

Food Miles

Companion Text: The Jakry Kids: Curiosity Shop, by Lin Jakary & illustrated by Ryan Olson

Subject Area & Grade Level: Social Studies, 4th Grade

Materials: World map, posterboard or butcher paper

Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Evaluate advantages and disadvantages of buying local food
- Calculate the food miles traveled of an average meal at their home

Introduction

Read the story once through without stopping. Then, return to page 8 and reread it. Ask students if they know where Darjeeling is. Point out the Darjeeling region of northern India on a world map, and have students guess how many miles away it is from your location (more than 7000 miles).

Procedure

Ask students if they have ever thought about the concept of food miles, that is, how far food travels before it gets to the people who eat it. Say, “Imagine if you could only eat food you could grow or raise yourself, or that you could buy from the people who live near you. What would that be like?” Break students up into small groups and have them make a list of the pros and cons of eating locally-grown food. When students have had a chance to make decent lists, bring the class back together and use their input to create a large pro/con list on the board as a class, and discuss it. Your list might look something like this:

Pros of eating local food	Cons of eating local food
Less expensive than imported food	Most processed foods are not available
Less fuel used to transport food	Fresh foods are only available in season
Builds community to buy from local farmers	Cooking fresh food takes longer
Tastes better because it’s fresher	Eating out-of-season requires preserving food
Fosters appreciation of local environment	

Discussion

Have students choose a meal they commonly eat at home, and list its ingredients, along with the city or country of origin of each, and the food miles each traveled. If students are unsure about the origin of any foods, such as produce, suggest that they ask their parents/guardians to take them to their usual grocery store for research. (All produce sold in the U.S. is now required to carry COOL, or country-of-origin labeling.) To extend learning further, have students bring a picture of the meal they studied, and make a poster or bulletin board of the pictures with each meal’s “food miles traveled” written on the poster under each picture. Let the poster guide a



class discussion about food miles: Which meal had the most? The least? Did any of the answers surprise you?

