

## Overview:

Popular diet in the United States in 2009 is almost unrecognizable to that which existed prior to our current era. Families used to eat two meals per day together and cooked food bought from local supermarkets. Families ate out on occasion and “fast food” restaurants as we know them today either did not exist, or were not nearly as accessible or even desired. What changed this trend? The answer to this question may have to do with the transformation of social norms and social values in the United States. In 1960, it wasn’t uncommon for a woman to stay at home, thus preparing well balanced meals for the family. This changed drastically, however, due to a rapidly globalizing world, which required the average American; man or women, to work full-time jobs. The food industry simply reacted to this changing trend and met the new needs of Americans. In so doing, they expanded the fast food industry. They realized that people were no longer cooking for themselves the way that they had years ago. This realization led to a competitive market that aimed to provide quick and cheap meals to Americans all over the country. Unfortunately, though these meals may have been prepared quickly, been cheap in price and even tasted good, they consisted mostly of processed food, high in saturated fat and cholesterol. Americans, who began consuming fast food in great quantities, were largely unaware of the profound effect that this new way of life would have on their families’ lives for decades to follow. Along with a changing diet, the nature of work also changed. The Industrial revolution removed workers from the farm and put many in factories. Globalization has led to an increase in office jobs. Both transformations coupled with the automobile has led to sedentary lifestyles for the majority of Americans. Exercise, is a relatively new concept; people by in large did not “exercise” in 1850. Nowadays many people go to the gym after work, not because they enjoy to workout, but rather because they must workout to maintain a healthy lifestyle due to a lack of movement in their everyday lives. As Americans have coupled a lack of movement and a poor diet, they have created a remedy for disaster. Some Americans have good diets and exercise regularly, but unfortunately, they are in the minority. In terms of both diet and lifestyle, why are Americans less healthy today than they were during any other period in history?

## Rationale:

Today, 34% of Americans are overweight and for the first time in world history, the obese population is actually larger than the overweight. One-third of the average Americans’ diet consists of “junk food” reports have stated. Physicians believe that for the first time in history, the older generation will actually live longer than their children can expect to live due solely to poor diet and lack of exercise. This lesson is aimed at challenging kids to take a look at the modern American way of life regarding diet and exercise and to compare it to that of which existed in the past. It might be that our society doesn’t take this issue seriously because individuals aren’t forced to investigate the causes and effects of the status quo, a status quo that is causing thousands of Americans to die prematurely each and every year. This lesson will require students to take ownership on this issue; both analyzing and synthesizing

secondary and primary sources to reach a reasoned conclusion regarding diet and exercise in the United States both past and present. The value of this lesson is that it won't only educate students on the history of diet and exercise in America, but it could also spark lifestyle changes in those who discover some truth while conducting their own investigation.

### **Multiple Objectives:**

During this lesson, students will:

1. B.12.1 Explain different points of view using data gathered from provided sources
2. B.12.2 Analyze primary and secondary sources related to a historical question to evaluate their relevance, make comparisons, integrate new information with prior knowledge and come to a reasoned conclusion
3. B.12.4 Assess the validity of different interpretations of significant historical events
4. C.12.8 Locate, organize, analyze and use information from various sources in order to gain an understanding of an issue of public concern, take a position and then communicate that position
5. Write a final thesis driven essay that demonstrates their knowledge and interpretation of this subject

### **Grade Level:**

This lesson is designed for high school level students. This lesson could be presented to middle school aged students, however, the sources, objectives and assessment would have to be altered.

### **Time:**

This inquiry lesson is designed for three 47 minute class periods. Depending on how the lesson is progressing, a fourth day could be added.

### **Course:**

This lesson has been designed for a sociology course that discusses current social issues. The lesson takes a "historical" approach to understanding why our present social issue has occurred. This lesson could also be taught in a US History course, or even a home economics class.

### **Materials:**

1. Videotape of "Supersize Me"
2. Videotape of "King Corn"
3. Audio and DVD components
4. Copies of sources
5. Outline sheet

### **Procedure:**

Day 1: This inquiry is designed for students to connect their findings on the history and progression of diet and exercise to their own lives, or those around them. I will

elicit their interests using a hook. This hook will be a 20-25 minute clip from the film *King Corn*. One cannot watch this documentary without becoming engaged to some extent. If I had the time, I would surely show the whole film, but there are simply too many aspects of this topic that I'd like to address. Next, I would provide them with their first reading, *A Social Movement Against Traditional American Diet: A Summary on Supersize me*. *Supersize me* is another film that, if I had the time, I would surely show it in its entirety, but again time simply does not allow for it. I authored this short summary, but it is not biased in any way and it provides excellent statistical information regarding the film. It is short and should only take the students 5-10 minutes at the end of class to read. I will assign them *Dietary Trends*, their second reading at the end of class, to be read for the next day in preparation for a brief discussion.

Day 2: Class will begin with a 10 minute discussion concerning *Dietary Trends*. This article provides a lot of current data, but also has a chart that outlines American dietary trends by decade since 1950. Following this brief discussion we will popcorn *A History of Exercise In America-Popularity and Trends*. After focusing on some dietary issues using *King Corn*, *Supersize Me*, and *Dietary Trends*, I'd like to provide the students with a look at another possible factor for the current problem in the United States and how this problem developed throughout history; and that is exercise or the lack thereof. This reading will take about 10 minutes and then we will spend about 10 minutes discussing it. For the last 15 minutes of class I will introduce students to a final, but crucial source for their investigative process. This essay, called *The History of Fitness* is lengthy, but we are going to split up the workload. There are twelve key eras in World and US History that students need to take a look at. Depending on class size, we will have each student or a pair of students work on an era. They will have the last 15 minutes of this class and the first 10 minutes of next class to organize a brief (2-3 minute) presentation regarding their era that they will share with the class. They can present orally, or work on computers to make a short power point.

Day 3: The hour will begin with 10 minutes of work time for the mini-presentations. The presentations will take roughly 30-35 minutes and I will ask that students take notes on each presentation. I will provide them with the entire reading of all of the eras that they can use when preparing their final essay assignment, but splitting up the work in this way, will save them the time of carefully reading each era and I believe it will facilitate more learning because it will be more interactive than simply having everyone read individually; many would likely not read it at all. Day 3 will conclude with me using the last 5 minutes of class to explain their essay assignment that will essentially elicit their hypothesis and argument supported by facts presented in the articles and essays that we looked at. The question that they will be answering through their own interpretation of the material provided and supported by evidence that they find compelling will be "In terms of both diet and lifestyle, why are Americans less healthy today than they were during any other period in history?" I will require that they come to class on Day 4 with an outline that will include their thesis and three strong arguments supporting their thesis. This means that the essay should include an introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs (presenting their

three arguments) and a conclusion that restates their hypothesis and provides closure to their argument.

The next day, I will check off their outlines when class begins. I will begin the inquiry lesson on a Tuesday, which means they will have their outlines checked off on the Friday of that week. Their essays will be due the following Tuesday. I want to give the students plenty of time to work through the material that was presented in class in order to develop a well written, thesis driven academic argument regarding this topic.

**Assessment:** Students will be graded on two levels. 30% of their overall grade for this lesson will be their preparation and class participation. The other 70% will correspond to their essay. Students will not be graded on what opinions they have on the issue and history leading up to it, but on the evidence that they have an opinion and support that opinion effectively using the sources that were provided to them. The inquiry lesson will be worth 100 points (5% of students overall grade for the semester class). I will promptly grade the essays, providing feedback and returning them to students. I will permit and encourage students to rewrite their essays for higher grades after taking into consideration my comments and or discussing their essays with me. I see no reason why students shouldn't be rewarded for improvement, especially on a skill such as inquiry and writing an academic essay that is so important for their overall growth as problem solvers and synthesizers of information and organization.

**Accommodations:** On a final note, I will provide extra assistance before and after school and during study halls for any students who wish to take the opportunity. This might involve additional assistance with interpreting readings or during the outline and or writing process. I hope that students of all abilities will consider this option.