

# Counterfeit Money

Think of all things chocolate. Most likely, you are thinking of things like cakes and cookies. You are thinking of drinks and candy. Most likely, you did not think of counterfeit, or fake, money! Strange as it may seem, there is a story that connects chocolate to counterfeit money. The story has to do with an ancient people.



Long ago, the Mayans lived in Central America. Central America is located between North America and South America. The Mayan people lived in what is present-day southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. They prospered between 250–925 C.E. During that time, the Mayans learned to brew some seeds that came from a tree native to their area. They brewed the seeds to make a very special drink. Today, we know this tree as the cacao tree. We use its beans, or seeds, to make chocolate drinks. We use its beans to make all things chocolate.



cacao tree

Cacao beans were very valuable to the Mayans. They were traded for goods, used as money, and were an accepted form of payment. When scientists dug up old Mayan sites, they found counterfeit cacao beans! The beans had been made out of clay! They also found cacao bean husks. Counterfeiters had removed some of the beans from the husks. They had replaced the beans with sand!

The spread of chocolate began in the 16th century. This was when European explorers first carried the cacao beans back to Europe. Cacao beans are not used as money today, but we pay money for the chocolate made from them.

# The Counterfeit Masterpiece

Amanda was on a field trip. Her class had traveled by train to an art museum. The director of the museum was showing Amanda's class around. He stopped in front of one painting surrounded by an ornate frame. The painting was of a woman sitting by a table with a rosy-cheeked baby on her lap. A large bouquet of flowers was on the table, as well as some fruit. There were apples and pears in a bowl and a pineapple next to the bowl.

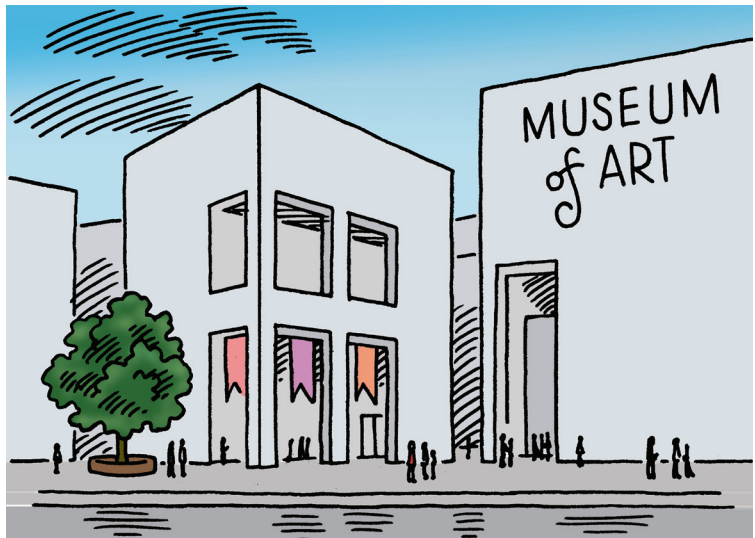
The director said, "This painting is a European masterpiece from the country of Italy. It was painted in the 1300s. We only have the painting on loan. We are trying to raise funds so we can buy it. We want to buy it so we can add this magnificent old masterpiece to our permanent collection."

Amanda spoke up. She said, "You should not buy it. The painting is counterfeit. It is a fake."

The director gasped. He said, "How could you say such a thing? You are only a child. You know nothing about the history of Italian art."

Amanda said, "You are right. I know nothing about Italian art, but I still know the picture is counterfeit."

"How do you know?" demanded the director.



Amanda said, "Pineapples are native to Central and South America. They didn't come from Europe. A pineapple couldn't be in an authentic Italian painting from the 1300s because at that time no one in Europe had ever seen a pineapple!"