Mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Who invented candy?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

[Video Call]

- Hi, Doug!

- Hi, Broc!

- I have a question for you. Who invented candy?

- Ooh, that's a great question.

There have been a lot of amazing inventions throughout history, the alphabet, the wheel, the first airplane, and then there's candy. Okay, candy might not be as important as the wheel or writing, but you have to admit, there's something about candy that makes a lot of people smile. In fact, some people love candy so much that they've gone out of their way to let the world know, like the makers of the world's biggest lollipop, it's as tall as a giraffe, or the artists who made this record-breaking Wizard of Oz candy sculpture using 88,000 jelly beans but candy hasn't always been around. What did people do before candy was invented? What did they do when they wanted something sweet? What do you think?

VIDEO 2

Well, when we look at drawings from way back in time, we see that people from around the world have enjoyed sweet treats for thousands of years. Check out this ancient hieroglyph. Can you tell what these ancient Egyptians are doing? You may have guessed that they're baking cakes. They are, and these cakes are sweetened with honey. The ancient Romans had sweet treats, too, like dulcia. It was made by stuffing nuts in a fruit and cooking it in honey. Shops that would sell this were really popular in Roman cities. But even though sweet treats have been around for thousands of years, for most people, their sweet treats were always sweetened using honey or the sweetness that comes from fruit. In ancient India, however, the people there had something special. It wasn't until other cultures started to visit ancient India that an entirely different kind of sweet treat got to be known worldwide. Visitors to India had never seen anything like it. It wasn't a cake like the Egyptians were used to. And it wasn't honey-cooked fruit like the Romans' dulcia. The people of India had created something that was deliciously new. It was incredibly sweet. When visitors from other cultures asked the Indian bakers, "What do you call these delicious treats?" They answered with one word khanda, which you might recognize. This is where our word candy comes from. It's from the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit. Visitors to India would have been stumped. "This is impossible," they probably said. "Only honey or fruit can make things sweet. "How are you making this khanda without honey or fruit?" But that's when the ancient Indians would have pointed towards a plant the visitors had never seen before, one that grows in India. By smashing this plant, they could get a sweet juice out of it. Then they could boil the juice and let it dry until it hardens into these tiny crystals. The ancient Indians had discovered an amazing new ingredient.

What in the language of Sanskrit, they called sharkara—sound familiar—English borrow that word from Sanskrit, sharkara—we pronounce it sugar! The plant is called the sugarcane, and in ancient India, they were using it to make candy in the shapes of animals and people. Soon other people began taking sugar back to their home countries and making their own khanda inventions. Like in China, where bakers began adding sugar to their old treats, like ginger and nuts, to make entirely new candy treats. And look at this root. People in England had been eating it for years, but it tasted a lot better when it was sweetened with sugar and turned into a candy known today as licorice. Over time, new treats like lollipops, candy canes, taffy, and caramels were being invented almost every day. Factories made lots of candy to keep up with how much people wanted it. It may seem weird to us now, but people were so excited about candy that they thought maybe it could even cure things, like stomachaches and colds. Since that time we've learned that candy isn't medicine. In fact, eating too much candy isn't good for us. That's why candy is a sometimes treat that we shouldn't eat all the time. But candy can still be fun, as long as we don't eat too much of it, especially now that there are thousands of types of candy to choose from, like these candy eggs with toys inside, and these gummy lightening bugs. They actually light up when you squeeze their stomach. In Japan, there are even candies where you can eat the wrappers. So in summary, people around the world have craved sweet treats for years, but it was people in India who taught the rest of the world how to use sugar to make khanda, the type of sweet treat we call candy. Since then, candy has become one of the world's most popular treats. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Broc, for asking it!