

POSTCARDS FROM AFAR # 1

(Time Middle)

Gastrodiplomacy: “I ate dinner in...” Descriptive Writing with Sensory Details, Metaphors, and Similes

Lesson Sketch

Skills: Students *read* passages about culture and food; *reflect* on personal responses and discuss responses with classmates; *compare/contrast* an unfamiliar culture/food experience with their own home and school culture/food habits; *take notes* to *evaluate information* that is relevant/irrelevant to their writing purpose; *write a short descriptive piece* using sensory language plus metaphors and similes; *practice the complete writing process*: identify an area of curiosity, read, take notes, identify a specific audience, brainstorm, compose, seek feedback, revise, polish, publish for readers outside the classroom.

Grades: 7–9

Time: Two 90-minute classes

Featured Resources: AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com articles on National Cuisine, Points of Interest, and Maps for 175 countries

Inspirations

"What is patriotism but the love of the food one ate as a child?" ~Lin Yutang

"Food is our common ground, a universal experience." ~James Beard

Lesson Overview

Students expand their cultural understanding, sharpen their research skills, and write with vivid concrete imagery when they send postcards home after their hypothetical dinners in Italy, Senegal, Iceland, China—wherever their imaginations and palates take them. Students learn about people and food in any of the 175 countries covered in AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com. Working individually and collaboratively, students encounter their own and their classmates' responses to unfamiliar cultures. Students identify and describe in writing some of the differences and similarities between subject cultures and their own culture/s at home and at school. Students experience the complete writing process, from first inspiration to final publication.

Lesson Steps

Working in pairs, students select one of the 175 countries covered in AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com. Students read National Cuisine articles and peruse Recipes. Students read Points of Interest articles and examine Maps in order to decide where to eat dinner. Students take notes together regarding their dining location and the names of featured dishes and ingredients. Students compare the subject country's dishes with their own usual dining habits, noting similarities and differences, familiar and new ingredients. Students note for themselves and share with classmates any ingredients that strike them as especially enticing, strange, or frightening.

Individually, then, students write their postcards home (80 words) using all five senses—sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound—plus at least one metaphor and one simile. Working together as peer reviewers, students offer constructive feedback on each other's drafts. Working individually, students revise and polish their descriptive texts. Using photos from AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com, students create photomontages for their postcards, add their finished texts, and enjoy their finished pieces of writing and art. Students can mail their postcards to family members or friends who will enjoy this culinary journey.

Standards Met

1. **Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Reading**
 - a. Key Ideas and Details 1, 2
 - b. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7
 - c. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10
2. **Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Writing**
 - a. Text Types and Purposes 1, 2
 - b. Production and Distribution of Writing 4, 5, 6
 - c. Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7,8,9
 - d. Range of Writing 10
3. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Reading**
 - a. Key Ideas and Details 1, 2
 - b. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7
 - c. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10
4. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Writing**
 - a. Text Types and Purposes 1, 2
 - b. Production and Distribution of Writing 4, 5, 6
 - c. Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7,8,9
 - d. Range of Writing 10
5. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Speaking and Listening**
 - a. Comprehension and Collaboration 1, 2
 - b. Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas 4,6
6. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Language**
 - a. Conventions of Standard English 1, 2
 - b. Knowledge of Language 3
 - c. Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4, 6
7. **National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards for the English Language Arts**
 - a. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
8. **National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies**
 - a. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9

Supplies

- Computer lab access with internet connection for student use of AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com
- Access to Microsoft Word
- Color printer access
- Blank 6x9 postcards
- Scissors, glue, colored pens/pencils/paints, other art supplies as desired
- Notebooks and pens/pencils
- Dictionaries
- Stamps (if students will physically mail postcards)
- Student access to postcard recipient/s addresses

Instructional Plan

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Increase cultural literacy and develop as global citizens. Explore an unfamiliar culture in an inviting, energizing, curiosity-inspiring way.
- Build skills in reading comprehension, research, note taking, brainstorming, and descriptive writing.
- Move beyond general descriptions to writing with specific, concrete details—crucial not only for vivid descriptive writing, but for effective persuasive writing using specific evidence.
- Write with figurative language.
- Experience the complete writing process: identify an area of curiosity, read, take notes, identify a specific audience, brainstorm, compose, seek feedback, revise, polish, publish for readers outside the classroom.
- Improve media literacy. Experience the design process by exploring the relationship between text and graphic elements.
- Find motivation for ongoing engagement with print, media, and cultural literacies via the success of a finished piece that readers will enjoy.

Session One

Teacher introduction

- Introduce the word and idea gastrodiploacy: learning about culture through food.
- Let students know that many small classroom activities will lead to one writing exercise—if students participate in small assignments along the way, the final writing assignment will be a snap.
- Set ground rules for partners working together: respecting each other's ideas even if you don't agree, strategies for achieving consensus, etc.
- Pair students into partner working groups, and ask students to move to shared work stations.

Student Directions

What country would you like to visit? Country selection

- Go to AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com
 - Peruse list of countries.
 - Identify three countries you are curious about. Skim materials for these countries: get a quick sense of where the country is, who lives there, and whether you are curious about the place.
 - Choose one country to mentally visit for this exercise.
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What would you like to see there? Reading for general impressions

- Go to Maps—understand where country is.
 - Go to Food and Recipes/National Cuisine articles and Recipes. Preliminary read—get familiar and develop a general sense of the food.
 - Go to Travel/Places of Interest. Read Places of Interest article and choose with your partner three that are of most interest to you. Note the region, province, or town of your top three Places of Interest.
 - Return to Maps. Locate your top three Places of Interest. With your partner, agree on one Place of Interest to visit. Imagine that after you visit, you go out for dinner together.
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What would you like to eat? Learning food vocabulary together

- Return to Food and Recipes/National Cuisine. Time to decide what to eat!
 - With your partner, re-read the National Cuisine article and look up any unfamiliar words (ceviche, croquette) in the dictionary.
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Where in the country can you eat what? Regional cuisines

- Are there any regional cuisine distinctions in the country? If so, which region's cuisine will you be sampling at your chosen Place of Interest?
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What stands out to you? Reflection, note taking, and brainstorming

Discuss the following questions together, and take individual notes on your answers:

- Why did you choose this country?
- What vegetables, fruits, grains, beans, breads, meats, and spices first grab your attention in the cuisine of your country?
- Which dishes or ingredient in your country's cuisine have you never eaten? Which dishes/ingredients have you never even heard of before?
- Which dishes/ingredients in your country's cuisine do you especially want to try?
- Which dishes/ingredients in your country's cuisine do you think would be gross or scary to try? Which are you curious to try anyway?
- Are you and your partner drawn to/curious about/grossed out by the same dishes, or by different dishes? Which ones?
- What about your country's cuisine is like you thought it would be? What is different? What surprises you about what the citizens of your chosen country eat?
- What would you order for dinner in a restaurant? Imagine that the description of foods in the National Cuisine article is a list of what's on the menu. Write down your selections from the menu.

- How are you eating? What do you notice about how food is served? What is the same as how you eat at home, and what is different? Is your dinner served on a plate just for you? Or is it served on a platter that you share with your companion? Is your plate ceramic, or a large leaf, or something else? Are you eating with utensils, or are you eating by picking up food with bread, or with your hands? Are you seated in a chair at a table, or on a cushion on the floor?
- What temperature is your dinner? Does the plate steam? Do you have to be careful not to burn your hands on the plate or hot utensils?
- What do you imagine that the individual dishes smell like?
- What are the colors on your plate? Are individual dishes all one color, or a mix of colors?
- What do you imagine that the individual dishes taste like? Are they sweet, salty, bitter, sour? Some of all of the above? Do they taste like any familiar foods? What kinds of textures do the foods have?

Teacher introduction

Prepare students to begin their writing assignment. Review the preparatory steps students have worked on up to now, and remind students that all these steps will inform their choices as they write. Remind students that, while they should make their best efforts to write well, there's no need to agonize over perfection in their first drafts—peer review and a chance to revise will come later.

Student Directions

HOMEWORK: What would you like to share with your reader? Composing

- Re-read your answers to the prompt questions about dinner in your chosen country.
- Choose your postcard recipient/s: A parent? A sibling? A friend?
- How do you hope your recipient will respond? By saying "That sounds delicious—I'm jealous!" Or by being freaked out? Or by planning a real trip to go to your chosen country with you?
- Using a highlighter or a pen/pencil in a different color from the one in which you took your notes, choose the most exciting physical details from your notes to share with your postcard recipient/s—those details that you hope will produce in your reader the response you are looking for.
- Write the first draft of your postcard (around 80 words) describing the meal in your chosen country. Keep your recipient in mind as you write.
- Describe your meal using all five senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, and smell.
- Describe your meal using at least one metaphor ("Red curry was a fire on my tongue") and one simile ("The melted caramel was hot as lava").
- Postcards might begin:
 - "You won't believe what I ate today . . ."
 - "You won't believe the delicious dinner I just had . . ."
 - "Guess what escargot smells like?"
 - "Guess what iguana tastes like?"
 - Or with anything you think your recipient should know about the food, service, or setting of your meal. What would amaze your recipient and grab his/her attention right away?

Teacher introduction

- Set expectations for peer review. Review the nature of constructive criticism, and review also writer strategies for choosing what changes to make when reader feedback differs.

Student Directions

What have you missed so far? Peer Review

Reuniting with partners, students share with each other a) who the postcard recipients are, and b) what response students hope to provoke. Students read each other's first drafts. Partners consider the following questions, and share the answers with each other:

- What do you and your partner have in common, in terms of how you responded to the food and your surroundings?
- What are the differences in how you responded to the food and your surroundings?
- What are the two most vivid descriptions in your partner's text? The moments when you can almost see/hear/taste/smell/touch the food, as if it's right in front of you?
- What are the moments in your partner's text that seem less exciting, less sensory than the most vivid moments?
- How effective are your partner's similes and metaphors in describing the meal?
- What are the moments in your partner's text that seem to be accomplishing the mission of tempting or alarming the designated reader/s?
- Any moments in the text that, while interesting in themselves, don't seem to relate to the response the writer wishes to create? (For example, if I were trying to gross out my mother, my partner might advise me to skip the detailed description of eating frosted cupcakes—and write a long description of eating blackened tarantula, instead.)
- Are there any places in your partner's text that confuse you? If so, where? Can you make any suggestions as to how to clarify the text?
- Are there any places in your partner's text where you could make a helpful suggestion about a grammatical issue? And/or do any grammatical questions come up for you as you review your partner's text? If you are both stumped about something, request a conversation with your teacher before you revise.

Teacher introduction

- Review with students the difference between revising and polishing—i.e., between changing content and changing punctuation. Suggest to students that they think of revising and polishing as a funnel-shaped set of tasks in which the writer starts big (improving transitions, making descriptions more vivid), then works down toward the smaller details (addressing punctuation issues and spelling errors).

Student Directions

Revising

Using your partner's feedback and your own clearer perspective, now that you've stepped away from your first draft for a while, make changes to your first draft in the following areas:

- Add excitement to areas of text your partner has identified as drab. Ask yourself: What sensory experience am I trying to convey? An experience of sight, taste, touch, smell, or sound?
- Try adding:
 - Active verbs instead of being verbs:
 - Active verbs are: sizzle, steam, burst, turn, mix, melt, dissolve, burn, cool, cut, stir, pour, blow, sip, drink, guzzle, chew, chomp, tear, rip, sop, wrap, slurp . . . what other active food-related words could describe your meal?
 - Being verbs are: be, am, are, were
 - Specific nouns instead of category nouns:
 - Specific nouns are: halibut and cod, turmeric and cinnamon, acids and salts
 - Category nouns are: fish, spices, flavors

Polishing

Now that you have made your meal description more exciting throughout, read it through one more time. Ask yourself:

- Does it make sense? Imagine: if you found this postcard in your mailbox and had never seen it before, is there anything in the text that you would find confusing? Make changes as necessary for clarity.
- Any pieces of punctuation missing?
- All words spelled correctly? Use AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com and/or a dictionary to confirm the spelling of any unfamiliar words.

Teacher introduction

- According to classroom supplies and logistics, instruct students as to how they will illustrate, assemble, and mail their postcards.

Student Directions

Illustrating

- As directed by your teacher, choose, print, and cut out cuisine photos from Food and Recipes or other sections of AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com for your country.
- Create a photomontage for the back of your postcard. Questions you might ask yourself as you select photos include:
 - Does it help your reader's understanding more to see images of the food from your country, or the overall location? If location, would your reader's understanding benefit more from viewing pictures of the landscape, or the people, or both?
 - Would you like to show your reader more soothing images, or more startling images? Would you like your pictures to include soothing or startling colors? Should the mood of your montage match your text, or contrast with the mood of your text?

Assembling

- Affix the photos for your montage to the back of the postcard.
- Write out the polished postcard text on the postcard, or print typed text and glue.
- Write the postcard recipient's name and address.

Mailing

- Add the recipient's address.
- Add a postcard stamp.
- Send!