

LESSON PLAN: Focus—Food, Culture, Environment in Speech (SPC 1026)

Rationale: We read and hear so much about food in our news reports—much of it concerns diets and obesity. However, there are also concerns arising about food borne illnesses, the advantages of eating foods grown locally, the slow food movement, the planting of vegetable gardens (The White House lawn), making healthy and nutritious food available to elementary & secondary schools, eliminating junk foods, improving our students' food choices, improving soil quality, encouraging more organic food production & consumption, etc. Is there some way that these, and other concerns about food and its impact on the environment, could find its way “organically” into an introductory Speech Class which emphasizes the fundamentals of speech communication? My intention in this lesson is to focus initially more on the communication aspect of the human speech, and less on the conventional subjects of food, per se. However, my hope is that when students research and conduct their experiments, that they will see parallels between food, environment, and speech communication, and that this exploration may heighten their understanding of speech communication and its consequences—AND food—examining the environmental impact of both. Plus, I would like to incorporate into the lesson the influences of culture which tends to condition our behaviors (both how & what we eat, and how and what we communicate). We take in and assimilate foods beginning in the mouth, and continue through the process of digestion, and finally, eliminate into the environment. Whereas when we communicate vocally, we produce using breath and sound, expressing out of our mouth—with tongue, cheeks, & nose assisting as articulators, and then release our sounds into the environment. Can students learn to eat and communicate in healthy ways, such that our environment benefits? And, can students move beyond the restrictions of their cultural habits which may no longer be so useful, while at the same time honoring the resourcefulness of their traditional diets (of both eating and communicating) which may be helpful? A large order or meal, I know, but this lesson plan is a creative attempt to introduce a menu of possibilities.

Lesson Plan: Part I Conceptual--First provide some background for the students--1) Explore the human speech system—including the mouth, tongue, nose, cheeks, throat, the vocal folds in the larynx and so on; essentially the human voice system can be divided into three areas— the lungs, the vocal cords, and the articulators. 2) Show images of the human mouth, looking into the throat and vocal cords, and questioning why it is referred to in anatomy sometimes as the “secondary reproduction system” or “higher reproductive system.” 3) Examine the proposition that vocal sounds are, essentially, amplified breath. 4) Explore the notion that the body can be seen as the “soil” of communication, and that breath can be compared to sunlight and air which grows and animates human voice production, similar to the way a plant grows from seed, and distributes its fruit/vegetable, spreading its seed. The emotions in speech communication could be compared to the water element in nourishing seed growth. So, we would have the four elements represented: air, water, soil, and sun.

Part II Experiential--After sharing some of the relevant background data above, then invite students to explore “the yum factor” in sound-making. Conduct a series of

experiments in which students explore the vibratory aspects of sound-making and communication—e.g. 1) Humming—see whether students can practice humming to themselves. 2) Observe how, when speaking in dyads or in small groups, they can attend to the “hum factor” as they share in conversation—how they can share/resonate/vibrate as they communicate with words to each other. 3) Notice when they practice their listening skills, and when they practice their nonverbal communication skills, they can attend to ways in which the body and voice affect the immediate environment. 4) Consider how the words they choose become nourishing (helpful) or junk-like (superficial) similar to the ingestion of different kinds of food; encourage the students to engage in relationship building and conflict communication by being selective with the words they choose to express their thoughts and feelings. Ask students to keep a journal and record their observations for a week.

Part III Behavioral—Next, extend the Journal work, and explore more practical connections to diet—being careful about what foods students put in their mouths, how they chew, how they digest, and the energies / moods that result. Practice Food Choice Awareness and combine with Verbal/Nonverbal Communication Awareness for one to two more weeks. Tie this into responsible behaviors, self-discipline, time management and other skills that help students to make changes in their lives. Ask students to record their observations, goals, experiments, and results. Encourage comparisons between food eating and environmental impact with verbal/non-verbal communication and environmental impact. Hold discussions during class meetings while these experiments are being conducted in order to fine tune the project and help the students to articulate (fertilize) the lesson, both in sharing and spreading their ideas.

Part IV Readings & Preparing Presentations—Starting with Michael Pollan’s article “Farmer in Chief”, students will begin now to study contemporary articles and issues surrounding food and its impact on the environment. Other resources I would recommend include recent articles—“Selling Obesity at School,” “CDC Study Finds Some Food-Borne Illnesses Rising in U.S.,” “Is a Food Revolution Now in Season?,” “‘Yum factor’ Hijacks Overeaters’ Brains,” “Getting Prepared for the Great Collapse,” “Urban Gardener Plants Ideas” (Will Allen’s work), “Can We Afford to Eat Ethically,” “Sweet Surrender”—taxing soda to make people stop drinking it, “Local Food Movement Debate,” “Don’t Have a Cow,” “A Moral Question on the Dinner Table,” and “The Aura of Arugulance.”

Once students find one or two articles that they would like to research, they would then bring these back to their classes in the form of a short presentation—a) a summary of the article; b) sharing comments on how they personally were affected by the information researched and how they applied this to their lives and their understanding; c) how this material agrees with or contradicts understandings about their cultural roots / traditions; and d) facilitating / leading a discussion and engaging other students as their audience—asking questions of the class and moderating a short discussion.

Assessment: Ultimately, since the scope of this lesson plan is very broad, the measures that I use to assess the students’ work should be varied and broad as well.

In Part I, the conceptual part of the unit, I would ask that the students pay attention and take notes. I probably would have already presented to them The Universe Story, so that they would have some idea of the evolutionary history of Time and Space that has led to

the human's speech system based on contemporary scientific evidence (for example, our speech making system can be traced to "talking fish" nearly 510 millions years ago). I would include T/F or Multiple Choice questions reflecting this background material on their next exam.

In Part II, experiential, I would use this phase of the experiment as part of their bi-weekly journal writing, on Communication, Vibration (Hum), and Nourishment. I would evaluate their journal for college level writing, for the descriptions of their experiments, their goals, their insights / discoveries, and their application to terms used in our Speech Communication textbook.

In Part III, behavioral, I would also primarily assess through their journal writing as well as their discussions / sharing in class. Mostly, I am interested in awareness (consciousness & conscientiousness)—and their ability to make changes in their lives that move them beyond habits that they find negative or not so helpful. While the focus is on diet & food choices, I am also interested in how they use communication skills to establish new habits that they find to be healthier—both with eating and communicating. As in part II above, I would evaluate their journal writings for details, originality, expression, insights, and applications to the fundamentals of our communication course. For Part IV, Readings and Presentations, I would assess in the same way that I evaluate students when they prepare their informative speeches—preparation outlines, presentation aids, speech organization, delivery, and overall effect—with additional evaluations for their way of leading the class in discussion. I would not judge their actual choices in their food and communication experiments, but would certainly reinforce whatever they've learned as a class about Food, Communication, and how both of these (plus culture) impact their environments.

In terms of Learning Outcomes, this unit would emphasize communication—both oral and written, history & culture, natural systems, and ethics.