

Whole World in our Hands: Experiential Activities

Food and Food Security Slowing Down our Food

Theme:

Food Security and the Slow Food Movement

Prerequisites:

Prior to beginning the activities described below, one period should be spent reading the “12 Hunger Myths” as categorized by *FoodFirst: the Institute for Food and Development Policy* (www.foodfirst.org/12myths). Class discussion to follow.

Curriculum Entry Points:

Grade 9 Social Studies; Grade 12 World Growth; Grade 12 Political Science; Grade 12 Economics; Grade 12 Law.



Overview:

The purpose of this unit is to challenge students to think about the complexity of issues surrounding food: where their food is grown, how it is transported to grocery stores, who benefits the most from this transport, and what achieving “food security” would mean for small scale farmers. These preliminary questions are designed to act as a springboard into broader discussions of how food security is influenced by free trade policies, globalization and debt-relief. Finally, students will have the opportunity to create a “living lunch project” in their schoolyard.

Objective:

To introduce students to the concepts of the Slow Food Movement; make students aware of how far some food travels that could be grown in their back yards; to familiarize students with local food producers and community concepts such as CSA farms and shareholders.

Main Concepts and Vocabulary:

THE SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT: Founded in Italy in 1986, the SFM is dedicated to stewardship of the land and ecologically sound food production; to the revival of the kitchen and the table as centers of pleasure, culture, and community; to the invigoration and proliferation of regional, seasonal culinary traditions; and to living a slower, more harmonious rhythm of life. The Slow Food Movement opposes the standardization of taste, defends the need for consumer information, protects cultural identities tied to gastronomic traditions, and defends domestic and wild animal and vegetable species.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENTS: The term given for the “reforms” that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund demand be implemented before loans, credits, or debt relief are given. Such “reforms” include privatization, promotion of exports, cuts in government spending, higher interest rates, and an opening up of countries to foreign investments.

HIPC: Highly Indebted Poor Countries as determined by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund

HIPC DEBT INITIATIVE: The debt crisis of developing countries is so acute that in 1996 the World Bank took the initiative to address the problem, and dragged a reluctant IMF into negotiations that have culminated in the joint IMF and World Bank (HIPC) Debt Initiative. Unfortunately, rather than providing a good framework for addressing the problem of debt, the HIPC Initiative is structured such that it will provide almost no debt relief, tie countries more tightly to structural adjustment conditionality, limit eligibility to fewer than one-quarter of the countries that are severely indebted, not take effect in most countries until after the year 2004, and enable any of the parties to the Initiative (the World Bank, the IMF and the Paris Club) to back out of the initiative if the other parties do not or cannot fulfill its commitments. In addition, the US\$500 million and US\$250 million pledged by the World Bank and the IMF respectively is nowhere near sufficient for meaningful debt relief.²⁷

Classroom Activity 1: Food Mapping

Time required:

One 60 minute period for class discussion of 12 Hunger Myths and familiarization of definitions.

One 60 minute period for initial research, finding out who to interview, setting up interview times etc., creating wall sized Mural so that information can be placed onto it.

Note: Interviews may have to be conducted outside of class-time.

One 60 minute period for a visit to the grocery store. (if not every student is participating in this aspect, this can be done when interviews are being set up and one group is beginning the construction of the mural.)

One 60 minute period for students to report back to classmates on their findings.

Materials:

- Sheets of poster board or paper to cover one blackboard or green board.
- Colouring tools such as paints, pastels, pencil crayons.
- Old magazines to cut images out of.
- Recording device like a mini-disk for those conducting interviews.
- Plan for safe transportation to and from the grocery store



Additional Background Material:

Eyes of the Heart: Seeking a Path for the Poor in the Age of Globalization

By Jean Bertrand Aristide

The Cuba Diet: What Will You Be Eating When the Revolution Comes?

By Bill McKibben; Harpers Magazine April 2005, reprinted for Harpers Website under “features” June 6, 2005

NFB FilmSeries: A Crack in the Pavement

Online Resources:

Project Food Share www.foodshare.ca

Food First www.foodfirst.ca

Food Production History www.50years.org

Setting up Edible School Gardens www.edibleschoolyard.org

Small Scale Gardening tips www.cityfarmer.org

Opening Questions:

How is it that hunger and poverty exist in areas of high agricultural production?

In your own words, how would you describe Food Security?

What would achieving food security look like for farmers in developing countries? In Canada?

How can we help Farmers' Grow the food we want?

COMMUNITY SHARED AGRICULTURE (CSA) is one way that producers and consumers can work together and share the risks of growing a crop of food.

Basic Concept: A community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community's farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. Members or shareholders of the farm or garden pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary. In return, they receive shares in the farm's bounty throughout the growing season. Members also share in risks, including poor harvest due to unfavorable weather or pests.

Activity Instructions: Food mapping

NOTE: as more than one activity is outlined in the process of creating one map for the classroom, have students work on the different aspects of the map in small groups

LOCATE: Make a map of your area. The idea is to make a giant mural complete with interview transcripts, research findings, photos, collages, etc. Take into consideration: Where does the agricultural land lie? Where are the industrial areas? Where is most fertile and what are the main crops that are grown there? Where are our watersheds, where are our wilderness areas?

INTERVIEW: Find out who your local farmers are, where they are located and what crops they grow. Where do they sell their produce to? Is it organic or conventionally grown? What do they view as the greatest obstacles to farming? Are there any CSA farms in your area? What is the history of CSA farms? What does it cost to become a shareholder? What is the shareholder entitled to?

CONSIDER: Visit your local grocery store. List all the products (do not limit yourself to produce!) that are grown locally, compare prices with products that are shipped in from out of province / out of country. What is the farthest place within Canada that food comes from? What is the farthest place internationally? How many products carry the Fair Trade Logo on them?

BRING IT HOME: Do a survey of your home. Does your family grow any of its own food? If so, for how many months of the year is it able to provide for you? If possible, bring in photos to share with classmates.



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Classroom Activity 2: Slow Food Menu

Pretend that you are the owner of a small café dedicated to serving in-season, local foods. Research recipes and ideas. Is there a slow food group in your province? Check out www.slowfood.com or www.slowfood.ca for ideas.

Design a menu for all four seasons; be as creative as possible. How will you convince people that this is a worthwhile approach to food?

Community Activity

Theme:

The creation of “living lunches”

Prerequisites:

NOTE: This is not a short-term activity. Pulling up pavement and creating an edible schoolyard will take time, forethought, patience and permission. It will also require a commitment on the part of the whole school as those students who are graduating will relinquish their responsibilities and younger students will have to be prepared to take them over. Container gardening will be the easiest way to ease into this project so put out the call early for containers of all shapes and sizes, (although stress that they need to be relatively clean as they will be used for food production!), old lumber, unwanted ceramic pots, etc. As the facilitator, think about the timing of the project. Research and planning can begin early in the fall as should the creation of a composter. All of this will take permission from school board, custodians, and parental support. Brainstorm about how to raise money for seeds, soil, and a few tools.

Objectives:

While the ultimate goal is to create an edible schoolyard, this activity focuses on starting with container gardening. Containers are also practical in that students are able to bring them home once classes are finished in June.

Background Research:

Students first need to become EXCITED about the idea of growing a vegetable or grain. Start by asking the class to brainstorm some favourite foods and determining any vegetable or grain that went into the production of the food. (if they get too caught up in processed foods, get them to think of anything that has a distinguishable vegetable in the final product, i.e. pizza is a great choice or salad).

Make an itemized list of common vegetables and grains that grow in New Brunswick. Allow each student to choose one vegetable or grain to research. Each vegetable and grain has its own unique history and some particular heritage varieties actually have individual stories of how they came to be grown in New Brunswick. Tracing our food ancestry is an intriguing way to explore the movement of people across the globe and the foods they brought with them in the compact form of a seed!



Main Concepts and Vocabulary:

HERITAGE SEEDS: A seed is considered “heritage” if it has been grown in your area for more than 50 years and if it has a story attached to it.

COMPOST: A.k.a. “black gold”. Compost is the process by which organic material (food scraps, twigs, leaves, straw) is left to decompose until it “recreates” itself back into soil. An amazing process that requires patience, occasional turning of the pile and a mixture of both brown and green additions.

VERMICULTURE: A specific method of composting that uses red wiggler worms

COMPANION PLANTING: Companion planting can be described as the establishment of two or more plant species in close proximity so that some benefit (pest control, higher yield, etc.) is derived.

Activity Instructions:

1. Approach a Maritime seed company for a small sample donation of seeds (contacts listed in at the end of this activity). Get some good-sized pots that could contain a full sized garden plant. Planting can occur anytime from January to March to allow for enough time.
2. Get some soil for the pots. Potting mix for indoor plants should be fine, but ideally some compost can be mixed in at a ratio of 1 part compost to 2 parts soil. The compost provides important nutrients and organic matter to the soil that will help all plants grow and retain moisture.
3. Meanwhile, students can present on their background research on different vegetables and grains grown in New Brunswick and start asking questions related to the cultivation of the plants “What are the requirements of their plant? Does it like full sun? Can it tolerate cold weather?”
4. Each student can prepare a pot for their seed and plant. Generally, plant seeds 3 times the width deep in the soil. So if the seed is very small, it should be fairly close to the surface, while a big seed like a kidney bean will be planted about an inch below the surface.
5. Place the pots in a south window if possible, if no south window is available, use any available windowsill, avoiding north windows, which will get the least amount of sun, especially in the winter time.
6. As the plants emerge, students can document the different stages of growth with drawings, measurements and if you have access to a digital camera, with photos.
7. As long as plants are watered regularly and have access to sunlight and warmth, they should grow for at least a month and ideally right up until the end of the school year.
8. You may need to add some liquid amendments to help the plants grow in the indoors. A good fungus-preventing solution can be made from horsetail (*equisetum species*) that is commonly available throughout the forests of New Brunswick. Compost tea is a solution that can be made with simple equipment: an aquarium tank aerator, water and some compost. However if your plant looks healthy and not showing any signs of yellowing or disease, you don't have to add a thing. Even if you encounter some plant ailments, you can always call in a local gardener or agriculturalists to do a check up with the class and make it into a learning process for the whole class.



Heritage Tomatoes



Composting Resources

- Composting: Waste to Resources 4-H Leader/Teacher Guide. Written by Jean Bonhotal, Marianne Krasny. Published by Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- Global Gardens Manual. 2005. Produced by Falls Brook Centre
- NB Ministry of Environment's "Guide to Composting"
- Backyard Composting: Your Complete Guide to Yard Clippings Published by Harmonious Technologies
- Cornell University Website : http://compost.css.cornell.edu/Composting_homepage.html