

Teaching Students to Write About Food

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Materials

- Food for the whole class, brought in by teacher. Consider bringing something slightly unusual, something you think students haven't tried before (I brought two kinds of Japanese rice crackers—sesame and seaweed. The seaweed was a culinary adventure for many.)
- Paper, pens, pencils.

Background

This exercise is designed to strengthen students' observation and description skills. As students learn to articulate what their taste-buds are saying, they also learn to express their emotions on the page.

Activity

To start, the teacher will pass out her food and ask students to take a close look. Before tasting, they record their observations about its appearance, such as:

- Size
- Shape
- Weight
- Color(s)
- Texture(s)
- Smell

As the class brainstorms aloud, the teacher writes their ideas on the blackboard, guiding them towards more precise descriptive phrases. Once they have all written basic descriptions (“the rice cracker is shiny white like the moon,” and “the size of a silver dollar,” and “the green specks of seaweed glitter like gems”) the teacher will ask the students to write some bolder, more extended metaphors on their own. For example, “The rice cracker smells like a clean but empty room, with a salty sea breeze. . . . It smells like snow. Its surface is slippery-shiny as an ice-skating rink. . . .”

Next, the students taste the food very slowly, silently jotting down their impressions between bites. Questions for the free-write:

- What flavors hit your tongue?
- If there's more than one flavor, how do these flavors blend or interact?
- What metaphors would you use to describe the flavor?
- Can you compare the flavor to noise or action? (The saltiness crashes, swirls and dances across my palate...)
- What does the texture feel like? How does texture make the food more or less enjoyable?
- If the food makes a particular sound while you're eating it, describe the sound.

This exercise should prepare students to describe their own favorite foods at home. Encourage students to write their food essays with the food beside them, so they write more accurately about the nuances of flavor and texture. 