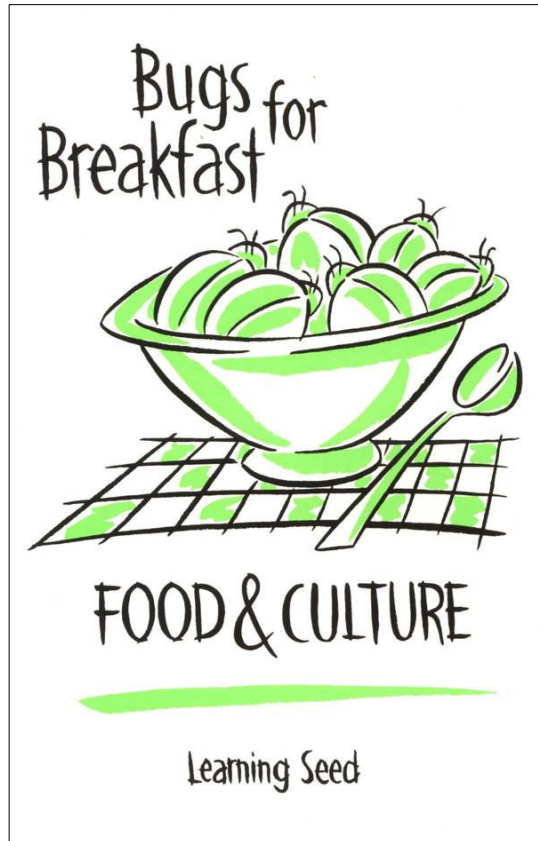


Bugs For Breakfast



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Bugs For Breakfast

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The Video

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Learning Seed Catalog and ISBN Numbers

DVD LS-1249-01-DVD ISBN 1-55740-936-6
VHS LS-1249-01-VHS ISBN 0-917159-06-3

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The Program

Summary

This program is a multi-cultural look at how we eat. Don't worry, we don't show people eating bugs. We want to challenge minds, not stomachs.

Explore why people eat. *No, it's not to survive. When was the last time you ate to avoid starvation?*

Why do you eat cows and corn and not swans and *dandelions? It's not about taste, it is about culture.*

Why do most people in our culture eat meat? *Our ancestors would have been a lot safer stalking the wild cucumber instead of risking their lives for mammoth stew?*

What food taboos do you practice? *Yes, you.*

We explore some strange dietary habits. Of course, some of them are what your students do every day.

Will future generations view eating meat as a health risk? *Might future food be laboratory food pills?*

Do humans around the world eat like you? *Most people don't use forks and spoons.*

Why don't the guys go out for soup and salad? *Is there something "male" about steak and red wine? Are there female foods?*

Conclusion of video: "People eat all sorts of food. It's even rumored some folks eat ground up cow muscles and wings of birds boiled in oil. Yes, people do eat the strangest foods. And that includes you."

Transcript With Commentary

The time-1920. The place-West Bengal, India. Local farmers kill a wolf and discover two young children huddled in a cave. Apparently abandoned by parents, the two girls survived by imitating wolves. Reared by wolves, the girls ate like wolves, attacking their food. They first sniffed food and literally "wolfed it down." They ate only meat and lapped water from a bowl on the floor. They would carry meat to the corner and gnaw on bones. The oldest slowly learns to eat vegetables and tolerate salt and sugar. But, when given meat, she reverts to her wolf-like habits.

The incident described took place in Midnapore, West Bengal in 1920. A band of locals killed a shewolf, entered her cave and found two children inside, huddled together with a pair of cubs. Placed in a nearby orphanage, they shunned daylight and spent part of each night howling. Note that the story is NOT told to teach that early childhood experiences form an inescapable prison for adults.

This information is from the book Consuming Culture: Why You Eat What You Eat by Jeremy MacClancy (Henry Holt and Company, NY, 1992). The book describes other tragic examples of abandoned children whose eating habits were not shaped by civilized culture. Why use this story to begin the video? The script explains:

In these children we see a pale reflection of our selves. We see that how and what we eat is learned behavior. For lacking parents and human culture, we too would feed. Instead, we eat. We eat what our culture pronounces acceptable as food.

This is a recurring theme of the video. One cannot separate what we eat from how we live; food and culture are forever bound. A viewer who says "I eat what tastes good" or "I eat what makes most sense for a healthy diet," is blind to the connection between food and culture.

Over a thousand types of bugs are eaten by cultures around the world. In parts of Mexico, Africa, and Asia insects such as water bugs, grasshoppers, termites, ants and grubs are ordinary snacks. The Bible claims that John the Baptist ate "locusts and wild honey." (Matthew 3:4)

Insects played an important role in human nutrition in Africa, Asia, Australia, Latin America, and for Native Americans of western North America. The South American Yupka prefer caterpillar larvae when in season over beef. In some countries of Africa, caterpillar eating is commonplace enough to appear in children's rhymes and songs. Near Taxco, Mexico people celebrate an annual "stink bug" festival which includes eating them whole or grinding the bugs into a paste served on tostadas.

Insects make up the majority of animal protein in parts of southern Africa. In Thailand, a hot pepper sauce featuring ground up water bugs is a popular treat. The Nepalese squeeze live bee larvae through cloth and fry the liquid like scrambled eggs. In both Laos and Venezuela, giant tarantulas are a much sought after snack. A trendy Australian restaurant might feature witchety grubs with emu steak.

Some third world entomologists argue that eating the most plentiful of creatures could cut malnutrition in poor countries. Surprisingly, you ate insects today. The Food and Drug Administration in the U. S. and its counterparts in other countries permit a certain number of "insect parts" in packaged food for the simple reason they are impossible to completely remove in processing. The FDA allows about 200 insect parts in a pound of flour. That means every bun or piece of bread you want to know more about the world's insect eating be sure to read and look at the

fascinating (and sometimes gross) pictures in Man Eating Bugs: The Art and Science of Eating Insects by Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio. A few images from photographer Menzel are included in this video.

This book on entomophagy (that's insect eating) is fascinating and a must browse. The book is published by Ten Speed Press, P.O. Box 7123, Berkeley, California 94707.

Another source of information is the Food Insects Newsletter (Department of Entomology, University of Wisconsin, 1630 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706.)

The contemporary Western world considers eating bugs taboo. The reason for this taboo lies not in their nutritional makeup, nor even in their taste. One reason is practical - growing and harvesting enough insects to feed a population presents a unique challenge. Another reason is simply that eating insects is alien; we are united in our disgust of insects. We named this video Bugs For Breakfast because the thought evokes a visceral response yet the idea makes as much sense as bacon and eggs. That vague sense of unease at hearing the title is culture at work.

What's disgusting and what's delicious depends more on your culture than your stomach. Food and language are the cultural habits we learn first, and the ones we change only with great difficulty. *Interesting discussion question: "How are food and language alike?"*

It's not the taste that's disgusting - it's the *idea*. In much of the world, eel is a delicacy, but it's not what you grew up eating. In Venice, Italy, for example, a fish shop will have rows of fresh eel for sale right next to the halibut and sole.

North Americans eat shrimp which are pretty much the same size, shape, and texture as lots of insects. But they've learned shrimp is a delicacy and insects are disgusting.

Infants object to sour or bitter tastes, but disgust is a fairly complex response that does not develop until humans are between 4 and 7 years.

Infants and young children do not show the same disgusts as adults in the same culture. Disgust (like prejudice) is not an instinct, it has to be taught. The spring 1998 issue of "Fork, Fingers, & Chopsticks," explores how this surprisingly sophisticated feeling develops. "Children learn from their parents and peers not only what items are considered disgusting, but a threshold for tolerance of disgust. Both the content, and the threshold, of disgust vary culturally. Thus, shrimp are a delicacy in the U. S., but similarly-sized and textured grasshoppers are abhorrent." For more information on the meaning of disgust see William Miller's The Anatomy of Disgust (Harvard University Press, 1997). Disgust, Miller posits, is a kind of protection. Just as fear causes us to flee danger or loyalty prompts us to support one another, disgust draws boundaries and insulates us from what is alien. His idea of "alien" includes anything from the unhygienic hair in our soup to homeless people on the streets.

Millions of people worldwide eat rats and mice. Not the kind that crawl around garbage cans -- country rodents as clean as rabbits. In much of Latin America, Asia, and parts of Africa and Oceania, eating rats is surprisingly common.

We find the idea of eating a rodent disgusting because of its association with dirt and disease. "You dirty rat!" is an epitaph made into a cliché. Or we might find it upsetting because who wants to eat Mickey or Minnie Mouse? But what if they were "farm-raised" just for eating, cleaner than chickens and plump and juicy? We would still find it disgusting because our minds take precedence over taste buds. But, if our minds were free of bias, we might actually

find some rodents edible. Nearly 40% of all mammals on earth are rodents, from rabbits and squirrels to gerbils or hamsters. Our attitude toward each is culturally determined. We pet rabbits, fear mice but think gophers are cute, put gerbils in cages, and tolerate squirrels. Someone described a squirrel as a "rodent with a good PR agent." The point here is not to turn stomachs against everyday foods, but to illustrate that judgment about taste in food (and by extension, about people and their cultures) is learned. Often, what we believe to be obviously natural or unnatural, superior or inferior, become less obvious upon closer examination.

Who was the first human to eat animal meat? Did a forest fire leave behind some naturally roasted meat? We will never know. Why did pre-historic peoples risk their lives tracking dangerous animals? Wouldn't stalking wild cucumbers have been a lot safer?

Why do humans eat meat?

The simplest answer is culture. A meat eating culture teaches the young to eat meat. People who grow up in a vegetarian culture are more likely to remain so.

Another reason is biological. Animal foods provide, in one compact package, all the essential protein building blocks humans need to survive. Of course, our meat eating ancestors didn't know a thing about protein or amino acids, they probably liked the taste. But their tastes helped them live long enough to pass their preference for meat on to later generations.

To avoid meat AND stay healthy requires a varied food supply and knowledge of nutrition -- both lacking in past centuries. Humans are omnivores -meaning they eat a variety of foods. That's good for survival, since those who depend on a limited source of food are in deep trouble if that supply dries up.

Protein deficiency is still a leading cause of malnutrition and death in undeveloped areas of the world. The Maasai of Kenya have a diet that includes milk and meat. They are tall, vigorous, and healthy. Their Kikuyu neighbors live on grain and sweet potatoes and are smaller, weaker, and less resistant to some tropical diseases. In fact, the average Maasai woman is as strong as the average Kikuyu man. A similar contrast can be seen in the Bengalis of eastern India who are weaker and smaller than the Punjabis of the northwest who get protein from milk and milk products. These cases point to a physical advantage to people who eat meat. This advantage is most useful in cultures where physical strength confers a survival edge.

In spite of meat's importance, it is subject to complicated restrictions. Pork, for example, is an important source of food from Asia, to the South Pacific, China, and much of the western world. Yet it is rejected as unfit for human consumption by two of the world's major religions - Judaism and Islam.

Most of the world eats beef. A fifth of the world's cattle live in India, yet Hinduism forbids the eating of beef. Nearly 85% of India's people are Hindu.

Cows roam the countryside and streets in India. One explanation for the restriction on eating cows is that it is practical. For example, many of India's "sacred cows" are used to plow fields. Their dung is used for fertilizer and fuel. Their milk is used for cooking and dairy foods. The cows are more valuable when not eaten.

The same is true for the Samburu in Kenya who carefully guard their cattle against attack. Cows provide milk, blood, and dried dung to build housing. Religion is another source of food restriction. Both Islam and Judaism prohibit eating pork, the blood of any animal, shellfish and certain fowl. Catholics long avoided meat on Fridays and today a fish fry,

still common in restaurants, was fueled by Catholic dietary restrictions.

Why do restrictions against eating so many different foods exist among the world's religions? Anthropologists and religious scholars do not agree on the reasons for these "taboos." Some point out that the restrictions are practical in nature and once helped the people survive physically. One of the most readable explanations of this approach is found in *Good To Eat: Riddles of Food & Culture* by Marvin Harris (Simon & Schuster, NY, 1985.).

Why are some people and/or cultures "vegetarian" and is this truly a superior way to relate to living creatures?

Vegetarianism is a key part of the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism. It is based on the concept of ahimsa, non-injury to all living creatures. Other meat taboos are less clear. Some Indians, Africans, and Asians avoid chickens as "unclean," probably because the chicken scavenges for food.

Camel flesh is widely eaten in the Muslim world, but is forbidden among many non-Muslim Middle Easterners. In Mongolia camel milk is drunk but the meat is rejected as a food.

Many North Americans see restrictions on specific kinds of meat as primitive. Yet, they too have restrictions or "taboos" against some meat. In fact, a surprisingly few edible animals ARE eaten by North Americans.

Eating horse flesh is "taboo" in most places in North America. But the Chinese, Japanese, and many Europeans (especially the French) eat horse meat. In fact, the U.S. exports horsemeat overseas.

A scholarly, yet readable, look at the question of food "taboos" is in *Etiary restrictions*. Viewers should realize that at *Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present* by Frederick J. Simoons (University of Wisconsin Press, 1994). Simoons explains food taboos in terms of maintaining ritual purity, good health, and well being.

Most western cultures declare various edible meats as taboo, yet rarely think of these as a form of dietary restriction customs or dietary laws and food restrictions are n. There are no universal food customs or dietary laws and food restrictions are not limited to preliterate cultures: they are found at all stages of development.

A vegetarian practices a form of food restriction. Vegetarians are more united in their rejection of meat than in their love of fruits and vegetables. The rejection of food has a long history as a form of protest. What one refuses to eat becomes a symbol of social identity.

Even in early America people ate a surprising variety of foods. One 19th Century cookbook described how to make fried robin on toast.

A British visitor back in 1840 reported that folks ate "little birds of all descriptions." In the 1870s pigeons were the bird to eat for those in the know. Today we eat very little that flies other than chicken and turkey. Why so few animals are eaten today remains part of the mystery of meat.

Back in 1850 adult Americans ate on average 300 pounds or more of meat per year. Beef and pork were most popular, but a variety of animals from squirrels to lobsters were common. Salt pork was the most common red meat during the 19th century. The lack of refrigeration meant that fresh meat was a distant second to cured meats in the typical diet until at least after the Civil War. The passenger pigeon was once very likely the most common bird in America. Hunters wiped out the passenger pigeon in only a few decades, netting hundreds of birds at a time. One small Michigan town shipped at least seven million dead birds a day during part of 1869. Pigeon meat was such a huge industry that the passenger pigeon was wiped out by 1914.

One reason we do not eat dogs and cats is that we have raised them to the level of honorary humans. Serving the house pet for dinner would be like feasting on a family member. We are not cannibals: we do not eat Rover or Tabby.

Animals that a culture eats tend to survive as a species. Bald eagles were far more likely to become extinct than chickens or turkeys.

At first hearing, this statement sounds contradictory. Another way to say this is that cultures usually make sure that animals that supply food do not go extinct. The major exception to this is when the animals must be hunted, not raised on farms or ranches.

Will future generations consider meat eating an unhealthy habit - much as we judge cigarette smoking? We already take care to make meat look as much unlike an animal as we can. Will the future look back on ancient "cattle eaters" as a primitive habit? But don't count on either a vegetarian or a meat-eating future. Future Food might be protein pudding, mineral mousse, and amino acid burgers. The food laboratory could replace the farmyard as our main source of food. *Of course we don't KNOW what food in the future will look like. Today's daily diet is very different than that of a hundred years ago and there seems little reason to believe tomorrow's food will not change just as much. But exactly how it will change is an excellent topic for discussion and speculation.*

America did *not* immediately embrace "ethnic foods." Immigrants to the New World tended to eat what they were familiar with in the homeland.

Each group was suspicious of what their neighbors from other countries ate. 100 years ago, foods such as pasta, bagels, gumbo, stir fries, salami, were known only to immigrants and a few curious eaters. Back in 1918 Americans didn't know the word "pasta," they called it either spaghetti or macaroni. Many believed it grew on trees.

The spread of "foreign foods" was viewed as a threat to American health. As recently as World War I, the traditional Italian diet was often seen as the result of ignorance or poverty.

Italians were taught that it "is not right to cook meat, cheese, beans, and macaroni together." Such a mix was said to be "bad for digestion." (source: Harvey Levenstin, "The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930, Food and Foodways).

Dieticians urged Mexicans to use less tomato and pepper so as not to harm the kidneys. (Source: We Are What We Eat, by Donna R. Gabaccia (Harvard University Press, 1998)

Hungarians, Polish, and Jewish parents were told they could hurt their children's urinary tracts by feeding them dill pickles. Many suspected pickles were a stimulant. (Source: We Are What We Eat).

Of course, Americans did not understand foreign foods very well. One 1930 cookbook described a pizza as "a large potato pancake." In the 1930s a series of *Settlement Cookbooks*, along with food festivals that allowed sampling, helped make "foreign foods" less strange to the masses.

Note: These Settlement Cookbooks and their later revisions are still used today.

World War II meant 15 million soldiers ate the same food. Many soldiers ate for the first time foods such as broccoli, black-eyed peas, grits, and eggplant. They didn't greet them all with gusto, but soldiers learned to expand their concept of what was acceptable as food.

One side effect of war was to expose troops to unfamiliar foods. Today, air travel and tourism expose millions to a variety of new foods. Today we assume that "ethnic food" is a part of our dietary mix, but this was not always so. Not too many years ago (especially during World War I), immigrants were urged to give up their favorite foods and eat a "healthy American diet." Today food and people from around the world influence each other. Food changes people as much as people change food.

Gender also plays a role in food choice. Most cultures have "guy foods" and "gal foods." In North America, guys don't get together and order soup and salad.

Discuss which foods today are "guy foods" and which are "gal foods"? Why?

We give food meaning far beyond fuel for the body. Sharing food is a symbol of human cooperation. In fact the word "companion" means with the bread. People of all cultures share food, create stories and celebrate rites of passage with familiar foods.

Food is indeed a "tie that binds." Each society attaches symbolic value to specific foods. Food is a material expression of social relationships. In many societies the phrase "we eat together" describes a friendly relationship. The phrase might mean "we are not neighbors or kin, but we will not attack or practice sorcery against each other." In Old Testament times, most pacts or covenants were sealed with a shared meal. The refusal to eat with someone was a mark of rejection. Most cultures have "rules" requiring that food and drink be offered to guests.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the video's statement that "we already take care to make meat look as much unlike an animal as we can." Find examples of meat that look nothing like an animal.
2. Discuss: Do you think we're becoming increasingly unwilling to eat a food that looks like an animal? Why or why not?

Book And Internet Resources

We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans by Donna R. Gabaccia (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1998). Amid our wrangling over immigration and tribal differences, we are all multi-cultural in the way we sustain life.

No Foreign Food: The American Diet in Time and Place by Richard Pillsbury (Westview Press, Boulder, CO 1998). How and why did the bland American colonial diet evolve into today's restless mix of exotic foods?

Consuming Culture: Why You Eat What You Eat by **Jeremy MacClancy** (Henry Holt and Co., NY, 1992). MacClancy writes about the British perspective about what your eating habits say about us.

Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture by Marvin Harris (Simon and Schuster, NY 1985). An anthropologist explains food taboos in a very readable style.

Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present by Frederick J Simoons (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison WI 1994 2nd edition). A scholarly look at the use and avoidance of "flesh foods" from antiquity to the present day.

Man Eating Bugs: The Art and Science of Eating Insects by Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio (Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA 1998). A fascinating picture book.

Why We Eat What We Eat: How the Encounter Between the New World and the Old Changed the Way Everyone on the Planet Eats by Raymond Sokolow (Simon and Schuster, NY 1991). The title says it all.

The Culture of Food by Massimo Montanari (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, England 1994). Montanari looks at the history of food in Europe and relates it to today's eating patterns.

Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos of an Ordinary Meal by Margaret Visser (Grove Press, NY, 1986). Visser has chapters on corn, salt, butter, chicken, rice, lettuce, olive oil, lemon juice, and ice cream.

Food and Culture in America: A Nutrition Handbook by Pamela Goyan Kittler and Kathryn P. Sucher (Wadsworth Publishing, Belmont, CA, 1998). This is a college textbook for courses in food and culture. An excellent resource guide to specific cultures - Africans, Europeans, Latinos, Asians, and Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Eatethnic.com A "must-browse" web site. All about ethnic foods and ingredients, international holiday traditions, religious diets, regional customs, recipes, fun food facts and cultural nutrition resources. A solid resource site.

Special Thanks to Pamela Goyan Kittler of Four Winds Food Specialists (see above website and textbook) for her comments and assistance in preparing the script for *Bugs For Breakfast*. Her insights and knowledge helped make this a better script.