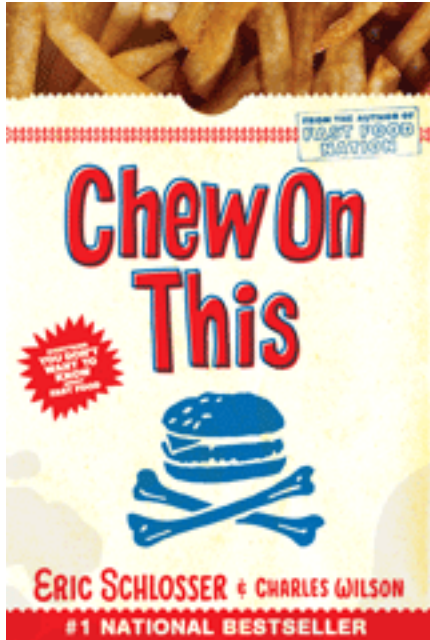


A Teacher's Guide



Chew on This

by Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson

- [About the Book](#)
- [Discussion Questions](#)
- [Activities](#)
- [Take Action!](#)

About the Book

Chew on This: Everything You Don't Want to Know About Fast Food is a carefully researched and engaging text that teachers will find useful in a variety of disciplines, including English, nutrition, health, social studies, debate, mathematics, history, and creative writing. It encourages young readers eleven and up to look critically at the world around them, offering much for self-motivated students to explore on their own while giving students who need support accessible and interesting information.

The suggestions in this teacher's guide provide starting points from which you and your students can spin off lessons in all sorts of interesting directions. You can build lessons around the whole book or single chapters. After reading *Chew on This* yourself, you will probably find potential for other cross-curricular projects across many disciplines.

Discussion Questions

"The Pioneers"

Do you think Hamburger Charlie had any idea how popular the hamburger would become? After reading this chapter, why do you think the hamburger became America's most popular sandwich? Was it inevitable that the hamburger would become so popular, or was its popularity the result of specific choices that people made?

"The Youngster Business"

Representatives from Coca-Cola have said that the two main things the company tries to convey in its advertisements are "youth and energy." Describe some of the fast-food advertisements you've seen. Drawing on what you've learned from this chapter, name

some of the techniques that fast-food companies use in these advertisements to attract children to their restaurants. Do you think these techniques are fair?

"McJobs"

Do any of you, your siblings, or your friends have jobs in fast-food restaurants? What do they like about their fast-food jobs? What do they dislike? How long have they worked in fast food, and how long do they intend to stay?

Teenage employees Pascal and Maxime collected plenty of signatures and lots of evidence against McDonald's to support their plan to organize a union. How was McDonald's able to win the legal case against them? Do you think the tactics McDonald's used were just? Do you think Pascal and Maxime were right to want to start a union?

"The Secret of the Fries"

Were you surprised to learn what's in the red food dye that goes into many fast-food strawberry shakes? Or to find out what flavoring goes into the French fries? What do you think about the fact that a lot of the flavors in your fast food come from chemical factories along the New Jersey Turnpike? Could our food be made in any other way?

Do you think it was appropriate for Harish Bharti to file a lawsuit claiming that McDonald's was misleading vegetarians? What do you think of the results of the suit?

Based on what you learned from reading this chapter, do you think that the foods American children like the most are the foods that children all over the world like the most? Why or why not?

"Stop the Pop"

Does your school have soda machines? After reading this chapter, would you be willing to stand up for the removal of your school's soda machines, as Kristina Clark did? Why or why not?

Does your school serve junk food or fast food in the cafeteria or the school store? Do you buy food à la carte or from the National School Lunch Program? Do you think that the National School Lunch Program is still able to fulfill its 1946 mission to "safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's children"? Why or why not?

"Meat"

Drawing on what you learned from reading this chapter, can you describe how cows, chickens, and pigs are raised for the fast-food industry today? In what ways are they raised differently from the way they were raised fifty years ago? What are some of the environmental consequences of the way we raise the animals for our food today? What do you think of these changes? How much or little do you feel the fast-food industry is responsible for them?

If you were in charge of one of the biggest meatpacking companies, what would you do differently?

"Big"

What are some of the effects on growing bodies of consuming too much fast food and exercising too little?

Representatives of the fast-food industry say that the responsibility for healthy choices lies with you. How much do you think that lack of personal responsibility is a cause of the current obesity crisis? How much do you think that corporations are responsible? Why?

Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson describe Sam Fabrikant's struggle with weight gain and his frightening experience with gastric bypass surgery at the age of sixteen. After reading about Sam's experience, do you think that gastric bypass surgery was the best option for him? What were Sam's alternatives?

"Your Way"

What alternatives to eating at the big fast-food chains do the authors propose? What other alternatives can you think of? Has reading *Chew on This* changed your mind about where to buy your food? Why or why not?

Activities

Geography, History, English, and Social Studies

Ask your students to research the development of fast food in your town or area. How has your town changed since fast food became a part of American culture? Visit your local library and look at photographs of your town before fast food arrived on the scene and the automobile became so important. If you can find aerial photographs, examine the evolving shape and street plan of your town. Where do fast-food restaurants tend to cluster? How has your downtown area changed since the arrival of fast-food restaurants? Interview people who have lived in your town for many years and seen these changes firsthand. How do they feel about the changes?

History, English, and Social Studies

Ask your students to interview grandparents or other older adults they know about how eating habits have changed since they were young. What meals do they particularly remember from their childhood? Who cooked them? What ingredients were used? Were more foods produced and consumed locally? Have their eating habits changed since fast food came on the scene? Why or why not? Do they think the changes are for the better or for the worse?

History

What do we know from history about the association between food health? Explore historical problems associated with malnutrition as well as the new health concerns about obesity.

Social Studies, English, and Business

Have the students design an advertising campaign directed at children for a fast-food chain, drawing on techniques described in "The Youngster Business." Assign students to teams and have individuals within those teams serve as the chain's marketing director, advertising writers, toy designers, movie studio executives, farmers, and flavorists, among other professions. Have each student describe his or her role to the class after brainstorming and homework sessions. At the end of the project, discuss whether the students think the techniques they used to market and sell their food were ethical.

Social Studies, English, and Business

Encourage students to interview siblings or friends who work at fast-food restaurants and write an essay about their discoveries. The students can ask: What do they like about their jobs? What do they dislike? How long have they worked in fast food and how long do they intend to stay? When do they work? Are they able to balance schoolwork and their job effectively?

Mathematics

Mathematical problems can be drawn from every chapter. For example:

- Using the information in "Big," have students make scale drawings to illustrate how portion sizes have changed over the years.
- The average assistant fast-food manager makes \$25,070 a year. Have the students make a budget for that money, spreading it out over 365 days, and look at how much the manager can spend on rent, a car, and other expenses.
- Divide the number of chickens killed in the United States every year (9 billion) by the current population of the United States to determine how many chickens are killed for every man, woman, and child in the country.

Science and Nutrition

Have the students read "Stop the Pop." Design an experiment that demonstrates the effects that soda can have on teeth and explain the scientific principles behind the changes (how sugars can serve as fuel for bacteria).

After reading "Big," have students make an anatomical drawing of the human body and describe how unhealthy fast foods can affect the liver, the aorta, the heart, the spine, and other parts of the body. (Students can draw on information from *Chew on This* and other sources.)

Nutrition and Creative Writing

Have the students keep a journal of everything they eat for one week. At the end, ask them what this journal teaches them about their diet that they hadn't thought about before. Will it change the way they eat? Why or why not? Compare the students' diets to the suggestions for daily dietary intake at mypyramid.gov.

Creative Writing

"Big" tells the story of Sam Fabrikant. Ask students to write a diary for the days leading up to and following Sam's operation, revealing how he may have been feeling.

Have students research a list of startling facts in the book and create an illustrated booklet called "The Illustrated Guide to All You Don't Want to Know About Fast Food."

Debate

What are the arguments for and against eating fast food? For and against marketing to children? For and against raising animals at factory farms? Have students take different sides.

Take Action!

Has *Chew on This* inspired you and your students to make some changes in the food you purchase and eat? Here are some suggestions on where to start.

- Start your own "Stop the Pop" campaign to remove soda machines from your school.
- Start a petition to give to your principal.

Want fresh vegetables in your cafeteria?

- Invite the person in charge of purchasing food for your school to your classroom. Ask questions about what he or she buys and why. Ask whether he has the power to buy from local farmers and dairies. Does he have just one supplier or many?
- Take a field trip to your own school cafeteria and see how food is made behind the scenes. Talk to the cafeteria workers about their jobs. Do they make food from scratch, or does much of their work involve reheating frozen foods? Do they decide what to serve? Are they involved when the school gives health classes?
- Grow your own! Talk to your teacher about starting a school garden, or apply for a grant to get you started: visit www.kidsgardening.com to find out how.

Worried you are eating too much junk food?

- Take some cookbooks out of the library and whip up some healthy meals with your parents. Find a recipe that uses a food you've never eaten before.
- Visit a farmers' market. Visit www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm to find one in your area.
- When you go to fast-food restaurants with friends, order a salad instead of a burger.
- Drink water instead of soda at meals and after school.
- Take a healthy lunch and snacks to school instead of purchasing food in the cafeteria.
- Compete with your friends! Count the foods in your lunch that haven't been processed. Each unprocessed food gets one point.

Upset by how animals and workers are treated at meatpacking plants?

- As a class assignment, write letters to your congressperson and senator explaining what you learned from *Chew on This* and why you think workers and animals deserve better treatment. Give some suggestions about ways to improve things. They will listen! To find your local representatives' contact information, visit www.congress.org.
- Support your locally owned restaurants!

- Work with your teacher to invite local restaurant owners and fast-food franchise owners to your class. Ask them where they purchase their ingredients and ask about their employee salaries and benefits. After they leave, discuss which restaurants you and your classmates feel comfortable supporting.

For additional teaching ideas and the latest updates on *Chew on This*, visit chewonthisnews.com. Portions of this guide are based on original ideas by Prue Goodwin, lecturer in literacy education and children's books.