

INFLUENCES ON NUTRITIONAL PRACTICES AND WELLNESS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Psychological, Cultural and Social Influences on Food Choices

Lesson Grade Levels: 7-12

Concept: Psychological, Cultural and Social Influences on Food Choices

Comprehensive Standard: 6.1 Analyze the factors that influence nutritional practices and wellness across the lifespan

Technical Standard: 6.1.1 Examine the psychological, cultural and social influences related to food choices

LESSON COMPETENCIES:

- Identify influences on the food choices (MS)
- Analyze internal and external influences on food choices (HS)
- Analyze marketing strategies that influence food choices (HS)

ANTICIPATED BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES:

- Students recognize the numerous influences on food choices made by individuals and families.
- Students are willing to try new foods.

Resources Needed:

- Overhead transparency of [*Factors That Influence Food Choices*](#)
- Map of world and slips of paper
- Foods from around the world for tasting panel
- Copies of all handouts/graphic organizer for each student
- Foods for tasting panel

References for teachers and students:

West, Dorothy. (2006). Nutrition, Food and Fitness. The Goodheart-Wilcox Company, Inc., Tinley Park, Ill. (<http://www.g-w.com/>). The book has been recently updated to include information on the new Dietary Guidelines and *MyPyramid*. Chapter 2 is titled - Factors Affecting Food Choices.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (1996). Family, Food and Society: A Teacher's Guide. WI Department of Public Instruction, Milwaukee, WI. This guide is suggests an approach to curriculum that challenges students to see the larger ramifications of their daily choices on their local and global communities. Using hands-on experiences and food labs, students learn to examine family and societal goals and how choices about food can help or hinder the realization of these goals. The five modules of the guide, filled with sample handouts and lesson materials, provide a prototype of a high school family, food, and society course. Module B addresses the development of food-related attitudes and norms and their significance to individuals and families. Available at the *Department of Wisconsin* webpage (<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/pubsales/lfskll.html>).

A lesson plan on this topic is available at www.healthteacher.com. This site is no longer free; it does require a subscription.

A wide variety of resources on ethnic and cultural influences on food choices including food guide pyramids from different cultures can be accessed at the *Food and Nutrition Information Center* at www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/ Click on “Topics A-Z” and then click on “Ethnic and Cultural”.

Background Information:

Food choices are influenced by many factors:

- age
- gender
- friends
- family
- role models
- cultural background
- where we live
- advertising
- nutrition knowledge
- others

People bond and foster relationships around the dinner table and at celebrations with special meals and foods, such as birthday cake or a graduation reception. Some people use food to cope with stress by overeating or depriving themselves of food. Food may also be used as a reward for accomplishing a specific goal or as a way of expressing creativity. Food is also a big part of social events. Consequently, what people eat can reveal much about who they are socially, politically and culturally.

Factors influencing food choices include:

- **Taste, texture and appearance**
- **Economics** – the cost of food affects what we eat and impacts the global economy.
- **Our early experiences with food** –food preferences begin early in life and change as we are exposed to new people and places. As children, our choices were in the hands of our parents. However, as we get older, our experiences with new people and places increase, thereby offering a broader opportunity for experiencing new foods and expanding our food preferences and choices.
- **Habits** – Most of us eat from a particular core group of foods. About 100 items account for 75% of the foods most people eat. Having a narrow range of food choices provides us with security. For example, going to a particular fast-food restaurant provides common expectations and experiences. In addition, many people also acquire the cooking habits and meal planning choices of their mothers or grandmothers. For example, serving a Thanksgiving turkey with “stuffing” in the Midwest versus “chestnut dressing” in the East.

- **Culture** – Religious values can affect food choices. For example, Hindus do not eat beef and some Jewish people do not eat pork. The ethnic heritage of families can also affect eating behaviors. For example, families of Norwegian descent may serve lutefisk and lefse for a holiday celebration while families of German descent might serve rouladen and strudel. Culture can also dictate the times to eat and what to eat at certain meals.
- **Geographic location** -The area of the world that we live in also influences food choices. In Sweden, people would not eat an ear of corn because that is considered food for hogs. In the United States, we don't normally eat insects, but in many parts of the world, they are regarded as preferred foods. Geographic location also contributes to food availability and cost of food.
- **Advertising/Marketing** – Food producers spend billions of dollars each year on advertising and packaging to capture the attention and interest of the consumer. The power of persuasion is strong, and so food producers and restaurants try to make their products as appealing as possible to consumers, even if it means making false claims.
- **Social factors** – Social changes have a big effect on the food industry. Our fast-paced society demands drive-through restaurants, salads in a bag, and microwaveable entrees. Gas stations now have restaurants attached to them so that people can do one-stop shopping while on the road. Social relationships with our peers also influence our food choices. When friends gather, food choices may be made based on our desire to feel accepted as part of the group.
- **Health/Weight Concerns** – Some people have health concerns that influence food choices. For example, a young person may have concerns about their weight – overweight or underweight.
- **Emotions** - Our emotions also play a role in food choices. We may eat some foods when we are happy and others when we are sad.

Learning Activities:

Middle School Level

- Ask students to make a list of their ten favorite foods. Ask the following questions and list student responses on the board:
 - Why did you choose these foods?
 - Are there some foods that several of you have on your list? What are they?
 - What types of foods would your parents have on their lists?
 - What types of foods does your family serve at holidays (i.e. Thanksgiving, Christmas)? Why are these foods served?
- **NEW** Ask students to think about the foods that are a part of their family traditions. Discuss the reasons that might make a food or dish special – this may include an association with their cultural heritage, their preparation differs from the way other families make it, a member of the family developed the recipe such as Grandma's potato salad, the context in which the food is

served such as a holiday, religious ceremony or camping trip, a story or event associated with the dish such as the chicken dinner dad cooked for mom the night he proposed or just because everyone in the family loves it. (Adapted from the teacher's guide to the Key Ingredients *Smithsonian* exhibit available at (<http://www.keyingredients.org/>).

- Ask students to brainstorm responses to the question: “What influences the food choices that we make?” Use the transparency master [Factors That Influence Food Choices](#) and the [graphic organizer](#) for students and discuss each of these factors with students. Give examples of each influence and ask students to give examples.
- Ask students to complete the t-chart, [“Social Times and the Foods We Choose”](#). Discuss other social events that the students associate with particular foods and why they make these associations. Discuss:
 - Would these food choices be the same in other regions of the U.S.?
 - How might these food choices be different in other regions?
- Ask students to brainstorm all of the ethnic foods that they have tried or have heard about. Students write these foods on slips of paper and identify countries of origin by placing the foods on a world map. Teacher may add to the list by identifying ethnic foods he/she has tried. Discuss influence of other cultures on American food habits/choices
- Hold a “tasting panel” with foods from around the world that students may not have tried (mango, papaya, pomegranate, etc.). Identify country of origin. A map could be used again for this activity with students identifying the countries from around the world that grow each food tried. Discuss how we develop a preference for foods - different tastes, textures, appearance, how it is prepared, etc.
- Have students conduct a survey of all students in their class or school. After compiling the results of their survey, develop a list of the “Top Ten Favorite Foods”. Discuss with students:
 - Why are these foods popular?
 - Would your parents choose the same foods? Why or why not?
 - What influences your food choices?
- **NEW** Share with students an image of the Corn Palace. Ask them to answer the question: “If you could build a monument honoring a food, what food would it be made out of and how would it be shaped?” Consider asking them to draw what it would look like.

High School Level

- Ask students to brainstorm their responses to the question: “Why do we choose to eat the foods that we do?” List student responses on the board.
- Use the transparency master [Factors That Influence Food Choices](#) and the [graphic organizer](#) for students and discuss each of these factors with students. Give examples of each influence and ask students to give examples.
- Following this illustrated lecture on the influences on our food choices, ask

- students to complete [*“Influences on Food Choices”*](#). Discuss responses. Ask students to identify other situations or choices they have made or others have made that represent the influences on the handout.
- Hold a “tasting panel” with foods from around the world that students may not have tried (mango, papaya, pomegranate, etc.). Identify country of origin. A map could be used again for this activity with students identifying the countries from around the world that grow each food tried. Discuss how we develop a preference for foods - different tastes, textures, appearance, how it is prepared, etc.
 - “Wrap it Up” – ask students to identify what they have learned from these activities and how it might influence their future food choices.

Academic Connections - NEW

- ✓ **Social Sciences** - Ask students to research the food customs/food availability of one of the countries that is a source of the foods included on the taste panel. A website that discusses the origins of the world’s food can be found at <http://museum.agropolis.fr/english/pages/expos/aliments/index.htm>
- ✓ **Social Sciences** - Visit the *Food Museum* online to explore the history of foods around the world. This site provides a "virtual tour of the world's foods, based on artifacts from the museum's collections. The site answers food questions, relates food news, reviews books, and describes the museum's programs." Of interest is the exhibits section, which includes food lists and foods that originated in the Western Hemisphere. Click on food history. <http://www.foodmuseum.com/>
- ✓ **Social Sciences** – check out the online educational companion to the Smithsonian Institution's traveling exhibition *Key Ingredients: America by Food*. At this website (<http://www.keyingredients.org/>), students can explore the two ingredients that are key to American cuisine – regional traditions and international influences. A teacher’s guide with lesson plan ideas is also available. The timeline offers information related to 500 years of American food including food used during war times, modern trends, etc. The *Great American Cookbook* offers recipes and family stories shared by visitors the sites.
- ✓ **Language Arts/Literature/Reading** - Read with the students or ask them to read *Salsa Stories* by Lulu Delacre. This is a children’s book that explains Hispanic culture through short stories and also includes recipes for dishes that are mentioned in the stories. Many young people think of Hispanic culture as coming from a single country. For example, in Texas children may feel that most people who speak Spanish are from Mexico, while in New York young people may think most Spanish speaking people come from Puerto Rico. *Salsa Stories* shows the broad panorama of Hispanic culture from many different countries, each country with different customs, climates, and cuisines.

After reading the book, have student make some of the recipes included in the book and/or a variety of salsas such as pineapple salsa, mango salsa, etc.

AND/OR Ask students to write their own story about a food that is special to them and create their own collection of stories and recipes. (See the reference to the *Great American Cookbook* at www.keyingredients.org for another example.)

This could be done as an extended activity with elementary students as well.

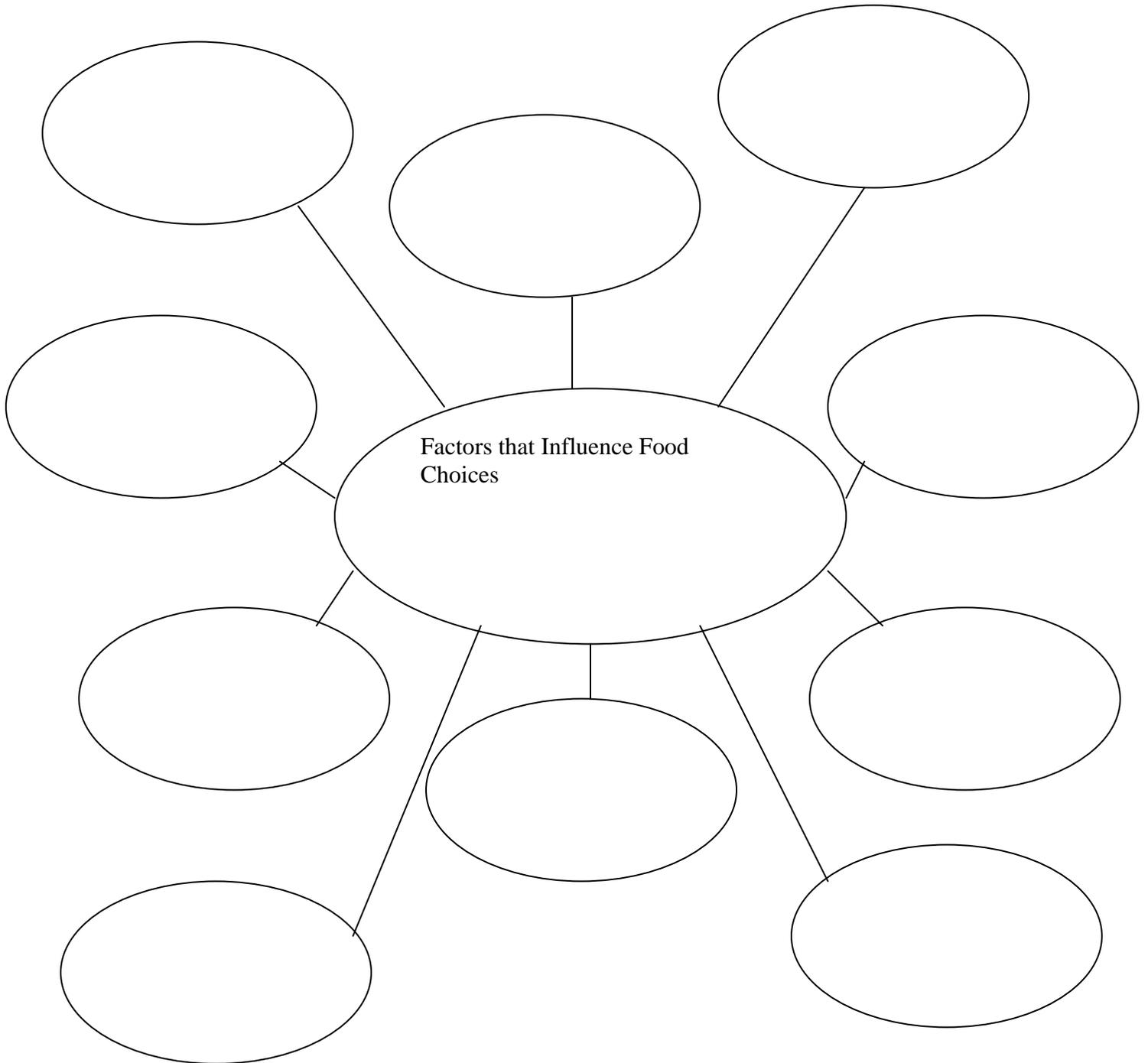
- ✓ **Mathematics/Statistics** – Use the results of the surveys conducted (see last bullet in learning activities) and create bar graphs showing the results.
- ✓ **Social Sciences** – Research the “Buy Nothing” movement to reduce consumerism and consumption. Relate to dining/eating out. Encourage students to work with family members to reduce meals eaten away from home.

Factors That Influence Food Choices

- **Taste, texture and appearance**
- **Economics**
- **Our early experiences with food**
- **Habits**
- **Culture**
- **Geographic location**
- **Advertising/Marketing**
- **Social factors**
- **Health/Weight Concerns**
- **Emotions**

Graphic Organizer

Identify the influences on food choices by writing each influence in the ovals as they are discussed. Give a personal example of that influence in each oval.



Influences on Food Choices

Name _____

Many factors influence our food choices. As you read each of the following situations, identify the influence on the food decision from the list below:

- a. **Climate/Geography**
- b. **Emotions**
- c. **Ethnic Influence**
- d. **Friends**
- e. **Health/Weight Concerns**
- f. **Media/Advertising**
- g. **Politics**
- h. **Religious Values**
- i. **Social Changes**
- j. **Technology**

- _____ 1. After losing the swim meet, Heather went home and “chowed down” a large bowl of ice cream.
- _____ 2. Jacob’s family will eat only kosher foods.
- _____ 3. Nikki’s mom does not get home from work until 6:30 p.m. Nikki has prepared a frozen entrée and a tossed salad for the two of them.
- _____ 4. Sweet corn, cantaloupe and watermelon are plentiful in South Dakota in the late summer.
- _____ 5. Lutefisk and lefse are served at the Olson family home for Sunday dinner.
- _____ 6. The Jones family chooses to eat only locally grown products to support area producers.
- _____ 7. Shelly selects a low sodium item from the menu.
- _____ 8. Rob convinces his mom to purchase the cereal with Tiger Woods on the package.
- _____ 9. Renae serves pizza, chips and pop at her slumber party.
- _____ 10. At home alone, John prepares a microwave entrée for supper.

Social Times and the Foods We Choose

Social Event	Food(s) Associated With It
Attending a football game	
A wedding reception	
A child's birthday party	
Going out to eat with friends	
Thanksgiving dinner	
Going to a movie	
School awards banquet	
Family reunion or gathering	
4 th of July picnic	
Graduation reception	
Going to a carnival or State Fair	
Going to the circus	
Going to a baseball game	
Camping trip	