

Name:

Date:

The Three Sisters Crops (Corn, Beans & Squash)

Native American Reading Comprehension Passage

For many Native American Nations, **corn, beans, and squash** were more than just crops—they were an important part of everyday life. These three plants are often called the **Three Sisters** because they grow best when planted together. Native American farmers discovered that each plant helps the others grow, making this planting method both practical and sustainable.

Corn grows tall and provides a strong stalk for bean vines to climb. The beans add nutrients, especially nitrogen, back into the soil, helping the corn and squash grow well. Squash spreads across the ground with large leaves that keep the soil cool, reduce weeds, and help the soil stay moist. Together, these three crops support one another like members of a family.

The Three Sisters also provided a healthy and balanced diet. Corn supplied energy through carbohydrates, beans offered protein and fiber, and squash added important vitamins and minerals. Growing these crops together helped families produce nutritious food without relying on a single crop.

Native American farmers carefully observed nature and understood how plants worked together. Instead of planting large fields with only one crop, they used companion planting, which improved soil health and protected their harvests. This farming method has been passed down through generations and is still used by many gardeners and farmers today.

Today, schools, community gardens, and Native American cultural programs continue teaching about the **Three Sisters planting method**. It reminds us that traditional Indigenous farming practices are still valuable and can help people grow healthy food while caring for the environment.

Vocabulary

Use the passage to define each word.

1. Companion planting:

2. Nutrients:

3. Sustainable:

4. Harvest:

5. Protein:

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Why are corn, beans, and squash called the Three Sisters?

- A. They grow in different countries.
- B. They help one another grow when planted together.
- C. They all grow underground.
- D. They bloom during winter.

2. What does corn provide for bean plants?

- A. Shade
- B. A strong stalk to climb
- C. Water
- D. Fertilizer

3. How do beans help the other crops?

- A. They attract birds.
- B. They add nutrients to the soil.
- C. They keep insects away.
- D. They grow faster than corn.

4. What is one job of the squash plant?

- A. It grows into a tree.
- B. It keeps the soil cool and helps prevent weeds.
- C. It provides wood for homes.
- D. It climbs the corn stalk.

5. What is the main idea of the passage?

- A. Corn is the only important crop.
- B. The Three Sisters planting method helps crops grow together and provides healthy food.
- C. Native American farmers only planted vegetables.
- D. Squash was used only for decorations.

Short-Answer Questions

1. How do the Three Sisters crops help each other grow?

2. Name the three crops known as the Three Sisters.

3. Why was the Three Sisters planting method important for Native American farmers?

4. How is the Three Sisters planting method still useful today?

Context Clues

1. Beans add nutrients back into the soil.

The word **nutrients** means:

- A. Harmful insects
- B. Helpful substances that help plants grow
- C. Rocks
- D. Tools

2. The Three Sisters method is sustainable.

The word **sustainable** means:

- A. Harmful to nature
- B. Able to continue while protecting natural resources
- C. Expensive
- D. Difficult to understand

Main Idea & Supporting Details

Main Idea

What is the passage mostly about?

Supporting Detail #1

Supporting Detail #2

Inference Question

Why do you think Native American farmers chose to grow the Three Sisters together instead of planting each crop separately?

Text Evidence

Find one fact from the passage that shows the Three Sisters planting method benefits the environment.

Critical Thinking

What can modern gardeners and farmers learn from the Native American Three Sisters planting method?

Answer Key

Vocabulary (Sample Answers)

1. **Companion planting** – growing different plants together so they help each other.
2. **Nutrients** – substances that help plants grow and stay healthy.
3. **Sustainable** – using natural resources in a way that can continue over time.
4. **Harvest** – the crops collected when they are ready.
5. **Protein** – a nutrient that helps build and repair the body.

Multiple Choice Answers

1. B
2. B
3. B
4. B
5. B

Sample Short Answers

1. Corn supports the beans, beans add nutrients to the soil, and squash keeps the soil cool and moist.
2. Corn, beans, and squash.
3. It helped produce healthy crops, improved soil, and provided balanced nutrition.
4. It teaches sustainable gardening practices and is still used in gardens and educational programs today.

Main Idea (Sample)

The Three Sisters planting method is a traditional Native American farming practice that helps crops grow together while providing healthy food.

Supporting Details (Sample)

- Corn gives bean vines a stalk to climb.
- Squash protects the soil by reducing weeds and keeping moisture in.

Inference (Sample)

Growing the crops together made farming more successful because each plant naturally supported the others.

Text Evidence (Sample)

"Squash spreads across the ground with large leaves that keep the soil cool, reduce weeds, and help the soil stay moist."

Critical Thinking (Sample)

Modern gardeners can use companion planting to improve soil health, reduce weeds, grow healthier crops, and care for the environment naturally.