



Label Sleuths

Lesson By Cari Ladd M.Ed

Theme: Nutrition, Economics, Health, Current Events

Grade Level: 5-6th

Subject Area: Economics, Language Arts

Summary: This lesson plan utilizes a clip from the film Food, Inc., a documentary that examines food in the United States and the industry that produces it. Students can use these materials to explore what consumers should be able to learn about food from Nutrition Facts panels.

Standards:

Sixth Grade ELA

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.6](#) Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.8](#) Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not

Preparation:

- Find access to clip
- Print food pictures: cheeseburger, French fries, and a milkshake
- Ask each student to bring in a food container or a food label that has a Nutrition Facts panel on it.

Teaching Time: 30 minutes

Materials:

- Clip from Food, Inc.: "A Cornucopia of Choices" (length 4:55)
- Handout: Corn-derived Ingredients (PDF file)

Background: Corn and products made from processed corn are found in more ingredients than most people realize, especially in fast food. Most meat comes from corn-fed cattle, it is also in lots of breads and hamburger buns, the condiments and sauces almost always contain high fructose corn syrup, and french fries are cooked in corn oil. Even milkshakes and soda pop contains corn syrup solids and cellulose gum derived from corn. In fact, a study (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2582047/>) of fast food published by the National Academy of Sciences found that 160 food products purchased at Wendy's restaurants across the United States all contained some form of corn.

Lesson Procedure:

1. Key Terms and Vocabulary

- a. High Fructose Corn Syrup vs. Corn Syrup: *Corn syrup* is 100 percent plant sugars that is okay for your body in moderation, while *high fructose corn syrup* is processed from its natural plant sugar into fructose which is unhealthy for your body when consumed in large amounts.
2. Begin the activity by showing the class an image of a cheeseburger, French fries, and a milkshake. Ask students what these three foods have in common. Let students share their ideas, and then explain that they are all made with or from corn.
3. Explain that many of the foods available at the grocery store also contain corn. Then, show the film clip. Set up the clip by telling students that Michael Pollan is an author who has written books about the U.S. food industry.
4. Display or distribute the list of corn-derived ingredients provided in the Materials section of this lesson plan (the PDF worksheet). Have groups of three or four students examine the ingredients listed on their food packaging and make a list of any corn-based ingredients they find. If an ingredient is found on more than one package, students can add tally marks next to that ingredient on the list. Ask a member of each group to report that group's findings to the class.
5. Discussion questions:
 - a. Which corn-derived ingredients are most commonly found in the sample of foods examined in class?
 - b. What kinds of food typically contain ingredients derived from corn? Do students consider these foods "healthy"? Why or why not?
 - c. How frequently do students eat these foods?
 - d. How do students feel about the idea that corn has been "hiding" in these foods, often behind different names?
 - e. How frequently do students read the Nutrition Facts panels on the foods they eat?
 - f. How much do students want to know about the ingredients in their food?
 - g. Who should decide what information is provided on food labels? Consumers? The government? The food industry?

Wrap up: Conclude the activity by challenging students to write a personal statements about what consumers should be able to learn about their food from Nutrition Facts panels. Why are clear, understandable food labels important to us as consumers?