

Contemporary Issues - Syllabus

Spring 2011

Casey Huling

Overview

In this course we will actively explore complex issues in our contemporary society such as politics, energy use, environmental issues, and public health. The common theme through which we will connect them all is food.

Why food?

By studying these issues using the lens of food we can gain a greater understanding of the political systems that shape public policy, energy use in the agriculture and transportation industries, the environmental impact of such energy use, and the agencies (and agents) who control public health. While each unit will focus on a specific area it will be important to keep the broader implications in mind as well.

The class format will follow that of a college seminar: full-class discussions of readings, guest presenters, sharing of student investigations and teacher-lead demonstrations and activities. Active participation is a requirement; this class will not be 'sit 'n' git.' Expect a half hour of reading each night and 3-5 pages of writing per week.

Reading (excerpts)

- * Omnivore's Dilemma by Michael Pollan
- * In Defense of Food by Michael Pollan
- * Food Politics by Marion Nestle
- * What to Eat by Marion Nestle
- * The Jungle by Upton Sinclair
- * Fast Food Nation by Eric Schlosser
- * Kitchen Confidential by Anthony Bourdain
- * The Scavenger's Guide to Haute Cuisine by Steven Rinella

Additional Reading

- * Newspapers, magazines, editorials, political speeches

Assessment

25% Reading responses

25% Class participation – Each student will be responsible for leading one round-table discussion. Students will be assessed by the teacher using a class-created rubric. Participation in class discussion will also be expected

25% Unit project – One goal of this course is to make at least one informed policy recommendation to local, state or national policy makers. This project can be taken on individually or in small groups.

25% Research paper –. Based on at least two units. Must submit a minimum of two drafts. Assessed using Social Studies department rubric.

Units

1. **Public Health and Politics**

Reading: In Defense of Food, What to Eat, Food Politics

As the nation's farmland continues to be depleted by industrial farming so too does the nutritional value of many of the foods we eat. This unit will explore how processed foods are trying to compensate for this lack of nutritional value. We will also explore the mechanisms in place that drive public policy toward health.

2. **Environmental Issues and Energy Use**

Reading: Omnivore's Dilemma, Fast Food Nation

In the face of rising fuel costs, the desire for locally grown products has risen dramatically. Along with the rise in energy costs, environmental impact is another factor driving the demand for local food. In this unit we will learn about the impact that one McDonald's hamburger has on our environment. This unit will also explore the connection between rising fuel costs and what we eat.

3. **Commercial Exposé**

Reading: Watch TV

Based on our previous units we will explore the actual food messages that reach people every day through TV. Your goal will be investigate the reality of one television commercial and how it affects consumers' choices.

4. **The Chicken Patty Project - June**

Reading: Kitchen Confidential

We will end the year with a local food project. We will research two chicken patty meals: one that comes to us once a week through our cafeteria food service and the other that we source ourselves from within 100 miles of Thetford.

Other Stuff

This course has a website (still under construction)

<http://bookbox.thet.net/~sstudiesch/CI/contemporaryissues.html>

Casey has email: casey.huling@thet.net

Casey has a phone at home: (802) 333-3608

Casey has a phone at school: (802) 785-4805