

Comparative Tasting Format

Preparation Time: 20 minutes
Cooking Time: None
Total Lesson Time: 45 minutes

Introduction

Explain that over the next period of time, the class is going to cook and eat fruits and vegetables that are grown locally. Before they begin, the students are going to do some thinking about food. Ask them why they eat. Acknowledge the many reasons but focus attention on the need for energy.

Explain that plants have an important and unique role in the earth's food web. Ask if anyone knows what that role is. Explain that plants make their own food. Plants capture energy from the sun, carbon from the air, and water from the ground and make their food. People and other animals cannot make their own food. They must eat plants or animals that eat plants to get energy.

Food is the vehicle for passing the sun's energy through the food web, and food is also the vehicle for cycling matter through the food web. Ask students to draw a picture of a plant, showing what the plant needs to make food.

Teachers can review photosynthesis, the carbon cycle, or the role of chloroplasts in cells, depending on the grade level.

Background

This activity is designed to be a generic lesson plan for an introduction to any crop in the guide. In this activity, students have the opportunity to taste and compare the different varieties of a single crop. Most fruits and vegetables come in many varieties that offer different sizes, colors, textures, and tastes. Although a few varieties are available at the supermarket, additional varieties will be found on a trip to a farmers market. For the best results, choose crops when they are in peak season and find the freshest produce possible. If you shop at a farmers market, talk to the farmers; they can give you suggestions for the best-tasting choices and give you interesting background information to share with your students. Produce managers at the local supermarket are also knowledgeable about seasonal varieties.

As an introduction to a new fruit or vegetable, this activity allows students to practice observations using all their senses. Students will investigate the different varieties with their five senses while they prepare for and actually do the comparative tasting. It is also a good activity for building students' vocabulary.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Use their senses to observe different aspects of a variety of fruits or vegetables during a comparative tasting.

Record their observations in their journals using descriptive words and drawings.



Materials

For the class:

- 4 or 5 varieties of the crop, with 5 samples of each variety
- colander
- 20 toothpicks
- 2 or 3 kitchen towels

For each group of 4:

- 2 cutting boards
- 2 serrated knives with rounded tips
- 2 plates
- 4 napkins
- journals

Preparation

1. Wash the fruit or vegetables, and dry them in the colander.
2. Clean and set up tables.
3. Have students wash their hands. Discuss proper methods of handling food.

Safety Precautions

Review safety precautions for using knives (see the subsection Health and Safety under "Suggestions for Success").

Doing the Activity

1. Announce to students that they will have an opportunity to use all five senses to examine the different varieties of the fruit or vegetable.
2. Show each variety to the class, explaining its name and where and when it is grown.
3. On the board, make a sample chart for recording observations using five senses for each variety. Have students copy the chart into their journals.
4. Explain that student groups will examine each variety and record their observations on the chart in their journals.
5. Provide each table with its materials and a sample of each variety. Students examine the varieties and record their observations. Ask students to share their observations with the class.
6. Have students cut each variety so that everyone in the group gets an equal share. Ask students to examine the cut fruits or vegetables and to record their observations.
7. Tell students they may now taste each variety, noting its taste, texture, and sound. They should record their observations in their journals.
8. After eating, lead a class discussion on the five senses and on each variety's appearance, texture, taste, smell, and sound.
9. Clean up materials. If there is a school or classroom compost or worm bin, place food scraps there.

