

### Lesson Plan for Small Group Discussion of *Fast Food Nation*

#### **Introduction:**

Introduce yourself and pass out pencil and paper to everyone. Tell students to write down their name, college major, and then describe the last fast food meal they ate—also tell when and where.

To get in the mood, begin by showing a TV commercial for a fast food place. A whimsical one that makes fun of the McDonald's-Burger King experience is the current CiCi's ad: in black and white, a lackluster employee takes the customer's order; the burger dives onto the floor from the delivery chute, and the employee picks it up, repackages it (badly) and hands it to the customer who has missed the burger-on-the-floor scenario while digging in her purse for change. Then a splash of color as the scene switches to wonderful CiCi's: fresh food, friendly and concerned employees, nice atmosphere. (I have both CiCi's commercials on tape—the second one is very similar to this one. I will be glad to make copies for anyone.)

Ask students to answer the following question on paper: Pick out something from this commercial that illustrates a point either in Mr. Schlosser's talk or his book *Fast Food Nation*.

After five minutes, ask for responses.

#### **Ice Breaker:**

Then do an ice breaker—On a sheet of a paper type out four or five fast food restaurants and duplicate each restaurant about five times (McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Taco Bell, Domino's or Pizza Hut). Cut out these slips, place in a hat and let each student pick out one slip. Those with the same restaurant will gather into a group and introduce themselves. Before discussing anything, they will write down (using the same piece of paper) the answers to questions that you put on the overhead or the Elmo, if you are in a multimedia room:

1. Write down a one-sentence description of Eric Schlosser.
2. Write down the adjective that best describes your reaction to Schlosser's talk: interested, angry, kind of bored, satisfied, intellectually stimulated, hungry, or choose your own adjective. After you write down the adjective, explain why you picked it.
3. Has your opinion of your group's restaurant changed at all after reading *Fast Food Nation*? Explain.

4. When you do fast food, what do you usually eat? Tell why.
5. Is there a right or a wrong way to do fast food? Explain.

Tell the students to pass their answers to the left. The person on the left chooses one answer to comment on in the margin. Keep passing and commenting--no two can comment on the same answer--until the paper comes back to its author.

Ask each group to share with the class.

### **Small Group Discussion**

For small group discussion of the book, on a slip of paper type out a provocative quote from each chapter; then let each small group (4 or 5 groups) pick a slip and discuss among themselves, reporting back to the large group after 10-15 minutes.

After all groups report back to class and discussion ensues, have each group choose a new quote, if time permits.

#### Chapter 1: "The Founding Fathers"

--"The automobile industry, however, was not content simply to reap the benefits of government-subsidized road construction. It was determined to wipe out railway competition by whatever means necessary" (16).

#### Chapter 2: "Your Trusted Friends"

--In a pitch to corporate sponsors: "Now you can enter the classroom through custom-made learning materials created with your specific marketing objectives in mind . . . . Through these materials, your product or point of view becomes the focus of discussions in the classroom, . . . the centerpiece in a dynamic process that generates long-term awareness and lasting attitudinal change" (56).

#### Chapter 3: "Behind the Counter"

--At the thirty-eighth Annual Multi-Unit Foodserver Operators Conference, the thought of unions "chilled" Norman Brinker, founder of Bennigan's and Steak and Ale. "He asked everyone in the audience to give more money to the industry's key lobbying groups . . . . As the crowd laughed and roared and applauded Brinker's call to arms against unions and governments, the talk about teamwork fell into the proper perspective" (88).

Chapter 4: “Success”

Actor Christopher Reeve spoke at an event called “Success” in Denver for budding entrepreneurs: “I had to leave the physical world,” Reeve says. . . . “By the time I was twenty-four, I was making millions,” he continues. “I was pretty pleased with myself. . . . Since my accident, I’ve been realizing that success means something quite different.” Members of the audience start to weep. “I see people who achieve these conventional goals,” he says in a mild, even tone. “*None of it matters.*”

His words cut through all the snake oil of the last few hours, calmly and with great precision” (107).

Chapter 5: “Why the Fries Taste Good”

--“Aroma and memory are somehow inextricably linked . . . . The human craving for flavor has been a largely unacknowledged and unexamined force in history” (123).

Chapter 6: “On the Range”

--“The four major meatpacking companies now control about 20 percent of the live cattle in the United States through ‘captive supplies’” (138). (See also 142.)

Chapter 7: “Cogs in the Great Machine”

--“In 1990, IBP (Iowa Beef Packers) opened a slaughterhouse in Lexington (Nebraska). A year later, the town, with a population of roughly seven thousand, had the highest crime rate in the state of Nebraska. . . . The smell that permeates Lexington is even worse than the smell of Greeley. ‘We have three odors,’ a Lexington resident told a reporter: ‘burning hair and blood, that greasy smell, and the odor of rotten eggs’” (165).

Chapter 8: “The Most Dangerous Job”

--For eight and a half hours, a worker called a ‘sticker’ does nothing but stand in a river of blood, being drenched in blood, slitting the neck of a steer every ten seconds or so, severing its carotid artery. He uses a long knife and must hit exactly the right spot to kill the animal humanely . . . . We walk up a slippery platform, where the production line begins. A man turns and smiles at me. He wears safety goggles and a hardhat. His face is splattered with gray matter and blood. He is the ‘knocker,’ the man who welcomes cattle to the building” (171).

Chapter 9: “What’s In the Meat”

--“The medical literature on the causes of food poisoning is full of euphemisms and dry scientific terms . . . . Behind them lies a simple explanation for why eating a hamburger can now make you seriously ill: There is shit in the meat” (197).

Chapter 9: “What’s In the Meat”

--“About 75 percent of the cattle in the United States were routinely fed livestock wastes—the rendered remains of dead sheep and dead cattle—until August of 1997. They were also fed millions of dead cats and dead dogs every year, purchased from animal shelters” (202).

Chapter 9: “What’s In the Meat”

--“You’d be better off eating a carrot stick that fell in your toilet than one that fell in your sink” (221).

Chapter 10: “Global Realization”

--“If we eat McDonald’s hamburgers and potatoes for a thousand years,” Fujita once promised his countrymen, “we will become taller, our skin will become white, and our hair will be blonde” (231).

Epilogue: “Have It Your Way”

--“Nobody in the United States is forced to buy fast food. The first step toward meaningful change is by far the easiest: stop buying it. The executives who run the fast food industry are not bad men . . . They will sell whatever sells at a profit” (269).

Afterword: “The meaning of Mad Cow”

--“‘McGarbage,’ wrote a correspondent for the *National Review Online*. ‘Schlosser wears many hats, a few of which are conical and contain the word dunce.’ I was described, moreover, as a ‘health fascist,’ an ‘economics ignoramus,’ a ‘banjo-strumming performer at Farm Aid,’ and a ‘hectoring taskmaster of the nanny state.’ The book was reviewed in the *Wall Street Journal* not by one of the paper’s fine investigative journalists, but by a right-wing member of its editorial staff. Among other things, she accused me of producing a ‘hodgepodge of impressions, statistics, anecdotes, and prejudices’ (276).

Afterword: “The meaning of Mad Cow”

--“There is one criticism of *Fast Food Nation* that needs to be addressed. A number of people have said that I was too hard on the Republican Party, that an anti-Republican bias seems to pervade the book” (277).