherita Giovanni.

He wanted to include the colors of the Italian flag in his dish for the queen. He added tomatoes (red), mozzarella cheese (white), and basil (green) to focaccia bread. He named the meal the Margherita Pizza, using part of the guest of honor’s name along with part of the name of the restaurant – Pietro Il Pizzaiolo. The pizza was delivered to the palace because the queen did not want to go all the way to the restaurant.

In 1905, Gennaro Lombardi opened the first pizzeria in the U.S. It still stands in New York City today. Pizza did not become popular until after World War II. War veterans who had been stationed in Italy returned home craving the pizza they had eaten there.

Soon, pre-made pizza mixes, frozen pizza, and pizzeria chains appeared around the country. Today, pizza is one of the most popular foods in the world. Some interesting pizza facts include:

• Pizza Hut is the largest pizza company in the world.
• The world’s largest pizza measured 37.4 meters in diameter. It was baked in South Africa in 1990.
• Kids between the ages of 3 and 11 prefer pizza over all other foods for dinner.
• Three out of the top ten weeks of pizza consumption occur in January. More pizza is consumed during Super Bowl week than any other week of the year.
• 62% of Americans prefer meat toppings on their pizza.
• Mozzarella cheese was originally made from the milk of water buffalo.

Article courtesy of the Michigan Department of Agriculture, www.michigan.gov/mda
Understanding

1. What was the name of the world’s first pizza place? Where was it? __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

2. What does the word **chain** mean in this reading? _____________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

3. What was the first fruit on pizza? ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

4. What was the precursor to pizza? ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

5. How was the first pizza created? For whom was it made? __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

6. What does the word **season** mean in this reading? __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

7. When did pizza come to the U.S.? ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

8. Which pizza fact surprised you the most? Why? __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

Writing

**Option A:** Summarize the reading in your own words.

**Option B:** Do you like pizza?

- If yes, write about your favorite kind. Where do you get it? How often do you eat it?
  What are your favorite toppings?
- If no, what don’t you like about it? What Italian food, if any, do you prefer?