



An article from  
**Catholic Rural Life Magazine**  
Fall 2003 volume 46 number 1

**A Lesson Plan: Sugar Coating the Facts**

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**A LESSON PLAN FOR TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2002**

*Based on the article "An 'Eat More' Message for A Fattened America"<sup>1</sup>*

**Examining the Food Industry's Influence on Nutritional Habits and Analyzing Nutrition Charts**

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**Grades:** 6-8, 9-12

**Subjects:** Health, Media Studies, Science  
Interdisciplinary Connections

**Overview of Lesson Plan:** In this lesson, students explore the food industry's influence on American children's nutritional habits and analyze the nutrition charts found on food packaging. They then synthesize their knowledge by designing "warning labels" to be placed on products that are targeted to children to better represent the contents' nutritional value.

Review the Academic Content Standards related to this lesson.

**Suggested Time Allowance:** 45 minutes- 1 hour

**Objectives:**

Students will:

1. Examine how various foods are marketed to children through their packaging; speculate about these products' nutritional content.
2. Examine the food industry's influences on children's nutritional habits by reading and discussing "An 'Eat More' Message For a Fattened America."
3. Analyze the nutrition charts and related nutritional information located on food packaging of products often marketed to children.
4. Synthesize their understanding of their research by creating "Surgeon General's warning labels" for their products and by writing defenses of their claims.

**Resources / Materials:**

-food items that are often marketed to children (one package per small group of three or four, including full packaging and contents; suggested food items include sugary cereal, chips, cookies or snack cakes, fruit snacks, candy, soda and juices)

-pens/pencils

-paper

-classroom blackboard

-copies of "An 'Eat More' Message For a Fattened America" (one per student)

-resources for researching nutrition (science and health textbooks, encyclopedias, books on nutrition, computers with Internet access)

-one or two cup measuring cups (one per student)

**Activities / Procedures:**

1. **WARM-UP/DO NOW:** Prior to class, arrange desks in groups of three or four, and at the center of each grouping, place the packaging for a food item that is often marketed to children (such as sugary cereal,

- chips, cookies or snack cakes, fruit snacks, candy, soda and juices). Upon entering class, each group responds to the following prompt regarding the packaging (written on the board prior to class; one student in each group should write down the group's responses): "How does this packaging appeal to children? Have you ever seen an advertisement for this product? If so, describe it. How was it appealing to children? How do its packaging and advertising address the idea of its nutritional content?" After students have had the opportunity to share in small groups, each group should report back to the class. What are the common themes that come up in their responses? Do students have different expectations of the nutritional contents of these products often marketed to children? On what are they basing their expectations?
2. As a class, read and discuss "An 'Eat More' Message For a Fattened America," focusing on the following questions:
    - a. Why did Dr. Nestle purchase the McDonald's Deluxe Mealtime Set?
    - b. According to Dr. Nestle, why does the food industry market to children?
    - c. According to Dr. Nestle's new book "Food Politics," what percentage of adolescents and children are overweight?
    - d. If hamburgers and milkshakes have nutrients, then why can they still be considered "unhealthy"?
    - e. How many extra calories are produced daily by the food industry for each person in the United States?
    - f. How does the food industry use indirect marketing strategies to promote its products?
    - g. How have American portion sizes changed over the last few decades?
    - h. Why does the food industry especially promote processed foods?
    - i. What is Dr. Nestle's advice for those people worried about their vitamin intake?
    - j. Why has Dr. Nestle criticized many common breakfast cereals?
    - k. How did Dr. Nestle use euphemisms to appease the food industry when she published her report on nutrition and health?
    - l. What health risks are correlated with obesity?
  3. Explain to students that they will be investigating the nutritional content of various food products often marketed to children for the Surgeon General's office. Each group will focus on the product that they discussed in the initial class activity. By analyzing the nutrition information chart on the packaging and by using all available resources, each group answers the following questions and performs the following tasks (written on the board for easier student access; distribute a measuring cup to each group):
    - What is the suggested serving size for this product? Pour that serving size into a measuring cup so you can visualize the portion. Does this serving size look like the amount of this product you would eat for a meal or snack? If not, why do you think the company chose this serving size?
    - How many calories does this serving size contain? What is a calorie? What is the recommended number of calories a child should consume throughout a day? What percentage of those calories would be consumed by eating one serving of this product?
    - How many sugars does this serving size contain? What is a sugar?
    - How many carbohydrates does this serving size contain? What is a carbohydrate?
    - Explain the relationship between sugars and carbohydrates.
    - What percentage of a child's calories should come from carbohydrates?
    - Choose three of the nutrients that represent the highest percentages of the recommended daily values (may be called DV on your packaging) among the list of nutrients on your product's nutrition chart. Why are these nutrients important for a child? What other foods contain these nutrients?
    - What aspects of this product are healthful?
    - What aspects of this product are not healthful?
  4. WRAP-UP/HOMEWORK: Each student designs a "Surgeon General's warning label" for the food product that his or her group examined in class, disclosing the health risks for children who may consume large quantities of this cereal. Each student also writes a defense of the claims he or she included in the warning by referring to specific statistics found on the package's nutrition chart and other information gathered in research. In a future class, each group should create a display (poster or otherwise) that includes their product's packaging, their warning labels and their written defenses.

**Further Questions for Discussion:**

- Why does marketing to children sometimes prove to be an economically successful strategy?
- How are the nutritional needs of children and adults determined?
- Why are nutrition charts on food packages important?
- How is obesity related to other health risks?
- Whose job is it to investigate the nutritional content of processed foods?
- How can parents help their children to eat healthfully?
- How have fast food restaurants changed the eating habits of children and teenagers?

**Evaluation / Assessment:**

Students will be evaluated based on their initial group discussions, thoughtful participation in class discussions, group analysis and research of the nutritional value of various food products marketed to children, and final Surgeon General warning labels and written defense pieces.

**Vocabulary:**

cellophane, sarcasm, appalled, contends, meticulously, stratosphere, logos, obesity, nutrients, susceptible, notoriously, exploits, masquerading, emphatically, saturated, euphemisms, coronary, unconscionable

**Extension Activities:**

1. The “diabetic exchange” of a food serving is often included at the end of many nutrition charts found on food products. What is a diabetic exchange, and how does this information help diabetics to design their daily meals and portions? Research type 1 and type 2 diabetes by visiting the American Diabetes Association’s Web site (<http://www.diabetes.org>). Based on the dietary information you find, create a daily meal chart (including portion sizes) for a diabetic.
2. According to Dr. Nestle, obesity correlates with coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes. Choose one of these health risks, and research the specific relationship between obesity and this risk. Create a “How It Works” poster to illustrate the relationship.<sup>1</sup>  
[www.nytimes.com/2002/02/19/health/nutrition.com](http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/19/health/nutrition.com)
3. Design and create an instructional poster that helps people better understand the information that is include on a food product’s nutrition chart label. You might include an enlarged image of a chart and explain each of the components. Include definitions of terms and abbreviations. After you finish the poster, display it in a school hallway or in the school’s cafeteria.
4. Maintain a “food diary” of the foods and approximate portion sizes that you consume over a school week (Monday through Friday). Also approximate the amount of money that each of those food servings cost. At the end of the five-day period, calculate the nutritional content of each serving, and compare this information to the amount of money spent on that serving. Do you notice certain trends? For example, do you spend more money on processed foods? Do the meals that are high in nutritional value also provide economic value, or are they more expensive?
5. Where can you find examples of direct and indirect marketing campaigns that advertise food products to children? Make a collage of these examples, and display it in your classroom.

**Interdisciplinary Connections:**

**Fine Arts-** Design an advertising campaign poster for a healthy breakfast alternative to attract students away from sugar-laden breakfast cereals. Study advertising campaigns aimed at children, and infuse your poster with some of those same qualities.

**Journalism-** Start a nutrition question and answer column in your school newspaper. Classmates can submit diet and nutrition questions to the newspaper, and you can research the answers. Consult the school’s nutritionist before printing your responses.

**Language Arts-** Read Eric Schlosser’s 2001 book “Fast Food Nation,” an investigation into the fast food industry’s practices and its vast influence over the diets of Americans. Write a paper that compares and contrasts Schlosser’s investigation to that of Upton Sinclair’s 1906 investigation of the American meatpacking industry that served as the basis for his novel “The Jungle.”

**Mathematics-** Survey students in your school with regards to their cereal preferences. After you have tallied the results of your survey, graph the results. Choose a few of the cereal brands that are the most popular among your school’s population, and research the nutritional contents of these cereals. Create another graph that students can use to compare the nutritional contents of the top brands in your school. You might also create a poster-size version of this graph to display in the school’s cafeteria.

**Other Information on the Web**

You Are What You Eat: A Guide to Good Nutrition (<http://library.advanced.org/11163/gather/cgi-bin/wookie.cgi/>) is an interactive guide to nutrition which includes nutritional information customized to your needs and a database of foods to help you plan a healthy lifestyle.

The Food Pyramid Guide (<http://www.ganesa.com/food/index.html>) includes explanations of what is included in the different categories on the food pyramid.

Diet Analysis (<http://dawp.anet.com>) allows you to enter the foods eaten for one day and then reports a complete nutritional review of your diet based on the Recommended Daily Allowances for your demographic.

Palate Works (<http://www.palateworks.com/nutlinks.htm>) provides useful Web links for nutrition information, food labeling issues and more.

**Academic Content Standards:**

**This lesson plan may be used to address the academic standards listed below. These standards are drawn from Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education: 2nd Edition and have been provided courtesy of the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning in Aurora, Colorado.**

**In addition, this lesson plan may be used to address the academic standards of a specific state. Links are provided where available from each McREL standard to the Achieve website containing state standards for over 40 states. The state standards are from Achieve's National Standards Clearinghouse and have been provided courtesy of Achieve, Inc. in Cambridge Massachusetts and Washington, DC.**

Grades 6-8

Health Standard 6- Understands essential concepts about nutrition and diet. Benchmarks: Understands how eating properly can help to reduce health risks; Knows appropriate methods to maintain, lose, or gain weight according to individual needs and scientific research

Health Standard 7- Knows how to maintain and promote personal health. Benchmarks: Knows personal health strengths and risks (e.g., results of a personal health assessment); Knows how positive health practices and appropriate health care can help to reduce health risks; Knows strategies and skills that are used to attain personal health goals

Science Standard 16- Understands the scientific enterprise. Benchmark: Knows ways in which science and society influence one another

### **Connect to State Standard**

Grades 9-12

Health Standard 6- Understands essential concepts about nutrition and diet. Benchmarks: Understands how nutrient and energy needs vary in relation to gender, activity level, and stage of life cycle; Understands the reliability and validity of various sources of food and nutrition information; Understands the role of food additives and their relationship to health

Health Standard 7- Knows how to maintain and promote personal health. Benchmarks: Knows how personal behaviors relate to health and well-being and how these behaviors can be modified if necessary to promote achievement of health goals throughout life; Understands the short- and long-term consequences of safe, risky, and harmful behaviors

Science Standard 16- Understands the scientific enterprise. Benchmark: Knows that science and technology are essential social enterprises, but alone they can only indicate what can happen, not what should happen

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1 Mary Duenwald, "An 'Eat More Message For A Fattened America'",  
New York Times Co, NY.2002, [http://biosci.usc.edu/courses/2002-fall/  
documents/bisc438-supp\\_eatmore.pdf](http://biosci.usc.edu/courses/2002-fall/documents/bisc438-supp_eatmore.pdf).



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