

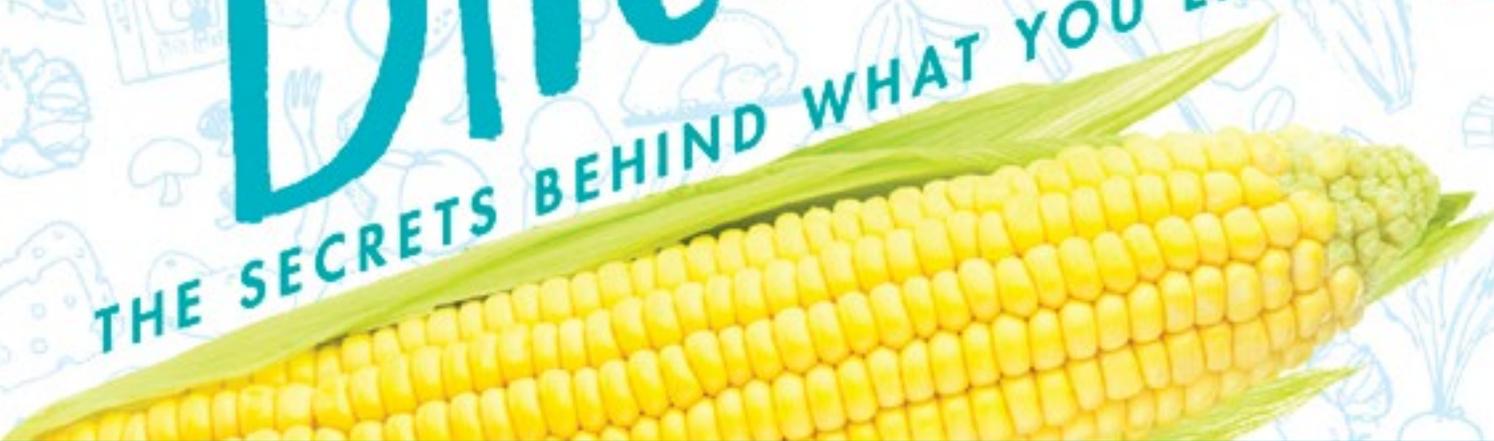
Classroom Lesson Plans

Making Curriculum Connections!



the Omnivore's Dilemma

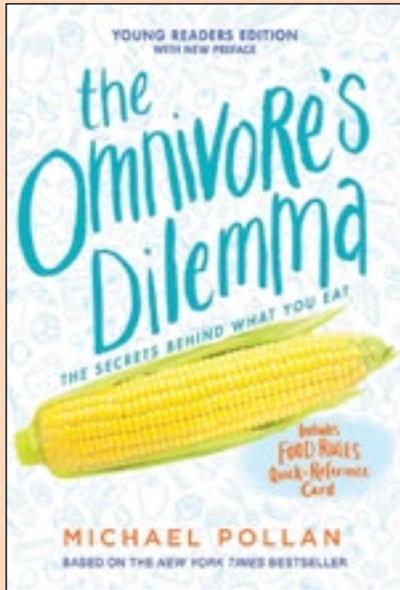
THE SECRETS BEHIND WHAT YOU EAT



INSPIRE • ENGAGE • EDUCATE

The materials in this guide are aligned to Common Core State Standards for grades 6–8

PenguinClassroom.com



About the Book

It's time to become a food detective!

Go undercover at the supermarket, asking questions like “What does the organic sticker on a banana really mean?” and “Where did the chicken in that nugget grow up?” You'll delve behind the scenes of your dinner, and by the time you've digested the last page, you'll have put together the fascinating (and sometimes shocking) puzzle of what's on your plate and how it got there. Michael Pollan's groundbreaking, award-winning book *The Omnivore's Dilemma* has thoroughly changed our view of food. Now here's an enlightening adaptation for younger readers, the generation who will take charge of America's eating habits for good.

This edition includes eating tips adapted from *Food Rules* and *In Defense of Food*, an entertaining Q&A with the author, photographs and graphics not found in the original volume, and a new preface in which Pollan discusses the reactions he has gotten since his book was first published.



About the Author

Michael Pollan (www.michaelpollan.com) is the author, most recently, of the *New York Times* bestseller *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*. He has written six other award-winning books, is a longtime contributor to the *New York Times*, and serves as the Knight Professor of Journalism at UC Berkeley. In 2010 Time magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people in the world. He lives in California's Bay Area with his wife and son.

Praise for *The Omnivore's Dilemma*:

“Not every volume will change a reader's life, but this one just might...lively writing rooted in fascinating examples make this accessible and interesting.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“[W]ill appeal to thoughtful, socially responsible teens.” —*School Library Journal*

“[T]his book uses a recipe of science, history, and humor to create an edifying yet entertaining story.” —*Horn Book*

“Young readers--and older ones, too--will find their thinking about food forever changed.” —*VOYA*

This guide was written by Liz Moraz. Liz holds a master's degree in special education from Hunter College in New York City and is in her third year of teaching middle school at The Stephen Gaynor School in Manhattan.



Pre-Reading Activities

1) Vocabulary:

Prior to reading, students will benefit from being taught some vocabulary explicitly that they will encounter in the text.

- 1) Ask students to define the word “dilemma.” Give one or two examples of dilemmas to illustrate its meaning. Ask students to brainstorm, either as a whole class or with a partner, examples of dilemmas that they have faced and how they attempted to solve them.
- 2) Present students with key terms they will read at the beginning of the text, as Pollan introduces his argument: agribusiness (19), industrial (19), hybrid (23), genetically modified organism (GMO) (25)
- 3) Present students with key prefixes and roots for words that they will read throughout the text.
 - a. Ask students to underline the different prefixes they find in the following words: omnivore, herbivore, and carnivore.
 - b. Ask students to box the common root they find in the following words: omnivore, herbivore, and carnivore.

2) Quick-Write:

In order to assess students’ familiarity with what will be presented in the book, ask students to write a written response, answering the writing prompts.

- 1) What informs your decisions about the foods you eat? Do you choose what you eat on a daily basis or does a family member choose? Give examples of what the choices that a family member or you make.
- 2) What did you eat last night for dinner? Where do you think this food came from? Who played a role in getting the food on your table? Revisit this question after finishing the book.

**Correlates to Common Core Standards: L. 7.1, 7.2; W. 7.3, 7.4

Post-Reading Activities

- 1) Chapter 3: Using information provided by Pollan, create a flowchart, showing the key events government regulators played a role in helping corn, starting from 1947.
- 2) Chapter 5: Pollan purchases Steer number 534 and follows him as travels through the meat-making branch of the industrial food chain. Follow Pollan journey and create a timeline, showcasing the events Pollan witnessed in Steer number 534’s life.
- 3) Chapter 6: Document what you eat over a 24-hour period. Using Pollan’s diagram featured on pages 68-69, highlight the food products made from corn that you consumed. What percentage of the total food consumed is made from corn? What items on the list were you surprised to learn were made from corn? Be prepared to present your findings to the rest of the class.
- 4) Chapter 10: Pollan lists key dates and people who played a role in the birth of organic food. Using information from the text, create a timeline of these events. Additionally Pollan mentions cultural movements and other key events that were happening around the country during the 1960s and 1970s, which also contributed to people’s awareness of eating organic. Explore these events further and add visual images of your research, including captions, to your timeline.
- 5) Chapter 12: Examine the chart on page 150, comparing Naylor farm to Polyface farm. Replicate the chart and also include a definition and visual image for each term listed under each farm.
- 6) Chapter 22: Pollan created a list of rules that he needed to abide by, in order to create his do-it-yourself meal (263). Look at his list and rules, and then brainstorm a meal that you and a classmate could potentially attempt to make, following the same standards. How would you attempt this? What would be your challenges?

**Correlates to Common Core Standards: R.L. 7.1, 7.2, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.8; W.7.2, 7.4, 7.7, 7.8;; L. 7.1, 7.2



Exploring through Writing and Research

- 1) In “The Rise of the Maize” (pages 14-19), Pollan traces the spread of corn throughout the world. Further explore the evolution of *teosinte* to today’s cornfields in Iowa. Identify the causes that have contributed to this evolution and the effects these have had on the role of corn in the food industry today.

Possible sources:

http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/news/070201_corn

http://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=104207

<http://www.news.wisc.edu/11476>

- 2) Pollan tells the reader that a nitrogen run-off as big as the state of New Jersey exists in the Gulf of Mexico (page 34). Investigate what factors contribute to the make-up of the dead zone and the effects the dead zone has on its surrounding environment.

Possible sources:

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/06/130621-dead-zone-biggest-gulf-of-mexico-science-environment/>

<http://www2.epa.gov/nutrient-policy-data/gulf-mexico>

<http://serc.carleton.edu/microbelife/topics/deadzone/index.html>

- 3) Pollan estimates that two companies, Cargill and ADM, buy nearly a third of the corn in America. Yet, he says that these companies are nearly invisible (page 43). Conduct additional research about these two corporations and their role in America’s food supply.
- 4) Pollan asks the reader to consider how food companies get Americans to eat and buy more food than they need (page 76). Take a look at the advertising for some of your favorite foods. How are these food corporations encouraging you to buy their products? Are these marketing strategies effective?
- 5) Different cultures choose their food based on culture and taste (page 94). Research another culture. What foods do people in those cultures eat? How do they prepare those foods? What generalizations could you make about that culture, based on the value people there put on food?
- 6) The USDA National Organic Program website includes their labeling guidelines (www.ams.usda.gov/nop). Explore their website and create a presentation, listing terms that consumers commonly find on different foods in the supermarket and their meaning.
 - 1) Pollan writes, “‘Eat Your View!’ takes work” (191). Research what foods grow seasonally in your area. Create a seasonal food guide, categorizing and labeling foods according to its season.

Suggested sources:

<http://www.sustainabletable.org/seasonalfoodguide/>

<http://www.100milediet.org>

- 7) Research surrounding farms in your area. Choose one farm and according to Pollan standards, label it as either industrial, industrial organic or local sustainable. List, using evidence from the text, the characteristics about your farm that determined its categorization.
- 8) Temple Grandin is an animal-handling expert who has researched how to make the killing of cows as quick and painless as possible (page 226). Conduct additional research about Temple Grandin, exploring her life, accomplishments, and her role in the livestock industry. Create a visual aid and prepare a short presentation to share with the rest of the class.

**Correlates to Common Core Standards: L. 7.1, 7.2; W. 7.2, 7.4, 7.7, 7.8, 7.9



Extended Writing Prompts

- 1) Chapter 2: Compare and contrast George Naylor's grandfather's farm to the farm that George Naylor runs today. What has changed? Using evidence from the text, why have these changes taken place?
- 2) Chapter 3: According to the text, how has the U.S. farming policy changed over time? What factors have contributed to the government's farming role in 1930 to its role today?
- 3) Chapter 8: After reading pages 85-89, what does the author mean by the omnivore's dilemma? Using evidence from the text, what are the causes of the dilemma?
- 4) Chapter 8: On page 89, Pollan compares human's capability to make decisions about food to an animal's instincts. Describe the comparison and then explain how the comparison helps develop his argument about the omnivore's dilemma.
- 5) Chapters 11 and 12: Summarize Pollan opinion about industrial organic farming. Using evidence from the text, what benefits does he find from this method? What problems does he find? Why does he view these methods are problematic?
- 6) Chapter 14: Joel Salatin says, "It's all connected. This farm is more like an organism than a machine, and like any organism it has its proper scale" (page 166). What examples does Pollan offer from Polyface Farm to support Salatin's claim? What role do specific animals play in the "organism" that Salatin has created? As an alternative, students could create a visual representation of Salatin's farm, showing the role each animal plays in upholding this organic food chain.
- 7) Chapter 17: Pollan writes, "All beef is not the same" (199). Using evidence from the text, compare and contrast grass fed versus grain fed meat. What natural chemicals and fatty acids are only found in grass fed meat? How do these benefit humans?
- 8) Chapter 19: Pollan read books by a number of animal rights thinkers, including Tom Regan, James Rachels, Joy Williams, and Matthew Scully. He says, "These writers all ask: Is it all right to allow animals to suffer just because they are animals? Isn't that a kind of discrimination?" (217). What is your response to the question that Pollack poses? Why?
- 9) Chapter 19: Pollan did not save Steer 534 (229). He writes, "A lot of people have asked me why I did not save steer 534. Believe me, I wrestled with the idea of a long time." Do you agree or disagree with Pollack's decisions to not save Steer 534. Why or why not?
- 10) In Pollan afterword, he writes, "Sometimes I meet people who tell me that they likes my book, but couldn't finish it. That's not what a writer ever wants to hear, so I always ask them, why not? 'Because in every chapter I learn about something I shouldn't eat anymore. I'm afraid if I get to the end, there won't be anything left to eat, and I'll starve'" (279). If you met Pollan, what would you say to him? What would you tell him you have learned? What would you say you agreed with? What did you disagree with? Will his story impact the decisions you make about what you eat?
- 11) Examine the structure of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. How does Pollan organize and develop his argument regarding the omnivore's dilemma?

**Correlates to Common Core Standards: R.L. 7.1, 7.2, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.8; W.7.2; L. 7.1, 7.2



A Q&A with Michael Pollan

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE FOOD?

My favorite food is probably paella, a one-pot dish from Spain that consists of clams, lobster, chicken, and chorizo sausage cooked on a bed of saffron rice. My mother, who makes the best paella anywhere, prepares it once every summer, when the family is together at the beach, so it's a special occasion meal.

LEAST FAVORITE FOOD?

My least favorite food would probably be organ meats, though I don't mind the occasional taste of pâté. I believe you should really eat the whole animal if you're going to eat meat, but most of the organs still gross me out.

HOW ABOUT WHEN YOU WERE A KID?

As a kid, I loved fast food and could eat three or four McDonald's hamburgers at a meal—not Big Macs, which hadn't been invented yet, but the single-patty ones. I loved the french fries too. I loved eating it all in the car, how the beefy french-fry smell would fill the station wagon! Now the very thought of that makes me a little nauseous.

WHERE, AND HOW, DO YOU SHOP FOR FOOD?

I live in Berkeley, a food-obsessed city, and that makes eating fresh organic food and grass-fed meat easier than in some other places. Also, our farmers' market operates fifty weeks of the year, because the weather is so good. (I know, we're very lucky.) I shop at the farmers market every Thursday, and get most of my produce there; I also buy my eggs and some of my meat and fish there. But we also go to the supermarket every week. There, I try to buy organic, which is increasingly common (even Walmart now sells organic), and I look for local produce too, which shows up in the summer. Some supermarkets now sell grass-fed meat, but I ask for it even when they don't, as a way to encourage them to stock it. But I think eating vegetables and fruit is so important that I buy them even when they're not organic—and even when they're not fresh. There's nothing wrong with frozen vegetables, and they're usually a bargain. Some canned vegetables are a great deal too, though they often have too much salt. The key thing? Eat plants (including grains), animals, and fungi as lightly processed as you can find them at the prices you can afford.

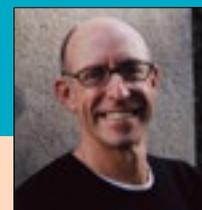
HOW DID YOU LEARN TO COOK? HOW CAN I?

I'm still learning how to cook. But I started out by helping my mother in the kitchen. She's a great cook and doesn't think of cooking as a chore. I especially loved frying chicken, scrambling eggs, and baking brownies—all magic transformations. Later on, I bought a few simple cookbooks and learned by trying out recipes that sound appealing—this is something worth trying if your mom isn't much of a cook. Sometimes I'll try to figure out how to make something I've liked in a restaurant, which can be an interesting challenge when you don't have a recipe. But I've learned you can't go too far wrong in the kitchen, and people are more intimidated than they should be, probably because we watch cooking shows on TV that make cooking look like rocket science.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE RECIPE?

At the moment, it's a trick I learned from Angelo Garro for making poached eggs, which is my favorite breakfast. The challenge of poaching a perfect egg is keeping the thing together—the white part tends to wander off. Here's the trick: Boil water in a shallow pan. Before you crack the egg, sink the whole egg in the boiling water for exactly ten seconds. Then crack the egg into a big kitchen spoon and gently slide it into the water. The egg will hold together, and in three minutes you'll have a perfectly poached egg that you can remove with a slotted spoon.





Michael Pollan's Food Rules:

The Omnivore's Solution: Some Tips for Eating

I'll bet I know your last burning question: "What now?" Now that you know all that you know about the food chains we depend on, how exactly should you fill up your plate? Most of my readers have the same question, so I've developed a handful of everyday rules to guide you through the newfound challenges (and possibilities!) of mealtime. (You can find more of them in the book I wrote after *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, called *In Defense of Food*.)

My advice comes in three parts:

Eat Real Food.

To make sure you're buying real food:

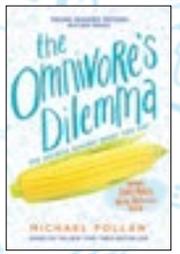
1. Get your food from the outside perimeter of the supermarket and try to avoid the middle aisles. In the cafeteria, go for the salad bar or the fruit basket. These places are where you still find fresh plant and animal foods that have only been minimally processed. In the middle aisles of the store—and in the school vending machines—are where most of the EFLS lurk.
2. Don't buy, or eat, anything that doesn't eventually rot. A food engineered to live forever is usually full of chemicals. Food should be alive, and that means it should eventually die.
3. Shop at the farmers market, through a CSA, or at a farmstand whenever you can. Get out of the supermarket, the corner deli, and the gas station, and you won't find those flashy fake foods.
4. Be your own food detective. Pay attention to where your food comes from (were those berries picked in your state or halfway around the world?) and how it is grown (Organic? Grass-fed? Humanely raised?). Read labels and ask questions. What's the story behind your food? And how do you feel about that story?

Eat Real Meals.

How you prepare and eat food is often just as important as what you eat. So:

1. Cook. The best way to take control of your meals is to cook whenever you can. As soon as you start cooking, you begin to learn about ingredients, to care about their quality, and to develop your sense of taste. You'll find over time that, when you prepare and eat real food, fast food gets boring—more of the same old taste of salt, fat, and sugar in every Chips Ahoy! or microwave pizza. There are so many more interesting tastes to experiment with in the kitchen and to experience at the table.
2. Garden. The freshest, best-tasting food you can eat is freshly picked food from the garden. Nothing is more satisfying than to cook and eat food you grew yourself.
3. Try not to eat alone. When we eat alone we eat without thinking, and we usually eat too much: Just think about how thoughtlessly you can put away a bag of chips or cookies in front of the television or computer, or while doing your homework. Eating should be social; food is more fun when you share it.
4. Eat slowly and stop when you're full. The food industry makes money by getting you to eat more than you need or even want to. Just because they offer a supersized 64-ounce Big Gulp and 1,250-calorie, 5-cup restaurant plate of spaghetti and meatballs doesn't mean that's the amount you should eat. Take back control of your portions (a normal-size serving of spaghetti is about a cup and a half).
5. Eat at the table. I know, it sounds obvious. But we snack more than we dine these days; 19 percent of the meals consumed in America today are eaten in the car. The deepest joys of eating come when we slow down to savor our food and share it with people we love. The real meal—family and friends gathered around a table—is in danger of extinction. For the sake of your family's health and happiness, and for your own, do what you can to save it. You might be surprised how much enjoyment it can bring.





The Omnivore's Dilemma:

- Now updated for a new generation of readers
- Incorporated into middle school curriculum nationwide
- A staple of classroom nonfiction collections

Michael Pollan's Food Rules

EAT REAL FOOD

- * Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food
- * Don't eat anything with more than five ingredients, or with ingredients you don't recognize
- * Don't eat anything containing high-fructose corn syrup

BUY REAL FOOD

- * Get your food from the outside perimeter of the supermarket
- * Don't buy anything that doesn't eventually rot
- * Shop at the farmers' market or farmstand whenever possible

EAT REAL MEALS

- * Cook
- * Garden
- * Eat at the table, and try not to eat alone
- * Eat slowly and stop before you feel stuffed

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