THE CHOCOLATE FARMER

All the knowledge that they teach us, we cannot eat it

TEACHER'S GUIDE

A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA PRODUCTION

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ABOUT THE FILM

This feature-length documentary takes us to an unspoiled corner of southern Belize, where cacao farmer and father Eladio Pop manually works his plantation in the tradition of his Mayan ancestors: as a steward of the land. The film captures a year in the life of the Pop family as they struggle to preserve their values in a world that is dramatically changing around them. A lament for cultures lost, ***The Chocolate Farmer*** challenges our deeply held assumptions about progress.

The film addresses a number of themes that can be examined in the classroom, including globalization, preservation of culture, sustainability, organic farming and eco-tourism. This guide provides context to these themes as well as ideas on how to successfully explore them with students.

RECOMMENDED AGE LEVEL

This film is suitable for students aged 13 and up.

RECOMMENDED SUBJECT AREAS

This film can be integrated into the curriculum in the following subject areas at the secondary and post-secondary levels:

- Social Studies
- World Issues
- Geography
- History
- Aboriginal Studies
- Agriculture
- Environmental Studies
- Food and Nutrition
- Economics
- International Development
- Human Rights
- Business

ABOUT BELIZE

Belize is located on the northeastern coast of Central America. It is bordered to the north by Mexico, to the south and west by Guatemala and to the east by the Caribbean Sea. Belize's population is made up of Creoles, the largest ethnic group, followed by Mestizos, Garifunas and the Mayas. This multi-ethnic country is also home to communities of German Mennonites, Chinese, East Indians and immigrants from the Middle East.

Belizean Creoles are the descendants of slaves—brought from Africa and the West Indies—and their British and Spanish owners. Generally, to be Creole means to have some African ancestry, but the term is now used primarily to identify non-Indian, non-Mestizo ways of life, with a set of social values derived from the Anglo-Saxon countries.

Mestizos are a mixture of Spanish and Mayan descendants and tend to be primarily Spanish-speaking, occupying the north of Belize.

Scattered along the Caribbean coast, the Garifuna people initially came to Belize from Honduras. The Garifunas are a cultural and ethnic fusion of African slaves, Carib Indians and a sprinkling of Europeans.

The majority of Belizeans are Roman Catholic. However, due to the heavy British influence, Belize has a larger Protestant population than any other country in Central America. The Maya and Garifuna practise their own fascinating mixture of shamanism and Christianity.

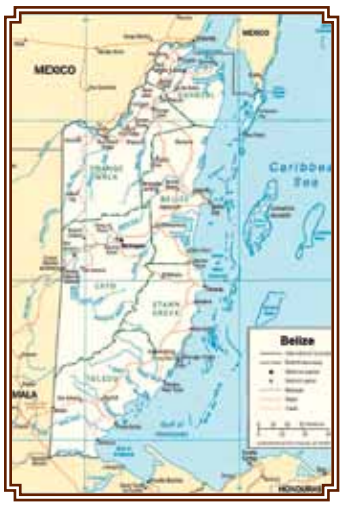
The official language of Belize is English, but many other languages are also used. Along the coast, you're most likely to hear Creole—a colourful variation of English—spoken. If you listen carefully, you might notice a familiar word or two—maybe!

The ancient Maya flourished here during the Classic Period from AD 300 to 900. Archaeologists now estimate that 2 million Mayas once lived in what is now Belize. Recent discoveries and expanded analyses have led many archaeologists and cultural anthropologists to conclude that the centre of Maya civilization was, in fact, Belize. Belize is a treasure trove of ancient Mayan temples, towns and cities, only a few of which have been uncovered.

After the collapse of their civilization, some lowland Maya still occupied the area when Europeans arrived in the 16th century. By then the primary inhabitants were the Mopan branch of the Yucatec Maya. Spanish colonists tried to settle the inland areas of Belize, but Maya rebellions and attacks forced them to abandon these efforts.

English and Scottish buccaneers known as Baymen first settled on the coast of Belize in 1638, seeking a sheltered region from which they could attack Spanish ships. These British settlers came to depend on slave labour for the harsh logging work in the area. Many skirmishes between the British Baymen and the Spanish arose, for the Spanish still claimed control of the area. The showdown came on September 10, 1798, at St. George's Caye when Baymen chased Spanish ships away from what had come to be known as British Honduras. The date is still celebrated as a national holiday in Belize.

British Honduras was officially renamed Belize in 1973. Progress toward independence, however, was hampered by a Guatemalan claim to sovereignty over the territory of Belize. When Belize finally attained full independence on September 21, 1981, Guatemala refused to recognize the new nation. About 1,500 British troops remained to protect Belize from the Guatemalan threat.



Belize's abundance of terrestrial and marine species and its diversity of ecosystems give it a key place within the globally significant Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. To the east, in the Caribbean Sea, the second-largest barrier reef in the world flanks much of the 386 kilometres of predominantly marshy coastline.

Belize has a small, essentially private-enterprise economy that is based primarily on agriculture, agro-based industry and merchandising, with tourism and construction recently assuming greater importance.

ABOUT THE MAYA

The Maya are no strangers to intellectual and technological progress. Their ancestors rose to the highest peaks of knowledge and technological efficiency in a complex civilization that existed over two thousand years ago. Their cities in ancient Mesoamerica were full of grandeur and decadence, with populations bigger than that of ancient Rome, which existed within the same time period. And although this civilization made great advancements in the physical sciences, astronomy, ecology, food production, social order and especially in art and architecture, their most precious commodity was the cacao bean. It was called "the food of the gods" and was hoarded by the elites. It was used in every major ceremony, including births, weddings and deaths. Kings and queens were buried with the highly valued bean. Cacao was even used as currency, traded for crafts, food and precious stones such as jade and obsidian. A shade-loving plant, cacao was grown alongside its ritually paired opposite, corn, which grew in the sun; the farming of both crops was part of the very foundation of Mayan civilization.

The elite classes of pre-history that lived in and controlled the trading centres of the region used the production and exchange of cacao to generate resources and attract followers—people who would live under their political systems and supply labour, carrying large boulders up tall mountains and building massive structures, for ceremonial and political gatherings, using only stone tools and sticks.

The elites would have claimed that if they weren't able to continue to perform their ceremonies on these hilltops, the rain wouldn't fall and the cacao wouldn't grow. This argument would have been highly convincing to local populations that saw the elites predict phenomena such as solar and lunar eclipses; their seemingly divine knowledge substantiated their earthly power. The rulers would have also convinced their populations to grow cacao, which was consumed only by the elites.

It is still unclear what caused the collapse of the Mayan empire—whether it was ecological disaster, overpopulation, mismanagement of resources or warfare (which seems less and less likely), or whether people just got fed up and decided to quit carrying cumbersome rocks up mountains for the benefit of others.

A team of archaeologists currently working in Belize is discovering data that suggests there was a long drought that may have played a role in this collapse. If such a drought did occur, it would have caused people to lose faith in their ruler's divine abilities, and acted as an incentive to stop producing surplus for the elites and focus on their own basic needs instead. We know that the complex civilization of the Maya deteriorated, and as history attests, collapse happens when elites lose control in any social order. The surviving Maya broke into small communal groups and continued to exist on subsistence farming for generations, even in the face of foreign invasions and large-scale turmoil.

The Maya of the Toledo district in southern Belize have been following the traditions of their ancestors for over a thousand years. Living in communal villages and practising subsistence farming, they have continued to survive long after the collapse of their great civilization and the subsequent invasion by the Spanish five hundred years later. Their obsession with chocolate has also survived the cultural upheavals of the last millennium.

THE POP FAMILY

Eladio Pop is a contemporary cacao farmer, skilled in sustainable organic methods and solidly rooted in traditional Mayan knowledge. Uneducated in the formal sense, Eladio is naturally reflective and philosophical, and wisely practical.

Eladio lives in a small village called San Pedro Columbia about 30 kilometres outside the sleepy town of Punta Gorda, in the southern district of Belize. Only a dirt road connects this area of Belize to the more developed north. Now, the construction of a highway is bringing the promise of development, electricity, industry and large-scale tourism.

Every morning, Eladio enjoys his traditional cacao drink—the same drink his ancestors have consumed for two millennia—and heads off into the jungle surrounding the village. It's about a 40-minute walk to his farm, a 30-acre area hardly distinguishable from the surrounding jungle.

None of Eladio's grown children is interested in taking over the family farm. They're all pursuing more lucrative professions. Eladio understands that "chopping bush" is hard physical work and probably doesn't appeal to young people who are looking for an easier lifestyle with more pay that will afford them material possessions he never dreamed of. They've seen the possibilities on television, which brings visions of fast cars, big houses and happy, effortless lives. For Eladio, this is a source of tension and constant worry. He believes the path they're choosing will eventually make them slaves to a system that may not even have jobs for them in the end. He believes their future is more secure if they learn to live a self-sustaining life on the farm, and he concludes, "All the knowledge they teach you—you cannot eat it."

SUSTAINABLE FARMING AND THE MAYA

Eladio's farm is completely organic. He doesn't use fertilizers or pesticides. The only tool he uses is a machete to prune and clear, driven by the energy of his own physical effort. As he says himself:

"This planet is already cultivated—I'm just a caretaker."

A diverse array of crops and natural vegetation co-exist in an ecologically sound and self-sustaining ecosystem. Eladio knows every plant and tree on his farm intimately and uses his immense knowledge of the wild flora in the surrounding jungle to seek out medicinal plants to cure anything from indigestion to headaches.

Although Eladio's primary obsessions are his cacao trees, he also grows corn, rice, mango, banana and other fruits and vegetables that feed his large family of 15. Any surplus is taken to market and sold for extra income.

Eladio uses a process called "shifting agriculture" on his rice fields. In this type of agriculture, a patch of forested land is cleared by a combination of felling and burning, and crops are grown. After two to three years the fertility of the soil begins to decline, the land is abandoned and Eladio moves to clear a fresh piece of land elsewhere in the forest, and the process continues. While the land is left fallow, the forest regrows in the cleared area and soil fertility and biomass are restored. However, for all other crops, no burning is required. Eladio simply allows the cleared vegetation to compost and serve as fertilizer. Subsistence agriculture was the dominant mode of production in the world until recently, when market-based capitalism became widespread.

ABOUT CACAO FARMING

When the cacao trees are ready to be harvested, the pods take on a bright yellow hue. Twisted off the tree with great care, the pods are broken open with a stone rather than with a machete, which could potentially damage the precious beans. The sweet, milky white flesh covering the beans is gleefully devoured by Eladio and his children, before the beans are left to ferment in a wooden box.

After fermentation, Eladio's wife puts the cacao out to dry for a number of days. A portion of the harvest is then roasted for the family's use and the rest is transported by one of the children on a bus to Punta Gorda, where it is brought to the office of the Toledo Cacao Growers Association. The beans are inspected for quality before being bought and paid for on the spot at fair-trade prices.

Owned by the farmers themselves, the TCGA represents their interests and coordinates the sale of cacao beans from southern Belize. The TCGA also regulates the quality of beans produced and deals with the immense amount of paperwork required to maintain the organic and fair-trade certification for their cacao beans. Since most of the farmers have only a very basic education and no business experience, Armando Choc manages business on their behalf.

At 29, Armando was thrust into a highly demanding role as the new manager of the TCGA when Gregor Hargrove, a retired Canadian businessman, suddenly passed away in 2008. Full of integrity and passion for the welfare of his farmers and community, Armando immediately took to his role as an intermediary between the farmers and the outside market, dealing with their often conflicting demands. It's not an easy position, but Armando clearly understands the importance of his task.

"It has to be balanced… We do not necessarily have to compete with commercial agriculture… against the influence of the West. We have to do something for ourselves."

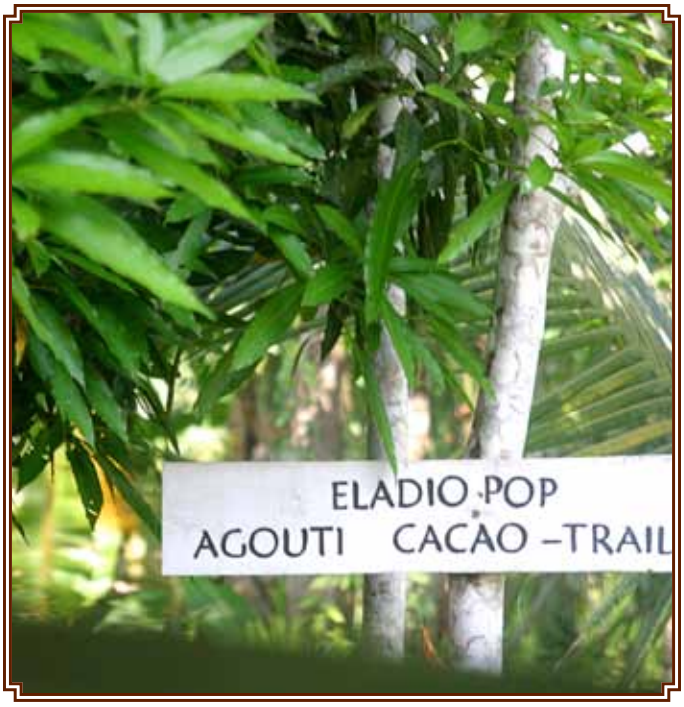
Since he also has the future of his one-month-old son to consider, Armando's search for balance infiltrates directly into his personal life. Like all the Mayas of his community, he stands at the crossroads of his shamanic past, whose traditions lie within the cycles of nature, and a future that must incorporate the necessities of business, industry and economic progress. Committed to safeguarding his community's traditional way of life, Armando is realizing that his farmers will have to reassess some of their traditional methods of farming cacao in order to succeed in the global marketplace.

The most obvious challenge is to increase production tenfold. Although total co-op membership is more than 1,000 farmers, the highest annual output meets only one-tenth of the market demand. The TCGA is embarking on an ambitious program to adopt more modern practices, using pruning and grafting techniques to increase productivity.

Many farmers resist changing their relationship to the sacred cacao tree. Even simple pruning methods are seen as overly tampering with a tree that traditionally is left to grow freely until the time comes to harvest. One of the TCGA "Field Extension Officers" responsible for conducting workshops

and educating farmers on these modern practices is Gabriel Pop, Eladio's second-eldest son. He is teaching these new methods to his father, who, having accepted the rationality of the practices, is adopting them on his own farm.

At the same time, Armando is well aware that the quality of the beans produced by his farmers has everything to do with allowing them to develop slowly through the natural pace of the tree, which in turn allows them to fetch the price that they currently do. Armando is committed to organic growing and to fair-trade practices. He is not interested in competing with large-scale cacao farming, which comprises over 95 percent of the global cacao industry. He doesn't want his farmers to be at the mercy of a fluctuating market that regularly offers prices less than one-fifth that of fair-trade prices, or leaves families in abject poverty and turns children into slaves.



ABOUT GLOBALIZATION

Globalization refers to the growing global links between culture, people and economies. Most often the term is used when describing the movement of goods and products from one country to another, increasing the interdependence of the world's markets and businesses.

Globalization has a number of benefits. More opportunities are afforded to countries that are now able to share their goods with the world. More opportunities, however, also create more competition.

Farmers like Eladio are at the heart of a complex debate about the advantages and disadvantages of globalization.

Collecting fair-trade prices for their cacao has been affording the farmers a decent lifestyle and the opportunity to send their children to school. Meanwhile, the construction of a new road into their once remote villages is bringing electricity and all the great promises of modernity and progress.

But Eladio is skeptical: is this progress akin to a deal with the devil? Will it rob them of the culture they've held intact for 3,000 years? As their children are being enticed by school, television, the promise of money and a more indulgent lifestyle, the Maya are wondering if they've become vulnerable to an invasion far more dangerous than any they've faced in their tumultuous history.

Most of the youth are no longer interested in farming and have left the villages in search of jobs on resorts and elsewhere. Yet the only jobs they're able to get are low paying, and the cost of living outside the farm so high that many become indentured on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder.

LAND RIGHTS

The Maya of southern Belize have a total population of about 21,000 Mopan-speaking and Kekchi-speaking people, divided among 38 communities. They have sought recognition of their land rights since the mid-1990s. Represented with great passion and dedication by Cristina Coc and the Maya Leaders Alliance, the Maya argue that they occupied their lands long before the political borders of Belize were ever formed. Cristina and the MLA claim that the Maya should retain communal rights to the land they have occupied for over 2,000 years and should not be forced into leasing individual plots from the government of Belize. They have obtained considerable victories on the national and international levels. In a landmark decision in 2004, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights recognized their communal property rights and recommended that Belize demarcate and title traditional Maya lands, setting an important precedent for indigenous peoples in the region. In October 2007, a historic ruling by the Supreme Court of Belize recognized the rights of two communities, Conejo and Santa Cruz, to their traditional lands and resources. In June 2010, the Supreme Court expanded these same rights to the remaining 36 Maya communities in southern Belize.

Despite these victories, however, Maya lands continue to be invaded by loggers and ranchers, the government continues to issue leases to outsiders and Prime Minister Dean Barrow has said that his government will appeal the Supreme Court's landmark decision.[1]

1 http://intercontinentalcry.org/maya-land-rights-affirmed-in-belize/

ECO-TOURISM

Given the rapid growth of the tourism and eco-tourism industries, Armando Choc is trying to further augment the income of his farmers by taking advantage of the huge tourism potential created by the international obsession with chocolate. The TCGA has begun a partnership with the Belize Tourism Association to host an International Cacao Festival that will bring well-to-do tourists from all over the world to Punta Gorda and onto the farms of the cacao farmers so they can experience first-hand the benefits of this iconic bean.

Well aware that high-volume tourism could easily corrupt the ecologically pristine lands of his people, Armando is committed to eco-tourism practices and finding a culturally and environmentally sensitive balance. But with the Cacao Festival potentially bringing in large numbers of tourists and big business tourism starting to take an interest in the formerly ignored Toledo District, a healthy balance may be difficult to maintain.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

There are several ways that you can discuss the film, both before and after you screen it. The following are suggestions for questions to be discussed with your students, as well as ways that you can encourage your students to reflect on the issues presented in the film.

MEDIA LITERACY QUESTIONS

While watching a film with your students, it is important to not only examine the content of the film but also its construction. The following provides a bit of background about media literacy.

> Media literacy is concerned with the process of understanding and using the mass media. It is also concerned with helping students develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of the mass media, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these techniques. More specifically, it is education that aims to increase students' understanding and enjoyment of how the media work, how they produce meaning, how they are organized and how they construct reality. Ultimately, media literacy education must aim to produce students who have an understanding of the media that includes a knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, biases and priorities, role and impact, and artistry and artifice. Media literacy is a life skill. (Ontario Association for Media Literacy, *Ontario Media Literacy Resource Guide*)

The following questions will assist students in understanding how the film ***The Chocolate Farmer*** is constructed. These questions can be addressed in several ways using various teaching methods.

1. What is this film about?
2. How did this film make you feel?
3. What are the main conflicts the subjects encounter in this film?
4. Are the conflicts resolved at the end of the film? Why or why not?
5. What did you learn about the cacao farming industry in Belize? Do you have a strong understanding of what is happening there? Explain.
6. Who do you think is responsible for the conflicts the Pop family is encountering?
7. Why was this film created?
8. What filmmaking techniques are used to attract your attention?
9. Does this film represent reality for the people of Belize? Why or why not?
10. Why do you believe Eladio Pop was selected to be the protagonist of this film?
11. How might this film be different if it were told from another point of view?
12. Are stereotypes present in this film? Are they critiqued or emphasized?
13. How would you describe the style of this film? Is it similar or different from other documentaries you have seen?
14. Do you think it is important for films like this to be created? Why or why not?

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM, SCHOOL-WIDE AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Now that you have watched and discussed the film with your students, reflect on how this learning can be extended beyond the classroom and throughout your school. Here are some suggestions:

1. Pick a farmed item and create a map/route of that item from farm to table. Compare/contrast the journey today versus the journey 30 years ago. Has it changed? How?
2. Choose a country in a southern climate that has a successful eco-tourism industry and examine the benefits and disadvantages to the original inhabitants of the land. Host a debate in the classroom with one group in favour of eco-tourism and the other against it.
3. Create a school-wide craft fair and invite students to create handmade goods to be sold. Students determine the price of their items based on what they deem "fair value." Proceeds can be donated to a charity of choice.
4. Invite a speaker to talk about farming and how it has changed. Do the struggles of sustainable farming apply only to Central America? How is the farming industry changing in your community? If a speaker is not available to physically join you, suggest a Web chat or a chat via Skype or another online video conference software.

RESOURCES AND SUGGESTED READING

NFB Films

The Fight for True Farming (Dir. Eve Lamont, 2005, 89 min)

Organic Prophecies (Dir. Ryan Young, 2002, 43 min)

Refugees of the Blue Planet (Dir. Hélène Choquette, 2007, 57 min)

The World According to Monsanto (Dir. Marie Monique Robin, 2008, 109 min)

Books

Bitter Chocolate, Carol Off, Vintage Canada, 2007.

Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico, Ronald Wright, Penguin Canada, 1989.

REFERENCES USED IN THE CREATION OF THIS GUIDE:

A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya, Linda Schele, David Freidel, Harper Perennial, 1992.

A Short History of Progress, Ronald Wright, Anansi Press, 2004.

Chocolate in Mesoamerica: A Cultural History of Cacao, Cameron L. McNeil, University Press of Florida, 2006.

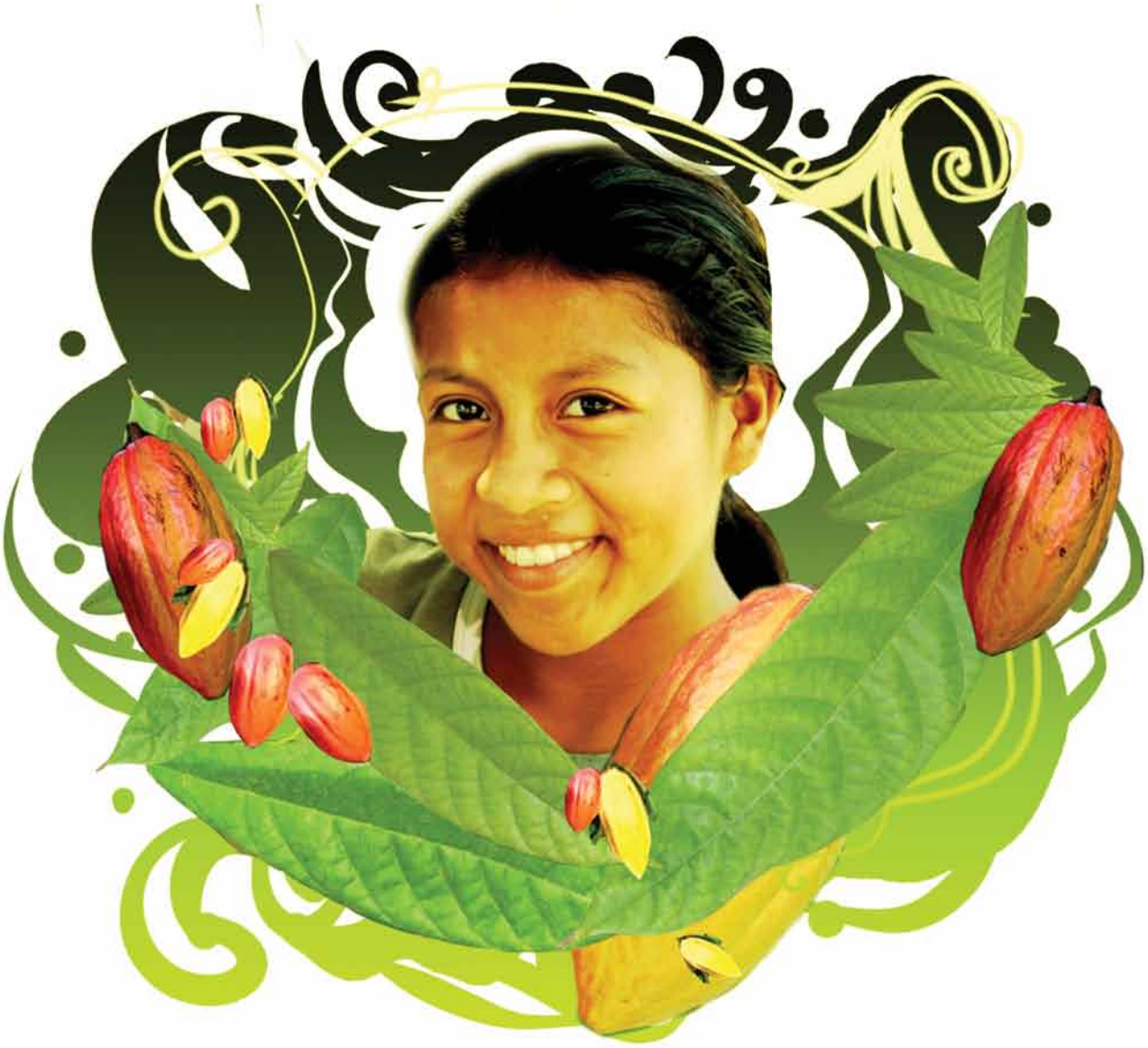
Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path, David Freidel, Linda Schele, Joy Parker, Perennial Press, 1995.

Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico, Ronald Wright, Penguin Canada, 1989]

Time and the Highland Maya, Barbara Tedlock, University of New Mexico Press, 1992.

What Is America? A Short History of the New World Order, Ronald Wright, Knopf Canada, 2008.

ELISHA
AND THE CACAO TREES



ACTIVITIES

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ABOUT THE FILM

Elisha Pop is 12 years old and lives in a small village in the southern district of Belize. Elisha has a big family—15 brothers and sisters! Her father, Eladio, is a cacao farmer and is very passionate about his plants and land. His goal is for his children to take over the family farm, but Elisha loves school and has her heart set on becoming an archaeologist so that she can learn more about her ancestors. In this film we get a close-up look at Elisha's daily life as she and her father show us how cacao is grown, harvested and turned into chocolate.

RECOMMENDED AGE LEVEL

This film is suitable for students aged 8 and up.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Where does this film take place? Identify the location on a map.

- Describe the home life of Elisha and her family. How is it different from yours?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to focus this film on Elisha?
- Why do you think Elisha's dad is hesitant about her pursuing more education?
- Elisha's father, Eladio, is an organic farmer. What does that mean?
- What are two questions you have after watching the film?
- Would you recommend this film? To whom? Why?

ACTIVITIES

Research Belize! What can you find out about the language, population, climate and history of the country? What other foods can be grown there?

Describe a dish or meal that is unique to your family. How do you make it? Where do the ingredients come from? Create a map and timeline of the meal from start to finish.

Create a class garden! Research foods that can be grown in your climate and see if you can grow them in your classroom or on your school property. If you are successful, create a meal or dish with the food you have grown and host a taste testing with your school.

What are the ideal conditions for growing cacao? Are there other places in the world that grow cacao? Have students bring in their favourite chocolate and host a chocolate tasting. Examine the labels—where is the chocolate from? Are the ingredients similar? In what way? Can you taste a difference?