Coffee is probably the most popular drink in the world. How did coffee drinking begin? How did café culture develop?

The discovery of coffee
We don’t know for sure how coffee was discovered. Here are two possible stories.

An Ethiopian boy called Kaldi discovered coffee by chance. He noticed that his goats became lively after eating some red berries from a tree. He tried the berries himself and felt the same. The berries were the fruit of the coffee tree.

A man from Yemen called Gemaleddin was in the port of Aden when some Chinese ships arrived. He saw the Chinese drinking tea and watched carefully as they made it. Tea didn’t grow in Yemen so he tried the leaves of other plants. Nothing worked so he went to Ethiopia and brought back the leaves and fruit of the coffee tree. The leaves weren’t successful but Gemaleddin noticed a great change in the coffee beans when they were roasted. They changed colour and smelt wonderful. He put the roasted beans in water and coffee as a drink was born!

The coffee trade begins
Coffee soon became the accepted drink of the Arab world. For a long time, it was traded locally. In 1555, it was introduced to the city of Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). It was a great success. Within ten years, the city had more than 600 coffee houses. Café culture had begun.

Coffee in Europe
In 1645, Italy became the first European country to open a coffee house. Soon other countries were doing the same. In England, the first coffee house opened in Oxford, in 1651. A year later, an Armenian called Pasqua Rosée opened the first coffee house in London. By 1739, London had 551 coffee houses. For the English, a coffee house was much more than just a place to drink coffee with friends. Scientists, writers, artists and politicians all met there to discuss important subjects.

Café culture today
Many countries today still have their own café culture, but there is also now a world coffee-shop culture. It began in North America and its home is the city of Seattle in the USA. These modern coffee shops are generally owned by large international companies like Starbucks.