

Politics of Food – Student Packet

In this module you will read three articles that discuss the health and well-being of humans and how science, agriculture, and politics are connected.

Reading Selections for This Module

Berry, Wendell. “The Pleasures of Eating.” *What Are People For? Essays*. New York: North Point/ Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990. 145-52. Print.

Pollan, Michael. “When a Crop Becomes King.” *New York Times* 19 July 2002, late ed.: A17. Print.

Rayner, Jay. “Big Agriculture is the Only Option to Stop the World Going Hungry.” *The Observer*. 11 Sept. 2010. Web. 5 Aug. 2013.
<<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/sep/12/food-riots-farming>>.

Instructions: Complete all of the activities on a separate piece of paper unless a chart is provided for you. Your work may be handwritten or typed in a Word or Google document. Label each activity so that it is easy for your teacher to check your work. Adhere to the following schedule unless directed otherwise by your teacher.

WEEK 1: Activities 1-3

WEEK 2: Activities 4-7

WEEK 3: Activities 8-9

Activity 1: Quickwrite

Write a paragraph in response to the following question.

Think about the amount of sugar, fried foods, meat, fish, fresh vegetables, and fruit that you eat daily. Evaluate your own dietary habits and discuss whether and in what ways you think you should (or should not) change your diet.

Read “The Pleasures of Eating” by Wendell Berry

Activity 2: Say, Mean, Matter (Berry)

Para. #	What does it say? (Paraphrase the text)	What does it mean? (Explain what it says)	Why does it matter? (Why is it important?)
1			
2			
3	<i>He defines eating as an agricultural act. The eater is the final participant in the act of planting & growing food.</i>	<i>He suggests that we never think about food in terms of an “agricultural act” and that we do not ask critical questions about the quality and cost of food that is sold. We are being used by the food industry.</i>	<i>He wants us to be conscious of how central food is and to get more pleasure from it, to be more aware of our health. He believes that it’s almost sinful to be ignorant.</i>
4			
5			

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16			
17			

Activity 3: Annotations (Berry)

Close Reading Questions

1. Where is the introduction?
2. What is the issue or problem that Berry is writing about?
3. What are the author's main arguments?
4. What examples does he give?
5. What is the conclusion?
6. What is your reaction to what the author is saying? Do you agree or disagree with him?

Stylistic Choices

1. Look at the following words and phrases and discuss why Berry chose these specific words to explain his concerns about our lack of knowledge concerning the agricultural process:

- mere consumers (paragraph 6)
- victim (paragraph 6)
- one reason to eat responsibly is to live free (paragraph 7)
- remarkable obliviousness (paragraph 9)
- dependent on toxic chemicals (paragraph 10)
- ignorance and helplessness (paragraph 12)
- bechemicaled factory-fields (paragraph 21)
- factory production line...looks more like a concentration camp (paragraph 21)

How are you affected overall by his language choices?

2. Find at least 3 sentences in Berry's essay that you have trouble understanding; rewrite them in your own words without losing or changing the central idea.

3. Find the sentence in paragraph 9 that piles up verbs until you're quite overwhelmed (hint: it begins with "The passive American consumer...". What is the effect of such a sentence on the reader? Does it have rhythm? Does it matter?

Structure of the Text

1. What is the text's main idea?
2. What are the supporting ideas?
3. What is the writer trying to accomplish?
4. Which section do you find most persuasive? Least persuasive? Why?

Marking (or the 'real' Annotations)

"Annotations" refer to marks in the text that indicate the reader's thoughts, questions and understandings while reading. For this final step, go through "The Pleasures of Eating" with a highlighter and a pencil and make sure you have MARKED (underlined, circled, highlighted, writing in the margins) all of the words and sentences that you used in answering EVERY question in this activity.

That means that your Berry article will have:

- a) only a few marks/notes
- b) tons of marks/notes

If you answered (b), you are CORRECT!

Read “When a Crop Becomes King” by Michael Pollan

Activity 4: Say, Mean, Matter (Pollan)

Para. #	What does it say? (Paraphrase the text)	What does it mean? (Explain what it says)	Why does it matter? (Why is it important?)
1			
2			
3			

4			
5			
6	<i>It explains how pervasive corn is in our diet, how hidden from us it is. It also explains how the extra corn is used by companies.</i>	<i>The meat that we eat (chicken, pigs, cows, fish) is all fed corn, and since these animals haven't evolved to eat corn, they get sick, so they are fed antibiotics.</i>	<i>Our health might be affected from eating the flesh of these animals.</i>
7			

8			
9			
10			
11			

12			
13			

Activity 5: Annotations (Pollan)

Close Reading Questions

1. Where is the introduction?
2. What is the issue or problem that Pollan is writing about?
3. What are the author's main arguments?
4. What examples does he give?
5. What is the conclusion?
6. What is your reaction to what the author is saying? Do you agree or disagree with him?

Stylistic Choices

1. Notice the soothing language of the first paragraph – its romantic treatment of corn as fanciful and idealistic.

- plants stretched toward the sun (1)
- ears of sweet corn (1)
- ceremonies of an American summer (1)
- second great lawn (1)

How are you affected by these language choices?

Now examine the words Pollan uses in the rest of the essay. They are the opposite of fanciful and idealistic.

- dominion
- welfare for the plant
- cornification
- corn we consume is invisible
- corn diet wreaks havoc
- illness and infection
- pushed sugar aside
- expanding race of corn eaters
- epidemic of obesity
- serious and lasting damage
- greediest of plants
- cracked system

How are you affected by this language?

2. Find at least 3 sentences in Pollan's essay that you have trouble understanding. Rewrite them in your own words without losing or changing the central idea.

3. Does Pollan use varied sentence structure? Explain. What effect does that have on the reader? Why?

Structure of the Text

1. What is the text's main idea?
2. What are the supporting ideas?
3. What is the writer trying to accomplish?
4. Which section is most persuasive? Least persuasive?

Marking (or the 'real' Annotations)

“Annotations” refer to marks in the text that indicate the reader’s thoughts, questions and understandings while reading. For this final step, go through “When a Crop Becomes King” with a highlighter and a pencil and make sure you have MARKED (underlined, circled, highlighted, writing in the margins) all of the words and sentences that you used in answering EVERY question in this activity.

That means that your Pollan article will be:

- c) super pristine clean
- d) a mess!

If you answered (b), you are CORRECT!

**Read “Big Agriculture is the Only Option to Stop
the World Going Hungry” by Jay Rayner**

Activity 6: Reading for Understanding (Rayner)

Read the title and the subtitle of the Rayner article. Answer the following questions:

- Do you think that Rayner will agree or disagree with Wendell Berry or Michael Pollan? Why or why not?
- Which article so far was the most difficult to read with an open mind?
- Do you think that you will agree with Rayner? If not, do you think you can read with an open mind? Why or why not?

Look over the following list of words before you read. Then go to the appropriate paragraphs, and highlight the selected words in the text.

- bout (¶ 1): a fight
- commodity (¶ 2): something bought and sold
- foodies (¶ 3): people who are very interested in high quality, delicious food
- gastroporn (¶ 4): high quality pictures or descriptions of food items or prepared dishes that emphasize the sensuousness of the food.
- inherently evil (¶ 4): evil is inborn, natural
- hinder (¶ 4): hold back, prevent
- unblemished (¶ 5): without a blemish, perfect
- harried (¶ 5): bothered, harassed, annoyed

- shedding (¶ 7): dropping off, like an animal sheds fur
- Sunday supplements (¶ 11): magazine-like publications that come with the Sunday newspapers

Reading “Big Agriculture Is the Only Option to Stop the World Going Hungry”

The previous articles argued against “Big Agriculture” in favor of local, organic, home-grown, and self-prepared food. Wendell Berry says he likes “to eat vegetables and fruits that [he knows] have lived happily and healthily in good soil, not the products of the huge, bechemicaled factory-field.” Michael Pollan laments the fact that government policies have made corn, especially high fructose corn syrup, a major part of our diet. However, Rayner, at least judging from the headline, is going to argue that we need factory farms, or the world will starve. As you read for the first time, you probably won’t be able to avoid thinking “What would Berry say to this? What would Pollan say? What would Barboza say?” However, you should also be asking, “What if Rayner is right?”

As you read the article, **note in the margins what you think these other writers would say to each point.** Do any of them have good arguments against the points that Rayner is making? Are there any sections where Rayner is responding to the types of arguments that the other authors have made?

Activity 7: Annotations (Rayner)

Close Reading Questions

1. What are the major claims and assertions that Rayner is making?
2. What evidence does Rayner supply to support his claims?
3. Are there any claims that Rayner makes that appear to be weak or unsupported?
4. Do you think the author has left something out on purpose? What and why?

Stylistic Choices

This article was published in a British newspaper. British English is somewhat different from American English. For American readers, however, the important question is whether Rayner’s examples from England are relevant to our situation in our own country.

1. To help yourself think about this important point, read through the text of the article again. Write a “B” in the left margin where you think the argument applies only to

Britain and a “U” where you think the argument is more “Universal,” applying to the whole world. In the right margin, note why you chose the letter you did.

2. When Rayner uses the pronouns “we” or “our,” who do they refer to? Does it include Americans or people in other parts of the world?” And even if the immediate reference is to Britain, can the same argument be applied to other countries? Go through the text and circle instances of “we” and “our.” In the margins, note who you think is included or intended in the statement.

Structure of the Text

1. What does Rayner say in the introduction of his article?
2. What are the main section in his article and what is the main argument of each section?
3. What does he say in his conclusion? How do you know he has reached the conclusion?

Activity 8: Synthesizing the Texts

Using your annotations and notes for each article, write a short summary of each by writing one sentence in answer to the following questions:

	Berry	Pollan	Rayner
What is the article about?			
What is the main argument?			
What does the author want us to do?			

After filling in the chart above, answer the following questions:

Do any of the authors share assumptions?

How does each author frame his argument? Which frame do you feel is the most compelling or significant, and why?

Activity 9: Writing Task

Food is an essential part of the human experience. It is necessary for life and is a key ingredient of culture. A government that cannot feed its people is not a good government. People make individual choices about what to eat and how to prepare it, but governments also make policies that control and influence the type, abundance, and quality of food. A balanced diet can make us healthy while eating a limited diet of one or two types of food, even if the food is high quality, can make us sick. Food can appear to be healthy but contain pesticides, contaminants, or dangerous bacteria. We make personal choices about food, but our choices are influenced by advertising and government policies.

For example, Wendell Berry wants us to become more aware and involved in the food we eat. He wants us to ask questions and make personal choices. Michael Pollan discusses the unintended consequences of massive government subsidies on the price and availability of corn. His argument is a policy argument. Although Jay Rayner does not mention Wendell Berry by name, he clearly thinks that if everyone made the personal choices that Berry recommends, it would lead to food that was too expensive for most people to buy, with dire social consequences.

Taking the statement you wrote at the end of Activity 8, explaining which author you agree with the most as a starting point, and taking the arguments and evidence of all authors into account, choose one of the following writing tasks:

#1 Personal View: In response to the articles you read in this module, write an essay in which you state your own personal preferences regarding food and nutrition. In this paper, describe the main criteria by which you will make decisions about food. Discuss what kinds of food you will buy for yourself and your family members, where you will buy it, and how you will prepare it. In addition to references to one or more of the three articles, support your food plan with logical arguments and evidence.

#2 Policy View: In response to the four articles you read in this module, what should policy-makers (politicians, school boards, food safety experts, etc.) do to make the food supply healthy and affordable? You might discuss such issues as food labeling, agricultural subsidies, nutritional education, food inspections, and regulations. You might also discuss whether certain types of unhealthy foods should be banned from stores, restaurants, or schools. Write an essay in which you describe a policy or a plan that would improve our food supply or the health of the population. In addition to references to one or more of the three articles, support your plan with logical arguments and evidence.