

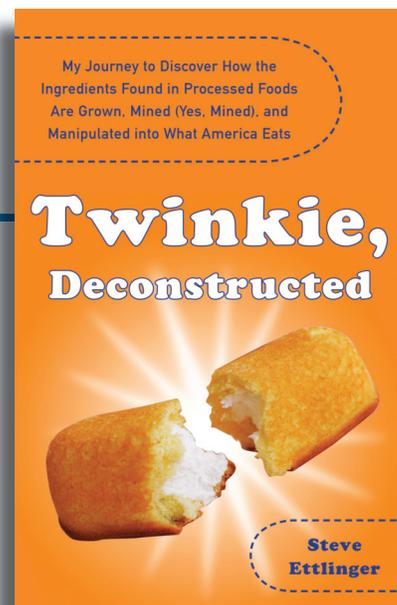


PENGUIN GROUP (USA)

A Teacher's Guide to Steve Ettlinger's

Twinkie, Deconstructed

My Journey to Discover How the Ingredients Found
in Processed Foods Are Grown, Mined (Yes, Mined),
and Manipulated into What America Eats



DISCUSSION TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

- How does the book relate to the well-worn quote, "You are what you eat?" Why is it important to know details about the sources of your food?
- Are you surprised by the raw sources of such common ingredients? What was the most surprising process or ingredient to you?
- What does it mean to have many common ingredients made from petroleum? How do you feel about that?
- What role does petroleum play in our food chain?
- Are artificial ingredients safe to eat? Is broccoli safe to eat?
- Are Twinkies bad for you? Does Ettlinger say they are bad or good for you?
- Do you think food ingredient manufacturers should be more open about their processes? Do you think we should know more about nutrition and agriculture and the food distribution business?
- What is Twinkie's role in the world economy?
- What role does homeland security play in the manufacture of artificial ingredients? How do risks compare with natural foods?
- Can you make a Twinkie from local foods? Whole foods? Organic ingredients? Why would you want to? What kind of shelf life would it have? How much would it cost?
- When does a chemical become a food? Are foods made of chemicals? If so, give examples.
- When are processed foods better than whole or natural foods? Are natural foods ever bad for you?
- If food is central to all cultures, what does processed food such as snack cakes say about our culture?
- Why do we have cake? When did cakes come into common creation?
- Identify some key historical moments in the development of food ingredients. How many are related directly to war?
- How has food processing affected our culture? How has our culture affected the food processing business?
- People have been processing food for a long time. What purpose did food processing have in the pre-industrial era? Over the last 200 years up to 1940? Since World War II? How has the role of processed food changed over the years? How is it different from culture to culture?

FOR JOURNALISM OR ENGLISH CLASSES:

- Should Ettlinger have taken a strong stand for or against this kind of food? What do you believe his attitude is? Where do you think he's coming from? Should it matter?
- How much do you think Ettlinger worked with and/or was influenced by Public Relations officers in his research? How much corporate cooperation was necessary for Ettlinger's kind of research, in that he visited factories?
- What is the role of travel and/or humor in a popular science book such as *Twinkie, Deconstructed*? Should there be more or less of the author's presence and attitude?
- Do you think Ettlinger's tone is funny? Amused? Appropriate?
- Should Ettlinger have included more or less science (formulas, equations, flow-charts, etc.) in the text?
- How does *Twinkie, Deconstructed* compare to *Fast Food Nation*? *The Omnivore's Dilemma*? Any work on industrial or scientific subjects by John McPhee?



PROJECTS:

- Have a Twinkie Tasting contest for homemade versions (be sure to include the packaged kind for comparison).
- Identify the chemicals found in common whole foods, such as apples.
- Make and determine the shelf life of a cream-filled snack cake that mimics a Twinkie made from whole, natural ingredients. Identify the basic problems beyond spoilage—moisture retention in general and also in balance between the crumb and the filling. Try to make it just like a Twinkie; compare moisture, texture, and changes over time.
- Identify what can you do to prolong the shelf life of a homemade snack cake
- Make a snack cake that mimics a Twinkie from locally-sourced ingredients. Make a vegan snack cake. Make an organic snack cake.
- Visit a local factory of some kind of food ingredient and describe the academic or industrial backgrounds of the people running the place.
- Arrange to intern at a local processed food factory.
- Visit a local processed food factory or bakery and describe the challenges it faces which affect or are affected by the recipe.
- Describe how emulsifiers work, especially polysorbate 60.
- Identify the carbon footprint of Twinkies.
- Identify toxic, explosive, or otherwise dangerous chemicals that are benign when in common compounds or that play an intermediate role in a chemical process resulting in an edible or otherwise safe product.
- Identify some of the major scientific and industrial discoveries or inventions that have helped make creme-filled snack cakes possible.
- Identify some of the most important scientists or historical figures who have played a role in making snack cakes what they are today.
- Write a biography of Carl Wilhelm Scheele emphasizing how his studies and discoveries relate to processed food.
- Compare the bubble production of yeast, baking powder and water, and baking soda and vinegar.
- Compare the price, taste, and texture of corn syrup and sugar syrup.
- Compare natural and artificial colors and flavors.
- Make mayonnaise without eggs. Compare various recipes that use egg yolks as emulsifiers when made without egg yolks.
- Make a cake without chemical leavening.
- Make flow charts and simple chemical equations for the chemical processes noted for each ingredient.



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