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Lesson 5. How Potatoes Changed the World

1. French fries, which are often served with fast foods, are one of the best known American side dishes.

2. It is said that Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, tasted these fried potatoes in France and brought the recipe home to America.

3. The real inventors of the so-called "French" fries were not the French but the Belgians.

4. Instead of French fries, the French have traditionally enjoyed roasted potatoes with chicken for their Sunday lunch.

5. Potato pancakes and potato soups are popular traditional dishes in Germany, while fish and chips is one of the most popular street foods in England.

6. The potato has become such an important part of Western food culture that it is hard to believe that it has had such a relatively short history in Europe.

7. The potato has been grown by South American Indians in the Andes Mountains for nearly 10,000 years, but it was only 500 years ago when the Europeans learned about this vegetable and brought it to their homelands.

8. At first, Europeans did not like this unfamiliar and alien food.

9. Most people thought potatoes looked too ugly for people to eat.

10. Some even believed that potatoes were created by devils.

11. For this reason, potatoes were most often given to animals, while people ate them only when there was nothing else to eat.

12. The potato gradually but steadily spread across Europe, as people learned how it could help them in times of war, bad weather, and desperate hunger.

The End of Hunger

13. Hunger was a common part of everyday life in 17th- and 18th-century Europe.

14. The average European not only often went hungry, but sometimes even starved to death.

15. Many countries suffered nationwide famines at least once every decade.

The potato changed all that.

16. Not only did potatoes grow well in much of Europe, but they were also very nutritious.

17. Once Europeans began to grow potatoes, their food supplies doubled in quantity and increased dramatically in quality.

18. Throughout Europe, potatoes quickly became the main source of nutrition for the majority of common people.

19. By the end of the 18th century, potatoes had taken over most European farms, and famine had become a rare and unusual incident.

20. At long last, Europe was able to feed itself.

The Industrial Revolution

21. Thanks to the fact that the potato was inexpensive and nutritious, many Europeans escaped famines, and the populations in European nations increased rapidly during the 19th century.

22. Furthermore, the potato indirectly led to the Industrial Revolution in 19th century England.

23. It was easier to grow potatoes than many other crops, so fewer people were needed for farming.

24. People who no longer worked on farms came to the cities and became factory workers, enabling new manufacturing industries to grow more quickly.

25. With the larger populations and more advanced technologies, European nations became powerful enough to venture into other parts of the world and colonize them.

The Irish Famine

26. The impact of the potato in Europe was not entirely positive.

27. It was much more complicated.

28. Because the people of Ireland were excessively dependent upon the potato for food, when a potato disease hit Europe in 1845, it led to a disastrous situation.

29. Many countries were affected, but Ireland suffered the most.

30. In two months, the disease wiped out almost half of the potato crop in Ireland.

31. The situation continued to worsen.

32. By 1852, more than one million Irish people, about 20 percent of the population, had starved to death, while another two million people had fled Ireland, and almost three-quarters of them had migrated to the United States.

33. It was one of the deadliest famines in history.

The Beginning of the Modern Pesticides

34. Despite the terrible outcome of the potato disease in Europe, it was perhaps less important in the potato's history than the Colorado potato beetle was in North America.

35. In the 1860s, the potato beetle was carried by horses and cows from Mexico to the state of Colorado in the United States.

36. There it attacked potatoes and spread quickly when potatoes were shipped to other parts of the country on trains and steamships.

37. Until that time, American farmers had only planted a few varieties of potatoes, and the potatoes that they planted were extremely vulnerable to the pest.

38. As a result, farmers were practically defenseless against this pest.

39. After a series of desperate attempts, one man eventually found that Paris green, a toxic chemical used for making green paint, killed the beetles.

40. Soon farmers were spraying it on their potatoes.

41. Farmers were not the only people to find a new use for Paris green.

42. Chemists saw what the farmers were doing and decided to try Paris green on other pests. They then decided to try other chemicals for other problems.

43. Scientists began to do research and discover chemicals and substances that were effective for many different agricultural problems.

44. That was the beginning of the modern pesticide industry.

45. Often, the course of history is changed by seemingly insignificant things.

46. In this case, it was changed by the potato.

47. The potato changed Europe first by freeing the European people from hunger.

48. It then went on to prepare the ground for the Industrial Revolution, the rise of the European empires, and new techniques in farming.

49. As a result, this simple vegetable, which was once unwanted and thought to be ugly, has shaped the modern world as we know it.

< Lesson 5 >

1. Main idea :

2. Key word(s)

3. Key expression(s)