

2 What do you eat?

This section focuses on food production, distribution and preparation—the main occupation of most of the poor in developing countries. Art prints, photographs, activities, and discussion introduce the concept of staple foods, diet and different conditions of hunger.

Objectives

Students will:

- Compare how food reaches the table in their homes with the route food takes in some developing countries
- Define "staple food" and give examples of staple foods around the world
- Compare their diets with those of children in developing countries
- Recognize that food has different uses in different cultures

Materials	
Art Prints	<i>Farming</i> by Yovanny Sanclemente Restrepo, Columbia
Photographs	<i>Threshing rice in India</i> <i>A Colombian Marketplace</i> <i>Drying Coffee Beans</i> (Honduras)
Chart	<i>Staple Foods Around the World</i> (Activity #4)
Activity Sheets	What do you eat? Activities #1 - #6
Maps, Globes	

Getting started

Ask students to consider the variety of foods that they eat. Some of our food is grown nearby, but most is produced, processed and packaged elsewhere,

Use the images in the art prints *Farming* (Colombia) and *Fishing in the River* (Sierra Leone), and the photograph *Threshing Rice in India* to show that children in developing countries generally depend on food from their own communities and assist their families in producing the food they eat.

Help students to notice differences in the prints and focus on details:

What scenes do you see?

What do the pictures say about where and how children get their food?

Why do you think the Colombian farmer grows more food than the Indian?

Consider the advantages and disadvantages of technology (tractors vs. bulls) in increasing food production.

The photograph *A Colombian Marketplace* shows where farmers from rural areas can sell a little extra food to increase their income. It also addresses the question *How do you get food in the city?* Colombia is wealthier than most developing countries and also more urbanized. The issue *How do you get enough money to buy food in the city?* is discussed later in the section, **Why do you work?**

The photograph *Drying Coffee Beans* raises still other questions about food production and the effects of growing crops for export instead of essential foods like rice and corn that can be consumed locally.

Teacher background information

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION engage a much larger percentage of the population in developing countries than in developed countries. In India and Sierra Leone, 70% of the labor force is in agriculture, in contrast to only 4% in the United States. Colombia is more industrialized with 54% of labor in agriculture.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION. Despite the hard work that farmers in Africa, Asia and Latin America put into food production, many of them do not get enough to eat themselves. There are various factors that contribute to this.

Many farmers in developing countries do not own the land they farm. They are paid minimally and given food during the harvest season that often does not last through the off-season.

Those who are fortunate to own land must choose between growing food for their own consumption and local markets, or growing cash crops, such as tobacco, for export.

Many farmers are not able to make a profit on their crops because of an insufficient support system or infrastructure. For example, farmers often do not have access to credit that would enable them to invest in fertilizer. There may not be roads or transportation to larger markets.

HUNGER-WHAT DOES IT MEAN? When we think of hunger overseas, images of children with swollen bellies come to mind. Actually, hunger takes on many forms, and the severe conditions of famine account for less than 10% of hunger-related deaths.

In developing countries, hunger takes the form of *undernutrition*, *malnutrition*, *malabsorption*, *seasonal hunger* and *famine*.

- *Undernutrition* is a chronic condition for many of the poor in developing countries. It means simply not getting enough to eat - consuming fewer calories and less protein than the body needs. This weakens resistance to disease and decreases energy.
- *Malnutrition* is not eating the balance of foods needed to maintain good health. There are many malnutrition-related deaths, and it also causes illness. For example, 250,000 children become blind each year due to a deficiency in Vitamin A in their diets that can be prevented by a single Vitamin A capsule per year.
- *Malabsorption* is a condition in which the body is unable to absorb nutrients. This is often due to intestinal parasites and is common in areas with contaminated water.
- *Seasonal hunger* occurs before each harvest when the food from the last harvest runs out.
- *Famine* is widespread lack of food caused by drought, flood or war. Famine occurs in countries that do not have the infrastructure - food storage facilities, roads, transportation - to compensate for natural disaster or political disruption.

FOOD AND CULTURE are closely connected. Attitudes toward food reflect cultural beliefs and values. Certain foods are avoided. Other foods are considered special and take on symbolic importance. In countries where the food supply is not always dependable, sharing food becomes very significant,

In Sierra Leone, production, preparation and consumption of food is a communal affair. Cooking outdoors is highly sociable. Women talk with other women. Children fetch firewood and water. Food is eaten out of a common bowl without utensils. Hospitality abounds and visitors are always offered something.

In many cultures, the status and rank of members of an extended family can be easily determined by observing who cooks, who serves and in what order family members are served. In many cultures, men eat first, then sons, then daughters, then wives. In times when food is scarce, who eats first can make a big difference.

Activity Sheets: What do you eat?

#1. **We eat Different Foods:** Introductory activity in which students explore different foods eaten by children around the world.

#2. **What do you eat?:** Introductory activity in which students draw and label the variety of foods that they eat. Students can compare foods they eat to foods of Third World peers.

#3. **Journey of the Corn Bread:** Students outline the different activities and people involved in producing corn bread and other processed foods and compare to scenes shown in study prints.

#4. **Staple Foods Around the World:** Students examine and answer questions based on a graphic showing common staple foods.

#5. **The Half-Gold Badger:** Students answer questions about the meaning of the Half-Gold Badger and relate the folktale to their own experiences.

#6. **Learning from Folktales and Nursery Rhymes:** Students read and discuss an Indian folktale about sharing food. In many developing countries folktales, storytelling, and other oral forms of communication play an important educational role in imparting basic values and beliefs. Students also read an Indian nursery rhyme in Hindi and compare it to other familiar nursery rhymes about food.

Developing critical thinking: questions for further exploration

- Experts say that there is enough food in the world to feed everyone. Despite this, there are people in every country who do not get enough to eat. Why?
- Why is food relief only a short-term solution to alleviating hunger?
- How might food production in a village be increased? Use a web chart to record ideas, stimulate associations and show connections.

Multidisciplinary approaches

Art. Collage, mural or drawing of favorite foods.

Economics. Survey the local supermarket to determine what products come from Third World countries, or analyze labels of packaged/canned goods in the home.

Health. Prepare recipes from different countries based upon staple foods like corn or rice. Many cultures traditionally eat combinations of foods, such as rice and beans, that provide complete proteins. Research the nutritional implications of food preferences and taboos in different cultures.

Language Arts. Many folktales (e.g. Spider Tales from Sierra Leone) deal with the subject of food. Read folktales, act them out, and compare them with U.S. nursery rhymes related to food. Write stories about food.

Science. Experiment with plants, showing the different effects of withholding water and/or adding fertilizer. Chart and compare what happens to each plant. Relate the results of the experiment to increasing food production in developing countries.

Social Studies. Map work, showing the differences among countries and the relation of staple foods to geography and climate (e.g. wheat in northern hemisphere, rice and millet in Africa and Asia). Research the origin of familiar foods.

Social Studies. Cafeteria garbage monitoring project to measure waste. Research food and hunger programs in the neighborhood and community. Collect class food basket for local food groups.

Expanding our notion of food

Food not only fills the basic need for sustenance, but also takes on other meanings in different cultures. For example, in deciding on where to eat out here, sustenance is not the only motivation in choosing a restaurant. In Thailand, food takes on a religious significance.

In Thailand, most of the people are Buddhist. Buddhists believe that people determine their fate through their own actions. Performing good actions will bring merit in this life and those to come. Buddhism also teaches that every action a person makes affects the balance of life. Thus, Buddhists have the responsibility to perform good actions for their own salvation and for the good of others.

One of the principles that guides good action is *dana* which means generosity, the act of giving and the gift itself. Even the poor who can ill afford it will give to increase their merit. *Dana* is often associated with giving alms to the monks.

"I did not like that they don't get lots of food because they need it just as much as we do"

-4th grader. Providence, RI

BASIC INDICATORS

	Annual GNP Per capita (US \$)	% of population urbanized	Total Population (millions)
Columbia			
Honduras			
India			
Indonesia			
Sierra Leon			
Thailand			
USA			

Adapted from *The State of the World's Children 1989*, UNICEF