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Lesson Title: *Colonial America's Test Kitchen*

Lesson Overview:

In this lesson, designed to be part of a unit of everyday life in colonial America, students working in small groups will experiment with combining ingredients in order to recreate the beverage called “switchel”. As they develop their brew, the students will write out their recipe and generate a list of adjectives, similes, and metaphors to attempt to describe the taste. As a whole class, the students will identify the ingredients they used, discuss the place of those ingredients in the trans-Atlantic trade, and hypothesize about why switchel was so popular in the colonies. Finally, students will participate in a blind taste test to determine the best batch of switchel and generate a slogan or jingle to popularize it.

Content Objective:

- SWBAT create switchel and understand its place in colonial culture and the trans-Atlantic economy.

Language Objectives:

- SWBAT use the academic language of sequencing and ordering in order to create a recipe for switchel.
- SWBAT use descriptive and figurative language in order to describe the taste of switchel.

Essential Question:

- What was switchel and why was it popular in early America?

Number of Class Periods: 1 period of 45 minutes.

Grade Level: 5-7

Materials:

For each group of 2-4 students:

- one quart of water- keep this ingredient a mystery
- one jar of molasses- keep this ingredient a mystery
- one bottle of apple cider vinegar- keep this ingredient a mystery
- one hunk of ginger- keep this ingredient a mystery
- spice grater
- empty quart jar for mixing

- wooden spoon
- paper cups
- sticky notes
- notebooks and writing implements

Lesson Sequence:

In the first part of the lesson, students will work in small groups of two to four to use the ingredients to create a palatable beverage. Introduce the activity as a cooking game show, like *America's Test Kitchen*. In the first timed round, each group will be given a set of mystery ingredients and a limited amount of time (5 minutes) to develop their product. In the second timed round (another 5 minutes), each group will record their recipe. In the third timed round (5 minutes again), each group will generate a list of adjectives, similes, and metaphors to describe the taste of their beverage. (15 minutes total)

In the second part of the lesson, gather the class back together as a whole. Lead the students in discussion by asking, "What do you think the ingredients were? How did you identify them?" Keep track on the board as they identify water, molasses, ginger, and apple cider vinegar. Next, ask the students how the colonists might have obtained each ingredient: "Where do these ingredients come from? How would they have been acquired in the colonies?" Guide the students to the discovery that molasses (from Caribbean sugar plantations) and ginger (from Asia) in particular could only be obtained by participation in global trade networks. Colonists needed to buy these ingredients from England, thus supporting the economy of the mother country. Apple cider vinegar was produced domestically, and water, of course, was available throughout the colonies. (10 minutes)

After identifying the ingredients, ask the students to share some of their descriptions of the taste of switchel. Again, keep track of their language on the board. "Did you like the drink? Will you be mixing up a batch to share at home after school?" Most likely, the majority of students will find the taste unfamiliar and unpleasant. This creates the opportunity to pose the question: "Why would the colonists drink this beverage in the first place?" Without chemical water purification systems, drinking fresh water was one cause of bacterial illness, like dysentery or the flux, in colonial America. Colonists purified their water by boiling it, particularly by making beverages like tea. For the colonists, hot water was associated with health and cold water with disease. These associations, however, created challenges in the hot summer weather. After working in the fields on a hot, humid day in July, who would want to drink a hot cup of tea? What other cold beverages might have been available? They didn't have sodas or juices. The colonists needed to create a cold beverage that would be refreshing and safe to drink. Their solution was switchel. They wouldn't have understood why, because until the time of the Civil War, nobody knew about germs and thus didn't have a correct understanding of how people got sick. Here's the 21st century answer: the vinegar worked as an antiseptic to kill bacteria in the water, and the molasses provided electrolytes lost from

sweating. In a sense, switchel was the original Gatorade! Here are a couple of other things to consider. Beer was made at home and everybody in the family drank it, but this type, called “small beer”, contained a low level of alcohol. Once a child was weaned from its mother’s milk, it started drinking small beer! Although colonial people didn’t know about germs and didn’t correctly understand how we get sick, they had figured out that beverages containing alcohol were safer (to a point) and so preferred small beer or hard cider to drinking water or milk. Keep in mind that taste preferences were different back then too. More people might have simply thought switchel was a tasty drink! (10 minutes)

Finally, ask each group to send a representative to the front of the room to serve as a judge for the best tasting switchel. Pour a sip from each batch into paper cups, and label each cup with a sticky note that corresponds by letter or number to the original batch. (N.B. Keep these correspondences secret, so that the students don’t know which cup comes from the batch their group brewed.) When the cups have been poured and labeled, each student judge takes a sip from each batch and casts his or her vote for the best tasting switchel. During the judging process, ask the rest of the group members to use their descriptive and figurative language to create a slogan or jingle for switchel. After the judges have determined the best-tasting batch, announce the winner and ask the class to vote on the best slogan or jingle to accompany their product on the market. (10 minutes)

Assessment:

As an optional homework assessment, students could write a one-paragraph piece of persuasive writing, a sales pitch to “sell” the idea of switchel. Exemplary paragraphs will have a compelling hook and thesis statement as well as three clear reasons for drinking it. This is an opportunity for students to incorporate the language they brainstormed with their groups to describe the taste of the beverage, articulate the role of switchel in the English economy, and explain its health benefits.