**What do you meat? An introduction into the culture of meat eating.**

**Aims:** To make students consider food and meat especially in terms of its cultural value, influence, and arbitrariness. To encourage learners to be more open to how meat is seen and treated in other cultures.

| **Stage** | **Procedure** | **Aids** | **Time** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Warm up - Board race, Introduction** | Students are divided into two groups and asked to write down as many meat dishes from as many different cultures as they can in 3 minutes. The team with the most culturally diverse list wins.  **Feedback**: Winner is announced, teacher asks questions about what students produced - where the dishes come from, when/why they’re eaten, is there anything interesting about them (e.g. sushi is made with raw fish, which is unusual in central Europe) etc. | Board, markers OR 2 sheets of paper, pens | 5 minutes |
| **Reading** | Students are given the text, comprehension questions are put up on the board. Students read the text and then answer comprehension questions with their partner. | The text printed out with words and phrases highlighted and comprehension questions | 10 minutes |
| **Research** | Students are put into five groups according to the highlighted passages in the text. They will have 10 minutes to briefly research the given topic to then be able to explain it/give examples to their classmates. | Phones, Internet connection, pens, paper | 10min |
| **Presentation** | Groups will take turns presenting their findings to the class. |  | 10min |
| **Discussion** | Students, having been equipped with some related language and context, will be shown slides with pairs of photos and more personal questions to discuss. This is to enable them to give their own opinion on things, better remember what they have learnt and help them realize that they are also a product of their culture when it comes to food.  Questions:  1. Do you feel masculine when eating meat? Do you know any male vegans/vegetarians? Why do you think masculinity is so closely connected to eating meat?  2. If you had been born as a Hindu in India, do you think you’d eat beef?  3.Would you be willing to try a guinea pig lunch? (pictured) What do you think about cultures where it’s acceptable to eat dogs/cats/horses?  4. What food do you view as “fancy”? What about it makes you feel that way? | Pictures of meat in different cultural contexts, questions | 8 minutes |

**Materials**:

**Pictures**:

1. **Meat and gender:**



1. **Religion:**



**3. Edible vs. inedible**



**4.Class and prestige**



**Reading**:

The social and cultural value of meat:

<https://www.alimentarium.org/en/story/social-and-cultural-value-meat>

Our food does not simply tend to our biological needs. It is also a marker of our identity, a symbol of belonging. Just think of discovering other culinary cultures when you go abroad, and the pleasure of eating your all-time local favourites. Food is also an essential element of our social interaction. In many cultures, we mark a special occasion or create bonds by sharing a meal and giving food as gifts (a bottle of wine, chocolates…). Religions acknowledge the symbolic power of food, as it is frequently offered to the gods. Eating is evidently a powerful symbolic act, in the sense that it is not just about assimilating the physical properties of what we eat, but the symbolic ones too… whether to enhance one’s faculties or, on the contrary, to poison oneself. This fundamental ambiguity of food as a source of life or as poison generates cultural awareness about what is acceptable to eat and what is not. This goes way beyond the objective health risk. A certain foodstuff can be a delicacy in some cultures and appalling in others…

Meat provides a good example of such ambiguity. On the positive side, it often symbolises strength and good health. Even nowadays, when many people eat meat every day, festive meals usually feature a special meat dish: lamb for Eid El Kebir, turkey for Thanksgiving and Christmas, etc. On the other hand, meat is the foodstuff most affected by taboos. Prohibitions regarding pork in Islam and Judaism immediately come to mind, as does religious vegetarianism in certain Hindu castes. Beyond that though, every culture identifies certain kinds of meat as unfit to eat. In many cases, it is the closeness to humankind that sets the limit to what is deemed edible. In Western cultures for example, consuming the flesh of a pet is generally out of the question. This has often been associated with the taboo of anthropophagy. Would eating an animal that is close to a human be like eating another human being? It is interesting to note that, whereas the notion of ‘murder’ normally only refers to humans, the vegan and anti-speciesist discourse sometimes extends it to include animals.

Beyond the taboos, consuming certain kinds of food is also linked to social belonging, especially in terms of social class. The cost of some products certainly influences this, but does not provide the full answer. In this respect, it is interesting to consider the place of meat in society. Studies have clearly shown that, in France, meat used to be the prerogative of the nobility, then of the bourgeoisie. Nowadays, the norms are quite the reverse. Meat is more often consumed by the working classes, while executives increasingly favour vegetables and fruit. This link between meat consumption and social identities varies from country to country. An increased consumption of meat and dairy products, particularly among the middle classes in Asian countries, is often associated with imitating a Western lifestyle they esteem.

Consuming meat is also linked to masculinity and gender identities. It is common to see advertisements of men gathered around a barbecue… In contrast, studies have shown that omnivores sometimes equate veganism with a lack of virility. While it is difficult to obtain precise figures, it would appear that it is predominantly women who give up meat. In fact, statistics reveal that a typical vegan person would be an urban, left-wing, educated woman, with no particular religious affiliation.

In terms of dominant family patterns, adopting a meat-free diet also directly affects women. It has in fact been shown that, when it comes to the learning and work involved in changing a family’s eating habits, women bear more of the load than men do. The same applies to learning to cook differently, without meat…

This last point shows that the role a foodstuff plays in society goes far beyond the purely symbolic aspects, but that these are very clearly embedded in our daily lives.

1. What positive qualities does meat symbolize in some cultures?
2. What are some taboos different cultures have about meat?
3. How is meat linked to class?
4. In what ways is meat “gendered”?