

## WAR OVER FOOD – REALLY?

Believe it or not, there were wars fought over food and in this text we'll talk about one particular food that led to several wars. It's salt. Today, salt is really cheap and it's difficult to imagine that it was considered so valuable in the past. Once upon a time salt was worth more than gold. Its value has been in its ability to preserve meat and fish. Our ancestors killed more than they could eat in a single meal so they developed techniques for making the meat last longer, of which smoking and salting are the oldest – and most delicious (think of prosciutto). The problem was that salt was difficult to get and that's why it was very expensive. During the early days of the Roman Empire, salt was used as a form of payment. It was considered rare until quite recently, so it's hardly surprising that, throughout history, salt has been a source of conflict among those who had access to it and those who didn't.



Salt is one of the most common and yet most controversial substances on Earth – you can't really live without it, but too much of it might kill you. Salt is a magical substance. It adds flavour to your food and preserves it. It's essential for the human body. Without it, we would die: the human body can't make sodium, but our nerves and muscles don't work without it. One of salt's many mysteries is how our ancestors first figured out that they needed it. Today, there's a new battle in the salt wars, between those who think that we eat too much of it and it's killing us – and those who think most of us are just fine.

In 1540, the Italian city-state of Perugia went to war against Pope Paul III because the Pope had imposed a heavy salt tax. Although the Perugians put up a good fight, the Papal States crushed their rebellion. Modern Perugians claim that their tradition of making saltless bread is part of a popular protest against the new papal tax in 1540.

Anger over the salt tax was one of the causes of the French revolution in 1789.



India became independent after the Salt March, a nonviolent protest led by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930. Gandhi organized a protest because the British controlled and sold salt. Salt was so expensive that the great majority of Indians, who were poor, could not afford to buy it. Although Gandhi and thousands of other protesters were arrested, the Salt March eventually led to Indian independence, in 1947.

The great importance of salt can still be seen today in many cultures and folklore. Some countries still serve salt and bread to house guests as a welcome. Nelson Mandela once said, 'Let there be work, food, water, and salt for everyone.' But we should remember that too much salt is not good for us.

**A1 Decide if the following sentences are true or false.**

- 1 Throughout history, salt was always easy to get.
- 2 Too much salt is not good for you.
- 3 Salt was valuable because it could preserve meat for long periods of time.
- 4 Salt was so precious that Romans were sometimes paid in salt.
- 5 Salt caused conflicts and wars.
- 6 Everybody agrees on how much salt we should consume.
- 7 In 1540, the new salt tax caused a war.
- 8 The salt tax was the main cause of the French Revolution.
- 9 Gandhi alone was sent to prison after the protest.
- 10 The Salt March, led by Mahatma Gandhi, led to Indian independence 7 years later.

**A2 Find words 1 – 10 in the text and check their meaning. Then use them to complete sentences a – h.**

- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1 tax        | 6 ancestors |
| 2 preserve   | 7 essential |
| 3 rebellion  | 8 access    |
| 4 nonviolent | 9 battle    |
| 5 war        | 10 valuable |

- a) His \_\_\_\_\_ had come to America from Ireland.
- b) Money is not \_\_\_\_\_ to happiness.
- c) The king lost one \_\_\_\_\_ but won the \_\_\_\_\_ eventually.
- d) You need a password to get \_\_\_\_\_ to the computer system.

- e) There was a strong \_\_\_\_\_ among people when the government introduced a new heavy \_\_\_\_\_ .
- f) Luckily, nothing \_\_\_\_\_ was stolen when our house was broken into.
- g) Refrigerators help to \_\_\_\_\_ food.
- h) A peaceful and \_\_\_\_\_ protest was organized against the racial injustice.

**B How much do you know about food? Do this little quiz to find out.**

1 What food item is traditionally carved during Halloween?

- a) watermelons   b) pumpkins   c) apples

2 What ingredient do dairy products contain?

- a) chocolate   b) flour   c) milk

3 What do bees produce that humans eat?

- a) nectar   b) sugar   c) honey

4 Which food would you find in a Mexican restaurant?

- a) enchiladas   b) pasta   c) sushi

5 What is a Granny Smith?

- a) a grandmother   b) an apple   c) a pie

6 Which fruit is like an orange but smaller?

- a) kiwi   b) tangerine   c) grapefruit

7 How do grapes grow?

- a) in the ground   b) on a tree   c) on a vine

**C1 Research time**

**Find out who in your family or among your friends ...**

- has the healthiest diet?
- has the sweetest tooth? (=likes sweet things the most)
- is the best cook?
- eats the most junk food?
- is a vegetarian?
- likes to watch food and cooking shows on TV?

**C2 Extra task for curious students**

**Here are some conflicts or wars caused by some food and your task is to find out more information about one of them:**

- the Wine Wars
- the Honey War
- the Sioux War (over a cow)
- the Pig War (between the USA and Great Britain) -the Boston Tea Party
- the Pastry War (between Mexico and France)