

Food Exploration

Overview: Using their senses, kids will explore and develop a deeper appreciation for food.

Grade Level/Range: K -12

Objective:

In this lesson, kids will:

- Reflect on the life cycle of the garden-grown produce
- Practice a new way of eating
- Explore different senses by interacting with their food



Time: 30 minutes

Materials:

- Fresh fruits/vegetables (garden-grown or purchased from a grocery store or farmer's market) such as:
 - Cherry tomatoes
 - Cucumbers
 - Carrots
 - Sugar snap peas
 - Fruit (e.g. berries, oranges, figs, melons, etc.)
 - Sweet peppers (e.g. bell, banana)
 - Beets
 - Broccoli
 - Jicama
- Optional: knives and a cutting board to cut produce into smaller pieces.

Background Information

Encouraging kids to think about where their food came from, the resources it took to grow them, and truly savor each bite are ways for kids to practice mindfulness and appreciation for the foods they eat, whatever they may be.

Chefs often talk about how we “eat with our eyes.” That is, usually the first sense engaged when we eat is our sight. We look at a food before we taste it, and foods that are deemed visually attractive (a very subjective topic!) will be more appealing.

By engaging all of our senses and slowing down, mindful eating can create more awareness of our own bodies and the foods that nourish them.

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According to [scientific research](#), “mindfulness-based interventions in children and youths hold promise, particularly in relation to improving cognitive performance and resilience to stress.”

When working with kids, the practice of mindful eating should be exploratory and engage their curiosity. Take care to not provide guidance for specific foods kids should be eating, protocols for eating, or devalue any foods in particular.

Advanced Preparation

It’s crucial to check in advance with your school’s nurse, admin coordinator, parents, or teachers to see if any kids may have food allergies. If they do, make sure to provide a substitute or have an option that works for the entire group.

Laying the Groundwork

As an opener, you can ask students to think about:

- What senses do you use to eat?
- What are your favorite food flavors?
- What are your favorite food smells?
- What does being “mindful” mean to you?

Exploration

1. Have all students wash their hands before handling the produce they will be eating.
2. If time allows, work with kids to harvest, wash, and prepare the produce. Ensure that there are enough samples for each student. Older students may help cut the produce into bite-size pieces.
3. With the pieces of food ready, have your group of kids sit in a circle.
4. Let kids know that they will be doing a food exploration exercise and that you will be guiding them through a visualization with their eyes closed. Tell them that this is an experiment to see how it may change the way they feel, taste, or perceive their food. Reinforce that they will be silently following along to the instructions and have an opportunity to share about what they experienced after.
5. Pass out the produce samples and instruct students to not eat them yet. Encourage them to be patient and that they are going to try a mindfulness exercise before they get to taste the food.
6. With the food in their hands, tell them to close their eyes. Instruct them to take a deep breath in and out.
7. Use the following script as a guide for the visualization.
 - 1) Imagine this food at the beginning of its life as a seed.
 - 2) See your hands digging into the dirt and planting the seed into the ground.
 - 3) The seed waits underground and takes in the rain. The hard seed coat softens and cracks open.. A tiny root emerges, starts to grow, and begins taking in nutrients from the soil.
 - 4) A small shoot sprouts from the seed. The sprout pushes upwards and finally emerges from the soil.
 - 5) The tiny plant continues to take in water and sunlight. As it grows, you see plenty of friends help it along the way: Worms that make tunnels in the soil so that the rain can more easily be absorbed by its

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roots; people who pull nearby weeds so that it can take in more nutrients; birds that consume the insects who want to eat its leaves; pollinators that visit the flowers.

- 6) The plant continues to grow up towards the sky. Finally, it's ready to be harvested. Imagine yourself (or a farm worker) harvesting and washing the produce.
- 7) Now, this food is in your hands. Use your fingers to feel the texture. Is it smooth? Soft? Rough?
- 8) Bring it close to your nose. What does it smell like? Is it familiar or new?
- 9) Open your eyes for just a moment and look closely at it. Notice the colors, any patterns, and its shape.
- 10) When you're ready, close your eyes again and take a moment to appreciate everything the plant went through to end up in your hand. Take a deep breath in and out.
- 11) You're about to taste the food, but before you do, commit to chewing the food at least 10 times, as slowly as you can.
- 12) You can play with opening and closing your eyes and notice how that may change the taste.
- 13) With your eyes still closed, place the food in your mouth and begin to chew slowly. What flavors do you taste? Is it sweet? Earthy? Refreshing? Bitter? What is the texture? Is it soft? Crunchy? Can you hear any sound as you chew? Try holding your nose for a few seconds as you chew. Does the taste change?
- 14) Open your eyes.

Making Connections

After kids have tasted the food, prompt them to think about the following through an open discussion. Alternatively, or additionally, the included worksheet can be used for students to express their experience in writing.

Food associations

Kids reflect on how they used their senses to engage with their food and what this brought up for them.

- What words can you use to describe the food? Get creative! Does eating it call to mind any memories? Consider offering a personal anecdote. For example, you might share that biting into a juicy peach transports you to your grandmother's backyard, or that a bite of sweet corn evokes the memory of summer picnics. Or even that ripe tomatoes "taste like summer."
- Does the food spark other sense memories? For example, biting into a cucumber might bring to mind the scent of the dill pickles or even the summery smell of freshly mown grass.

Food cycle

Take time to discuss the journey of the food that was eaten and any new awareness around the food production process.

- What was the life cycle of this food? How long did it take for it to grow?
- What resources did it need to grow?
- How were you or others able to help it grow?
- What challenges did it possibly face and overcome?
- From the time it was a seed, how many different hands touched it?
- How does the journey of this garden-grown food compare to food bought in a store?

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Relationship to food

Allow kids to express what they are feeling in their bodies, minds, and energy and encourage them to practice gratitude around all aspects of food.

- How was this experience different from other times you eat?
- How do you and your body feel?
- How do you feel about the food you just ate? How did your reflection on the process of growing the food change how you felt about it?
- If you have tried the food before, how was this time different?
- What does it mean to be grateful for our food?
- How can we practice gratitude for food that others grew, prepared, or cooked for us?

Mindfulness

If time permits, wrap up this lesson by discussing mindfulness with kids.

- Ask, “In what other areas of life can we practice mindfulness? How about when you brush your teeth? Or weed the garden?” Explain how practicing mindfulness helps each of us to pay more attention to the world around us, and to focus on what is present for us, as opposed to focusing on the past or worrying about the future.
- Ask, “Can you think of any benefits to this way of paying attention?” For example, it can help improve the ability to focus on a task, calm our bodies, and manage stressful situations. It also provides opportunities to practice gratitude and cultivate joy. End by inviting kids to explore practicing mindfulness in other parts of their lives.

Branching Out

Taste Test Game

This quick food exploration activity allows kids to test their knowledge of different food flavors.

Materials:

- Blindfolds (simple pieces of cut cloth will work)
- Pieces of various foods (anything will do!)

Instructions:

- 1) Have kids break up into two teams.
- 2) Each team member will take turns blindfolding themselves and tasting different foods.
- 3) The first person to guess the food wins a point for their team!

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Food Exploration - Writing Worksheet

Food association

1. What words can you use to describe the food?
2. Does eating it call to mind any memories?

Food cycle

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3. How were you or others able to help it grow?
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Food Exploration - Writing Worksheet

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5. What does it mean to be grateful for our food?
6. How can we practice gratitude for food that others grew, prepared, or cooked for us?

Mindfulness

1. In what other areas of life can we practice mindfulness?
2. Can you think of any benefits to this way of paying attention?

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