

Lesson 2.2: What Are We Eating?

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Time Frame: 1 class period

Materials:

- Food Sorting [Activity](#)
- What Are We Eating? [Class Data Collection Sheet](#)
- Data Representations
 - [Intake of dietary factors among adults 25 or older at the global and regional level in 2017](#)
 - [Figure A: mortality rate per 100,000](#)
 - [Figure A: death rates and number of deaths attributable to individual diet risks by socio-economic index \(SDI\) and cause of death](#)
- [Food Influences Case Studies](#)

In this lesson, students use case studies to explore the influences on teen food choices, and the ways in which teens may or may not integrate healthy foods into their diets. Teens discuss ways to positively impact their families' food choices.

Teacher Background:

In today's world, it is challenging, if not nearly impossible, to live only on Native foods. Because of this, many Native people promote a hybridized diet that incorporates both Western and traditional foods in a way that still supports cultural and spiritual connection. Fostering a deeper connection with food happens in many ways. For example, growing one's own food, harvesting and processing it by hand, and giving thanks to the earth, animals, and plants that have made themselves available to human communities for mindful consumption, are all a part of interacting with food in a way that supports cultural and spiritual cohesion.

Across Indian Country, Native communities have their own cultural traditions, stories, songs, and methods for interacting with food. In Pomo country specifically, a wide variety of detailed **baskets** were used for each step of the harvesting, gathering, and

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preparing process. Interacting with edible plants requires that significant time and care are taken to weave baskets that can then be used to handle food, with each basket design symbolizing specific edible organisms.

In this example, eating food is not just about nutrition and energy, it is also about the community in which weavers weave, the songs and stories that both weavers and gatherers sing and tell as they work, and about the deepening connection between organic materials and the humans that rely on them.

In many Native communities, the Westernization of food systems has had negative consequences on mental, spiritual, and physical health. Traditionally, Native peoples did not consume refined processed sugars, as sugar came organically from fruits, and were turned into syrups or beverages when prepared for consumption.

Alcohol, another introduction to Native communities through colonization, contributes to physical and mental health disparities in Indian Country as well, with high rates of diabetes and coronary heart disease.

Developing an awareness of the kinds of foods students consume is the first step in changing habits around food. Remember, “food habits” are not just our habits around eating. Eating in a way that is aligned with Indigenous values and that values the health of communities and the greater ecosystem requires reflection on how the foods we eat impact the land, animals, and plants.

In this lesson, students explore four categories of food:

- **Indigenous Foods**
- **Settler/Introduced Foods**
- **Whole Foods**
- **Processed Foods**

Indigenous foods can be defined as locally grown food that is originally from the area and has been eaten by Native people for thousands of years. This food is grown with no chemicals or pesticides and is grown in just the right amount.

Settler or introduced foods represent any foods that are not indigenous to the local landscape, and that often come from outside the country. Just because a food is introduced doesn't mean it is unhealthy or bad for the environment, though sometimes this is the case. Introduced foods have the possibility of interfering with the local ecosystem when not controlled properly. The risk of certain organisms becoming invasive, taking over local ecosystems, is ever present. In addition, introduced foods may not align with the nutritional needs of the local community,

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which can cause damage to physical health. It is important to be aware of these possible impacts when consuming foods that are not a part of one's ancestral food diet. One common example of introduced foods conflicting with Indigenous diets is the introduction of dairy products and the high rates of lactose intolerance found in Native communities.

Whole foods can be defined as foods that have been processed or changed very little from their original form. Whole foods do not have added flavors or additives. While Native communities do process foods (Pomo acorn bread, for example, requires significant processing), many foods are minimally processed.

Processed foods can be defined as foods that have been altered or changed from their original form, and that often include added flavors, preservatives, and substances. These foods might taste and look totally different than the organisms from which they originate. Processed foods often contain added sugars and saturated fats that can be detrimental to health.

Much of human eating habits can be linked to community norms and expectations. We tend to eat what our families eat, and, especially for teenagers, peer pressure and pressure to fit in significantly informs choices around eating, exercise, and behavior. This lesson breaks down the categories of influence that students may feel to eat a certain way.

The categories include:

- **Family responsibilities and role models:** Referring to the norms in one's family about acquiring food, preparing, and eating it.
- **Cultural norms and traditions:** Referring to traditional foods, attitudes around cultural foods from one's own culture and other cultures.
- **Environmental awareness and concern:** Referring to consuming, buying, and growing foods with concern for how those behaviors impact the local and global environment.
- **Popular and peer culture:** Referring to norms, pressure, and social attitudes that influence decisions and behaviors in regards to food.

These categories support students in understanding how their personal eating habits come to be and allows them to consider ways that they may want to adjust or improve their relationship with food. By analyzing case studies of teens their age, students begin to identify these influences in others, and apply the same awareness and analysis to their own habits.

ENGAGE

Provide students with the **Food Sorting: What am I Eating? worksheet**. Ask students to categorize the foods listed in the box at the bottom of the page into the correct categories.

EXPLORE

Project the **What Are We Eating? Class Data Collection worksheet** for students to see.

Explain to students that each row of boxes corresponds with a “**category of influence.**” Each category represents the kinds of influences we might have in our lives that impact what we eat. The four categories are:

1. **Family Responsibility and Role Models**
2. **Cultural Norms and Traditions**
3. **Environmental Awareness and Concern**
4. **Pop Culture and Peer Culture**

Students might think of new categories as they move through the lesson.

Read each statement for the class, and have students silently raise their hands if the statement read applies to them. Count the number of hands raised for each statement and write the number in the box.

As a class, observe the data you’ve collected and discuss the **follow-up questions**:

- Which statements have the *highest* number of students, and what categories do they come from?
 - Why do you think these statements are most represented in our class?
- Which statements have the *lowest* number of students, and what categories do they come from?

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- Why do you think these statements are least represented in our class?
- Which category do you think influences the class's *overall* eating choices the most?
- Can any other conclusions be drawn from the class data?

EXPLAIN

Explain to students that for many people, considering what is normal within one's family, culture, environment, and popular or peer culture is a major part of deciding what to eat.

When your family or friends eat a certain way, commonly you will eat the same. Just because your family or friends eat a certain way, however, does not mean that those food choices are the healthiest for you or your environment.

Walk students through the **data representations**, asking what they **notice** and **wonder** about the data.

[Intake of dietary factors among adults 25 or older at the global and regional level in 2017](#)

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Round the conversation out by reminding students to look for peers and adults who model healthy eating for you. It's important to notice people who care about their health and the health of their environment.

ELABORATE

Provide students with the **Food and Health: Who Influences Us? worksheets**. This activity includes four separate scenarios that highlight ways that teens make decisions

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about what to eat. Students consider the importance of role models and how food choices impact different parts of their health.

You may choose to assign two scenarios to pairs or groups, or have students complete all four.

EVALUATE

As a class, discuss the following questions:

1. **Who and what can influence the way we eat?**
2. **How can food impact our health?**
3. **What are some ways we can influence others to live healthy lives?**

VOCABULARY

Indigenous: Produced, growing, living, or occurring Natively or naturally in a particular region or environment

Food Sovereignty: To achieve independence in terms of the production and provision of food. Communities who achieve food sovereignty grow, distribute, and consume their own food from their own food sources.

Reinvigorate: To give new or renewed strength or energy to (something or someone) : to invigorate (something or someone) again

Nutrition: Related to eating foods that provide the nutrients needed to live. Nutrients found in food and drink help provide energy to the body.

Indigenous Foods: Locally grown food that is originally from the area and has been eaten by Native people for thousands of years. Food is grown with no chemicals or pesticides, food is grown in just the right amount.

Settler/Introduced Foods: Foods that come from other countries or from outside the local ecosystem. Foods are sometimes healthy and sometimes damaging to health. Sometimes these plants can harm the local ecosystem.

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Processed Foods: Foods that have been altered or changed from their original form. They often have added flavors, or artificial substances added, and might taste much different than their original form.

Whole Foods: Foods that have very little, or no processing/have not been changed from their original form. Foods do not have additives or any artificial substances added.

STANDARDS

CA Health Standards:

1.1.N Describe the short- and long-term impact of nutritional choices on health.

1.5.N Differentiate between diets that are health-promoting and diets linked to disease.

1.10.N Identify the impact of nutrition on chronic disease.

Common Core:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2

Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CA Indian Essential Understandings:

Essential Understanding 2: California Indian identity is individual and the range of Tribal identity from assimilated to traditional is unique to each individual. The diversity of identity means there is no standard or cookie cutter appearance or behavior. There is no generic American Indian, in California, or in the United States.

Essential Understanding 4: California Indian peoples' histories and cultures have been and continue to be impacted by foreign, state, and federal policies. Policies developed during the Mission Period, the Gold Rush Allotment, the Boarding School Period, termination policies, and self-determination policies are integral parts of the history of tribes in California.

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Essential Understanding 5: Land and place are unique and inextricably tied to Tribal cultures.

SOURCES

- [Tending the Wild](#) by Kat Anderson
- [Food in California Indian Culture](#) by Ira Jackni
- The Lancet (2017). “[Health effects of dietary risks in 194 countries, 1990-2017](#)”