

WITH EYES TO SEE



PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: FOOD

When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.

Brazilian Bishop Dom Helder Camara

ideas for
teachers

who want
to
integrate
social
justice
concepts

into what
and how
they teach

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The theme for this school year's With Eyes to See newsletters has been an exploration of three basic necessities around the world: Land, Water, and for this third and final edition of the year, **FOOD**.

When seeing food through a lens of social justice, there are infinite possibilities in the classroom and beyond, especially for interdisciplinary units that incorporate a combination of math, science, geography, writing/reading, "hands-on" growing, and eating itself. On the global level, we can look at the distribution of food resources, learning about other cultures through their foods, hunger/caloric intake in various countries and contexts, crop subsidies and trade agreements, etc.

On a more local level, we can explore nutrition and food habits of children/youth and the relation to an increase in obesity and diabetes; organic agriculture and its connection to the health of our bodies and the environment; where we get our own food; growing food in our homes and schools; and much more. There are many examples of schools around the country that have integrated food into their curriculums to varying degrees, from school gardens to actually connecting directly with local farms and serving fresh fruits, vegetables and grains in lunch programs.

The educational possibilities are limitless, and these pages cannot do justice to the topic, but the activities presented here attempt to provide ideas and get students to think more critically about the food they eat, how it is grown and makes it to their tables, how their sisters and brothers around the world experience it, and if our eating habits in this country relate to the lives of people we do not know, both in this country and beyond.

Increased food production will not solve hunger worldwide. Giving out food or money will not address the causes of hunger, (which are).. unjust distribution of land and resources, huge unequal access to education and health services, and corruption.

Miguel Villegas

CONCERN AMERICA

P.O. BOX 1790, SANTA ANA, CA 92702

(714) 953-8575--CONCAMERINC@EARTHLINK.NET--WWW.CONCERNAMERICA.ORG

K-12

What Does Your Pyramid Look Like?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) food pyramid has become a ubiquitous symbol of nutrition awareness in this country, and in 2005 it was updated as a way to tailor its message on an individual basis based on one's age, sex, and level of physical activity. The intention of the USDA is that each of us will use "our" pyramid to change eating and exercise habits for improved health. Certainly this is important for each of us and for the health of our society, but try the following exercises to take the pyramid to deeper levels. Bottom line: following the food pyramid is more than simply personal choice.

"It takes 1.5 acres to feed the average American. In Asia, people can feed themselves on only 0.2 of an acre."

"Cutting stalks at noontime. Perspiration drips to the earth. Know you that your bowl of rice each grain from hardship comes?"
Chang Chan-Pao

1. Have each student chart the food s/he eats for an entire week. Time will need to be spent first talking about basic concepts like portions, ounces, classifying foods, and charting. When ready, have each student print up her/his personalized food pyramid at www.mypyramid.gov (or bring some examples to the class based on the age, sex, and activity levels of your students). At this point, ask the following question: How does your food intake compare to the suggestions of your food pyramid?

To answer this question, students need to quantify what they ate into the categories of the pyramid. In small groups, have students discuss their results and summarize them. The next step is to brainstorm reasons for the differences which could range from the availability of stores/foods in the area, the food preferences of parents and care-givers, one's culture, taste preferences, time to shop for and prepare food, family income, and more. At this point, any number of activities is possible. Three examples include: if the cultural food choices of students is not reflected in the pyramid, they could design their own; if there are few stores in the area that sell fresh produce and whole grain products, students can invite local politicians, businesspeople, and/or community leaders with whom to talk about this issue; week-long menus can be planned that the students would enjoy eating, that they and their parents/care-givers can make, and that incorporate healthy ingredients (try making some of the meals in class).

2. Related to the previous activity, food pyramids already exist that showcase the diets of other cultures, including Mediterranean, Latin American, and Asian. These can be found at www.oldwayspt.org. Print up copies of each of these pyramids, including two others that can be found there: Vegetarian and *EatWise*. Do any of these pyramids better reflect the diets of students than the U.S. based example used above? How do all of these pyramids compare? What is the same/different? On a general level, are food pyramids a good way for promoting good nutrition? Why or why not?

3. FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN: Ask children to list things that are good for them to eat, and highlight healthy foods that they know. Show them the USDA food pyramid, and have them find the foods that they themselves had already identified. What foods do they eat that aren't on the pyramid? Show them copies of the pyramids from other cultures listed above. What is the same?

Food 101

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Think globally, act locally, and for students, what is more local than the place where most spend close to a third of their lives from the time they are young children to young adults, and where they eat at least one meal a day throughout this time: SCHOOL. With a focus on school, the following activities are based on the premise that fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low fat/sugar diets are best for children; that organic, locally produced foods are best for our health and that of the environment; and that food has a great potential for getting students engaged in learning. For each activity, the students will become researchers that collect, compile, and analyze the data they find.

1. In the documentary film *Supersize Me*, highlighted on page 4, there is a segment in which a school in Wisconsin of at-risk youth saw a marked decrease in disciplinary issues once natural and fresh foods were served for lunch; another scene shows a school cafeteria worker boasting that the only kitchen tool she needs is a box cutter. What food is served at your school? Is it made from scratch, using fresh ingredients, or processed at a factory and delivered in a box to the school? Where do the ingredients and food come from? Locally, or shipped long distances? Who makes these decisions? What is the basis for the food that is served in the school? Nutrition? Cost? Ease? Wishes of the students? The answers to these and similar questions enable the students to create a comprehensive overview of the food served at their school. And then the big question is: What to do with information?

2. School lunches certainly aren't the only source of food for students considering that many bring their own lunches. Students can do a survey of their classmates for a week to get a sense of what food is brought from home. How does this compare with the lunches, in terms of balanced nutrition, that are served by the school? Who packs their lunch? How much of these lunches is consumed vs. thrown away? How does this compare with the school lunches? In general, are these students getting a healthy, balanced diet for lunch? (NOTE: this exercise would not be appropriate if it singled out students whose lunches bring them embarrassment for either economic or cultural reasons).

3. What activities are currently taking place at the school which focus on good nutrition? On fresh, natural foods? And what of these activities is tied directly to the lunches served by the school/consumed by the students? To get a sense of the possibilities, have the students look at the web site www.edibleschoolyard.org which highlights the Martin Luther King Middle Jr. Middle School, a public school for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students in Berkeley, California in which food, from growing to cooking, is integrated into the curriculum. If access to the internet is difficult for the entire class, various pages from the site can be printed and used instead.

4. Grow it yourself! Many schools have gardens, but too often, especially in colder climates, crops mature when the students are on summer vacation. What types of vegetables can be grown in the classroom itself? What types of planting systems could the class build and maintain? Researching these questions is a lesson in and of itself; the next step is to put them into practice. Such an adventure infuses literature, math, science, and eating...all important subjects at school!

"At home I serve the kind of food I know the story behind."
Michael Pollan

"We can each make a huge difference in our own little space, create a green holistic oasis, influence our family and friends and let the ripples float outward for a better environment worldwide."
Darina Allen

RECOMMENDED

"Forks and spoons have probably done more to reconcile people who cannot agree than guns and bombs ever did" Theodore Zeldin

"Food is our common ground, a universal experience." James Beard

RESOURCES

The following is a list of resources that focus on food issues and includes a movie, books, and web sites.

1. Nominated for Best Documentary Feature in 2004, Filmmaker Morgan Spurlock's *Supersize Me* follows his own one-month stint to eat nothing but MacDonalds food. The film explores the legal, financial, and physical costs of America's hunger for fast food. For more information, including how to make school lunches healthier, visit www.supersizeme.com.

2. To get an in-depth look behind fast food from the process of growing and preparing the food to the business behind the restaurants, even the toys in Happy Meals, read *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, by Eric Schlosser. This book can be used both as a resource or for great reading for high school classes.

3. A good resource for learning all that goes into the things we eat and use is *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things* by John C. Ryan and Alan Thein Durning.

4. To explore the problems of hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity internationally, visit www.feedingminds.org. For more ideas about making school lunches healthier, visit www.rethinkingschoollunch.org.

CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Colombia, Guinea, and Mozambique.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in California which include:

- * The St. Nicholas Project
- * Walk Out of Poverty
- * Infusion Method Workshops for teachers
- * "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- * School and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- * Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Feel free to contact the Education Coordinator at Concern America for more information on any of these projects.

What Did it Take to Make it?

Most students have planted seeds in plastic cups with soil and water and watched them grow. However, most of us never consider what it takes to get food to our tables, from the resources that went into growing/producing the food to the transportation to our supermarkets. For example, to produce one pound of beef it takes 12,000 gallons of water to grow the grain/corn used to feed the cow; compare that to 420 gallons of water to produce chicken. Similarly, it takes 100 times more water to produce 1 pound of animal protein than 1 pound of vegetable protein. On top of water, one must also consider the amount of soil/space needed, the fertilizer and herbicides/pesticides used and what they kill/where they end up, and the fuel used to process and transport them. Have students make a list of the food they eat in one day, and then create charts that list each item (corn, beef, carrots, etc.), with the resources needed to get them to their table. Some time will need to be spent searching for the information. (see above for related resources, especially *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things*)

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