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ABSTRACT

This document describes "Food for Thought," a multidisciplinary project for grades 5 through 8, using nutrition as a focal point. The program focuses on the popular topic of food to make the study of different cultures and historic periods more relevant. In the program students research the diets and prepare the meals of cultures they are studying. They learn that humans throughout history have been driven by similar nutrition needs whether they were Mayans, Roman Centurions, European explorers, or astronauts. Studying history through food conveys a clearer picture of people in the past: what they believed, how they experienced events, and how they conducted their lives. Students draw the important connection between then and now. The program becomes particularly relevant when students examine their own diets and evaluate them using computer software. (SG)

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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Project SEED

the Center
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PROJECT SEED
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

FOOD FOR THOUGHT is a multi-disiplinary project designed for grades 5-8, using nutrition as a focal point. The program focuses on the popular topic of food to make the study of different cultures and historic periods more relevant. In this program students research the diets and prepare the meals of cultures they are studying. They learn that humans throughout history have been driven by similar nutrition needs whether they were Mayans, Roman Centurions, European explorers, or astronauts. Studying history through food conveys a clearer picture of people in the past: what they believed, how they experienced events, and how they conducted their lives. Students draw the important connections between then and now. FOOD FOR THOUGHT becomes particularly relevant when students examine their own diets and evaluate them using computer software.

PROJECT GOALS

Now, more than ever before, we are embarking on a nutrition revolution. As a society we are being asked to take a closer look at what we are eating and why. We are constantly being advised to beware of this product or eat more of that. Increase fiber! Lower fat! Watch your cholesterol! In a time when what we **don't** know **ca**n hurt us, it is important that we strive to build not only healthy thinkers, but also healthy eaters.

By implementing FOOD FOR THOUGHT, we hope to raise the nutrition awareness of students involved and provide a way of integrating all curriculum areas.

OUTCOMES

We hope that this project encourages schools to allow students the opportunity to study the significance of foods they eat for nutrition and cultural value. Why do we eat the foods we eat? What spurs our choices?

At the culmination of this project, students should have used computers to compare different cultural diets and analyze their own eating habits to achieve an understanding of nutrients and their food sources.

PROCEDURES AND INSTRUCTIONS

1) Decide on which aspects of this project you would like to focus. The entire project or various pieces can be adapted.

A. <u>Historical approach</u>:

* Choose a number of cultures or time periods and research the diets consumed. Use school kitchen facilities or parent volunteers to re-create a typical meal. At Bowdoinham Community, we have focused on European explorers and Greece, as they are part of Social Studies curriculum. Our fifth graders research the foods available to European voyagers and prepare a typically uninviting seafarers supper complete with hardtack, salt beef and cod, and water that has been collected and slowly "aged" to ensure an authentic unsavory taste.

*Our sixth grades prepare a Greek meal. This is served to a toga clad class after being prepared in our school kitchen and at home. Unlucky students draw "slave cards". Since slaves outnumbered citizens in ancient Greece most of the class eats a thin, wheat-based porridge as they watch the Athenian elite gobble down olives, cheese and fruits. Students remember that Greece may have had the first democracy, but there were few who were privileged to participate.

B. Science Approach

*Present information on nutrition; RDA, fat, sugars, sodium, vitamins, minerals and how they effect our bodies. Use resources such as a district dietician, home economics teacher, nurse, and parent volunteers. In doing this project we found that there were a great many people genuinely interested in eating habits, with a great deal to offer.

*After students have become familiar with basic concepts of nutrition, they record everything eaten in a day/week and analyze this for nutritional content/balance using the appropriate computer hard and software.

*Have students construct calorimeters to record the heat value of particular foods. Peanuts and other foods high in fat work well for this series of experiments.

*Measure out amounts of sugar, sodium, fat in the common "fast food" diet- using CRISCO is a great way to represent fat graphically- and display so others can see just what is in the food they may be eating. Test tubes and glass beakers work well for this.

*Using the computers and appropriate software,-EAT FOR HEALTH-students create both an unhealthy and healthy meal.

PROCEDURES AND INSTRUCTIONS CONTINUED

*Students create an interesting snack or meal, prepare and serve it during snack or lunch periods. An example of this is "sparkling health" created by two sixth grade students. Their drink contained seltzer, apples, bananas and oranges. Using the software EAT FOR HEALTH, they created cards that contained all nutritional information and handed these out to all who ventured to taste the creation. It was in fact very tasty, healthy, and an example of students taking pride in their work.

2) Involve as many people as possible. Though much of the project is delivered by the classroom teacher, we employed the help of parents and district "experts". It can only help children to understand the importance of healthy diets when they see a greater number of adults interested in what they are learning.

3) Give us a call at Bowdoinham Community -207-666-5546 - and we will be more than happy to talk with you about how to integrate this project into your curriculum or go into greater detail of aspects of the project.

DURATION

At Bowdoinham Community School, we have found this project to be successful on a variety of levels. This is a project that can be used throughout the whole year, for one period of time, or to focus on our present diet trends. As with any other sizeable project, planning time is crucial. We have the luxury of a built in planning period of two hours each week. This has been invaluable to us for this project and others. Adapt what you are comfortable with. Rome wasn't built in a day.

RESOURCES

Hardware/Software

We have been using four Apple IIc's with an imagewriter printer, but have recently acquired 12 Macintosh LC II's. Though we have had great success with the Apple IIC's and the software package EAT FOR HEALTH, we anticipate a new software package for the LCII's that will give us similar nutritional data.

PROJECT COST

The school should budget around $100.00 for software costs. This may be a bit more if you are considering a software package for the Mac or IBM.

Food is generally donated by parents of those students involved in the project but it may be wise to budget another $50.00-$75.00 if you adapt this portion of FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

CONCLUSION

Humans spend a lot of time thinking about food. The curriculum comes alive when we focus on food, and our children receive the information they need to make good choices in their diets. Combining content areas and nutrition is not only fun, it's a great use of precious school time.