In a restaurant or on a cook show you may have noticed the tall white hat worn by many chefs. This distinguishing article of clothing has an interesting and complex history. The toque dates back to the 13th century when the toque style hat was common in many trades. A toque (tōk) is a type of hat with a narrow brim or no brim at all. Today the toque is known as the chef’s hat.

During the 16th century there were many artisans, including chefs, being imprisoned or executed for their free thinking ways. To avoid being executed, many chefs hid in the Orthodox Church among the priests. They wore the same clothing as the priest, including the hats. The only difference was that the priests wore black, while the chefs wore grey. In the middle 1800s, Marie-Antoine Careme, a popular French chef, is credited with developing the current chef’s uniform. The tall hats had already been introduced, but Careme wanted to create a specific uniform to honor the chef. White was chosen for the chef’s uniform since it is symbolic of cleanliness.

Today the chef’s hat is worn for hygiene, than symbolism. Toques help prevent hair and sweat from falling into the food. Chef’s hats began with the intent to distinguish chefs from other people in the community. Today toques still distinguish chefs from cooks and other culinary and food service workers all over the world.

Review
1. What is a toque?
2. Why are chef’s uniforms white?
3. What do the 100 pleats symbolize?
4. Which chef wears the tallest hat? Why?
5. Name two reasons chef’s hats are worn today.
6. During the 16th century what did the different height of the toque represent?
7. T or F: Before 1600 many people wore toques other than chefs.
8. T or F: The head chef wears the shortest hat.

History Connection
Look up the answers to the following and record in notes.
What events in the 16th century led to the toque being used by chefs?

Language Connection
Write a paragraph on the following:
How does the toque relate to professionalism of the culinary industry?