



A Blank Plate: Investigating the Healthy Eating Plate and Personal Diets

SUBJECT: nutrition, health

GRADE LEVEL: 3-5

CLASS TIME: 40 minutes

OVERVIEW

This activity builds upon the “Food Groups Galore” lesson. It is strongly suggested that teachers use the two consecutive lessons within a few days of each other to facilitate ample understanding of the material. This lesson enables students to take their knowledge of food groups and apply it to their own eating habits. Students will use a food journal to record their food and drink consumption. Using the Healthy Eating Plate Image as an aid to investigate what a healthy and balanced diet entails, students will analyze their own diet.

MATERIALS

- Food Journal Worksheet
- Healthy Eating Plate Image
- Small, round or star-shaped stickers (30 per student)
- Paper plates
- Pens

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Review the healthy distribution of food groups needed for a balanced diet.
- Explain which foods provide specific nutritional benefits.
- Investigate personal eating habits and the intake of important nutrients.



STANDARDS

National Science Education Standards (NSES):

Life Science Content Standard C, Grades K-4

- Life cycles of organisms
- Organisms and environments

Earth and Space Science Content Standard D, Grades K-4

- Properties of earth materials

Science in Personal and Social Perspectives Content Standard F, Grades K-4

- Personal health
- Changes in environments

A Blank Plate

Background

Talking about nutrition on an abstract level can be helpful for basic understanding, but analyzing personal eating habits has the potential to go far beyond that. Children must learn to consciously and accurately assess their daily eating habits in order to implement real change in their diets and overall health. This lesson aims to facilitate the start of that process by encouraging children to question the nutritional benefits of their food intake. Can a piece of pizza count as one vegetable serving? Should three glasses of milk qualify as three dairy servings? In which food group should I categorize a turkey sandwich? This exercise gets students thinking about questions related nutrition, serving size and how to achieve a more balanced diet.

Introduction

1. Begin by reviewing some highlights from the “Food Groups Galore” lesson. For example:
 - Ask: Can you name the six food groups? *Whole grains, vegetables, fruits, healthy proteins, healthy oils, and dairy.*
 - Instruct everyone to find a partner and share one new fact about healthy eating they have learned.
2. Bring out the Healthy Eating Plate Image to refresh everyone’s memory about the recommended balance of food groups. Explain to the students that this distribution applies to our intake of both food and drinks over an entire day. It would be really hard to cover all these groups at every single meal. The important thing is to make sure the day’s consumption is balanced.
3. Start a discussion about serving size. Explain that vegetables and fruits usually have a cup as a serving size, and that is about the size of a baseball. Whole grains usually advertise a serving size of about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup and that is approximately the size of a small light bulb. Nuts, meat, and cheese usually have $\frac{1}{4}$ cup serving size and that is only the size of a golf ball. Continue with this type of visual explanation. Bring in the objects to show the students and they will likely grasp the idea of serving size much more easily.
4. Introduce the Food Journal Worksheet to the students. Show them an example of a completed sheet you have prepared that details your day’s food and drink intake.
5. Ask students to recall their most recent three meals (and snacks) and write down everything they have eaten in the past day on the Food Journal Worksheet. Make sure they are specific! Explain that they should individually record all the ingredients in each food item. For example, make sure to write whole wheat bread, mayonnaise, tomato, lettuce, and turkey instead of just turkey sandwich.
6. Allow about 10-15 minutes for them to be thorough.

A Blank Plate

Activity

1. Set the stage for the main activity by explaining that now they can put all their food group and portion size knowledge to the test by analyzing their own day's diet.
2. Distribute 30 stickers, a paper plate, and a pen to each student. Make sure they still have their Food Journal Worksheet nearby and the Healthy Eating Plate Image in sight.
3. Explain to the students that they should draw the divisions just like the Healthy Eating Plate Image onto their own plate. Make sure to leave space along the edges of the plate for the healthy oils and dairy sections. In addition, have them draw a new circle on the periphery for all the foods and drinks on their lists that do not fit into one of the six nutritious categories.
4. Students place a sticker for every item on their Food Journal Worksheet into the proper food group section on their plate. Some students might have a lot of questions, so feel free to pair up students to work together. This should take about 15 minutes.
5. *Optional:* If students appear motivated, consider serving size more thoroughly by placing more stickers for larger serving sizes onto the plate. For example, a full salad counts as four vegetable servings (stickers), while a piece of lettuce on a sandwich only counts as one.
6. Wrap up the exercise by examining the stickers on the plates together. Consider a few questions:
 - Given how big each section is, does it look like there is the right amount of stickers in each section?
 - Do we need more or less of any food groups?
 - Are there some foods we need to work harder to completely eliminate from our diet?
7. Leave them with a helpful hint about maintaining a healthy diet: Make sure you have as many different colors on your plate as possible to roughly calculate a balanced meal!

Going Further

1. Challenge students to try a new fruit or vegetable this week and eliminate one of the unhealthy food items on their list.
2. If you have not yet, suggest playing this game about picking healthy eating choices at: <http://www.whatsonyourplateproject.org/games/smartmouth>. Recommend students watch the video, "What's on Your Plate?" to learn about how two kids from New York City explored the nutritional content in their school lunch and much more.

Credit

Becky Wasserman, Author, Middlebury College

Shelburne Farms, Food Journal Worksheet Resource

Kate Hester, Editor, Center for Health and the Global Environment

Food Journal Worksheet

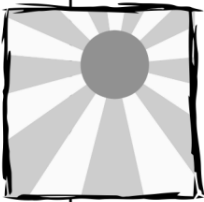


Breakfast



Snacks

Lunch



Dinner



My Food Journal