Teacher's Key

The Hidden History of Cheese in Asia: From Steppe to Pizza (Level C1)

Vocabulary Matching

1 misconception = **N**
2 ingenuity = **A**
3 pastoralists = **H**
4 perishable = **L**
5 hallmark = **G**
6 contested = **M**
7 taboo = **I**
8 patronage = **E**
9 dwindle = **D**
10 staple = **O**
11 palate = **J**
12 inroads = **K**
13 surplus = **B**
14 revive = **C**
15 mainstream = **F**

Fill in the Blank

1 misconception
2 ingenuity
3 pastoralists
4 perishable
5 contested
6 taboo
7 patronage
8 dwindle
9 staple
10 palate
11 inroads
12 surplus
13 revive
14 mainstream

True or False

1 **True.** The reading says it is exported to the United States and sold mainly as a dog chew.
2 **True.** The reading says the mummies were about 3,600 years old.
3 **True.** Lactose is described as the sugar that causes the trouble.
4 **False.** Such wheels suit people who stay in one place, not people on the move.
5 **False.** Some food scholars argue that dried curds are not really cheese at all.
6 **False.** Paneer is made with an acid such as lemon juice and needs no animal rennet.
7 **False.** The reading calls the origin contested and lists competing theories.
8 **True.** The reading describes so as a dense food made by boiling milk down for hours.
9 **True.** The reading says he began keeping goats there in the 1960s.
10 **False.** They were left with a surplus because schools had closed.

Language Focus: Cleft Sentences for Emphasis

Example answer: **It is** price and convenience **that** will decide whether these cheeses succeed. Or: **What** will decide whether these cheeses succeed **is** price and convenience.

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1 Open answer. A strong answer notes that chhurpi is a Himalayan food that most readers would not link to cheese, and that its fate as a dog chew abroad is a surprising twist. It sets up the challenge to the idea that cheese belongs only to Europe.

2 Proteins in the dental plaque of people buried in Mongolia show dairy eating about 5,000 years ago, and kefir cheese on mummies about 3,600 years old in China's Tarim Basin.

3 Much of the lactose, the sugar that causes the digestive trouble, drains away with the whey or is broken down by bacteria, so these foods are easier to digest than fresh milk.

4 Large cheese wheels ripen slowly in cool cellars and suit people who stay in one place. Small dried lumps are light, last a long time, and can travel with people on the move.

5 Some food scholars treat dried curds as a separate category. A strong answer says this does not weaken the main point, because the reading is about milk preserved by many methods and the question of definition is part of the story.

6 Paneer is made by adding an acid such as lemon juice to hot milk, with no animal rennet. Theories: Persian and Afghan arrivals (the word is Persian), Portuguese settlers in seventeenth-century Bengal, and an older taboo that slowed its spread. The reading says the question is contested.

7 Historians suggest the industry depended on aristocratic patronage, so it began to dwindle when court power weakened in the late Heian period. The writer hedges: the cause is given as a suggestion, not a certainty.

8 Open answer. A strong answer notes that a new food needed a local business reason (goats and income), a way of explaining it through a familiar food (tofu), and a market that grew with new eating habits such as pizza.

9 Open answer. A strong answer notes that the order moves from evidence to history to the present, ending with the 2020 revival as proof that old foods can return. It makes the final question about the future feel earned and open.

10 False. The reading calls the origin contested and lists Persian, Afghan, and Portuguese theories, so historians do not agree.

11 No. The writer calls the idea that cheese has little connection to Asia a misconception.

12 Best answer: to leave the topic open. The question points to what is not yet known and invites the reader to think. Accept a reasoned answer about prediction, but the question does not claim to forecast an outcome.

Notes on the Evidence

- No source draft was supplied, so this reading is original and no source corrections were needed. Tarim Basin: Fu Qiaomei and colleagues, Cell, September 2024. Cheese samples from three tombs at Xiaohe, about 3,300 to 3,600 years old, with cow and goat DNA and kefir bacteria. Press coverage calls them the oldest cheese samples found. Residues of dairy processing in European pottery are older, about 7,000 years, but are not cheese samples. Mongolia: Wilkin and colleagues, Nature Ecology and Evolution 4, 2020, 346-355. Dental calculus proteins show dairy eating by about 3000 BC and horse milking by about 1200 BC.
- Digestion: a 2020 review (PMC7302802) notes that Central Asian herders are mostly lactase nonpersistent despite relying on dairy. Persistence is under about 5 percent in East Asia and intermediate in Central Asia (about 11 to 32 percent in one Kazakh and Tajik-Uzbek study). Estimates for India differ by region (higher in the north, lower in the south). The reading therefore says many adults across Asia, not most. Drained whey and bacterial fermentation reduce lactose, which is the standard explanation for why cheese and soured milk are better tolerated.
- Steppe foods: aaruul and qurt are described by Slow Food (Ark of Taste) and by Oskenbay (Crossroads, 2016). A Kazakh source (qalam.global) argues qurt is not cheese because it is not made by curdling and aging; Slow Food calls aaruul a curd cheese. The reading hedges for that reason. The Himalayan chhurpi details (yak and cow milk, very hard, sold abroad as dog chews) come from FAO material, Culture magazine, and Nepali press. The BBC Travel chhurpi article could not be opened (site blocked). Export values vary by source and were left out.
- Paneer: origin theories (ancient Indian, Persian or Afghan, Portuguese in Bengal) are summarized in several reference works. A UN FAO report cited in the Oxford Companion to Cheese suggests Persian and Afghan arrival in the 13th and 14th centuries; others suggest the 16th or 17th century. The taboo idea is credited by one food writer (Chitrita Banerji). Rasgulla: West Bengal received a protected-name (GI) tag for Banglar Rasogolla in November 2017 and Odisha for Odisha Rasagola on 29 July 2019. The tags cover specific versions and do not decide who invented the sweet.
- China and Japan: Kotyk (Religions, 2021) finds substantial dairy production in Tang China and says it reached Japan by the seventh century (Zenna, offering milk to Emperor Kotoku, 645 to 654; Engishiki, 927). Kotyk also notes that dairy was mainly medicine and that a Japanese monk's travel diary never mentions it. He ties the end of Japan's industry to the collapse of aristocratic control in the late Heian period; popular accounts point to the rise of the samurai, so the reading hedges. So is called cheese-like or dairy by historians, not strictly cheese. The Ming recipe is from a text by Zhu Quan (1378 to 1448) cited in Li Shizhen's Bencao gangmu (1596). Rushan: Allen and Allen (2005).
- Korea and modern figures: sources differ on dates for the first Imsil cheese (1964 in one account, 1967 in Korea JoongAng Daily), so the reading says the 1960s. The 1972 pizza shop detail comes from one newspaper only. South Korea and Japan: about 2.8 and 2.4 kg in 2017, and 3.09 and 2.35 kg in an OECD-based report, so the reading says roughly two to three kilograms. China: per person intake of about 0.1 kg in 2017 and 130 g in 2021 (trade estimates), 0.3 kg in an OECD-based report; processed cheese was 85.4 percent of consumption in 2019. Europe: 18.6 kg (2017). These are dated and may have changed. Japan 2020: school lunch closures left a surplus of milk and a so recipe spread online (Atlas Obscura, 2020). Cheese per capita in Japan and Korea is about 2 to 3 kg in the same sources.