

POSTCARDS FROM AFAR # 1

(Time Minimum)

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.

Grades: 7–9

Time: One 90-minute class

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 write text for 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 using sensory language and figurative language.

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.

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
- Notebooks and pens/pencils
- Dictionaries

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.

Session One

Teacher introduction

- Introduce the word and idea gastrodiploamacy: 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.
- Choose one country to mentally visit for this exercise.

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.

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.

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?

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.

Student Directions

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?