

Fast Food Nation Discussion Lesson Plan:

Introduction: Pass out pencil and paper. Ask the students to write down their name, college major. Then answer the following questions:

1. How often do you eat at a fast food restaurant per week.
2. What is your favorite fast food restaurant?

Ice Breaker: Begin with a word association test. Say (or project onto the overhead screen) each word or phrase and wait while the students react with a short written response, either a word or phrase. Tell the students to leave a blank space after each response. There are no right or wrong responses. We will fill in these blank spaces later. The list of words includes:

Ray Kroc; fried food; manager; Jack-in-the-Box; Lifetime Learning Systems; unions; Greeley, Colorado; success; beef rancher; IBP corporation at Lexington, Nebraska; USDA; Taco Bell; Ronald McDonald; franchise owner of Subway; government beef inspector; raw hamburger meat; the food-buying parent; super size; Congress. After working on your list, let the students add to the list and continue until 25.

Now give students a chance to go back over these one-word responses and use material from the book or Schlosser's talk to back up their responses. Allow the students about a minute per response. They may use their books, but that is not necessary.

Choose several students to read their responses, which will probably be mostly negative. Then say, "Let's have a public discussion to see whose behavior needs to change. But first let's discuss some issues":

1. Should we even have an investigation? Why not just send the police down to close out all the fast food outlets? (Remind students of the rampage in India—p. 279).
2. If we are going to hold people guilty of law-breaking, then we have to be very clear about what the law really demands. Ideally a law should be written before bad behavior occurs. Would anyone start a business if mob rule prevailed?
3. Are there any faceless defendants? Assigning guilt will always hurt someone, so let's be careful. Also be aware of unintended consequences. Breaking up a big agricultural corporation does not in and of itself mean that the smaller farmer will be a better corporate citizen.
4. Is it easy to determine who is at fault? You've all seen the commercial on TV. The ad features footage supposedly shot from a surveillance camera. The salesperson is dealing with a woman customer who is fumbling for something in her purse. Meanwhile a hamburger comes down the chute and breaks apart as it lands on the floor. The salesperson turns around, scoops up the burger, wraps it and gives it to the customer who is unaware of the history of her meal. Put the students in the role of manager and ask them how they would handle the situation. Introduce the concept of a manager as one who solves problems by reprimanding where necessary, devising procedures, or calling for the redesign of the chute. The students might decide that the guilty person is the employee at the other end of the chute. Since we are all managers, and since managers make decisions and should be held accountable for these decisions, let's take our list of "beefs" and put the proper manager on trial.

The Presentation: Go through the list, decide what “crimes” the manager is guilty of. Some charges may be summarily dismissed. Who (local fast food manager, fast food CEO, school board that invites Coca Cola and McDonald’s into the school) is responsible? What changes in behavior does the group expect. How should these changes be brought about? How would Eric Schlosser respond if he were here?

Thomas Jefferson said that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. What does he mean by that?

Now you are ready to answer the last set of questions:

1. Has the book changed the way you look at fast food? Will your habits change?
2. Did Eric Schlosser leave anything important out?
3. Was the book and talk a success? Boring? Hard to follow? Choose your own adjective.

If you have time left over, summarize some of the book reviews that you have previously downloaded from the Internet. Ask the students if they agree with the reviews.

Closing Remarks: Safety of our food supply is important, and I thank Eric Schlosser for writing the book. Books are one of the tools of social change. But speaking for LSU, I don’t want you to leave this here thinking that because LSU wants every freshman to read this book, that bringing about the changes advocated in this book are all of what your experience at LSU should be about. If enough people get involved and are involved in the right way, the fast food industry will change. In ten years or so another problem will develop somewhere else, and another Eric Schlosser will write about it. That’s the way of the world. However an education is more than just chasing after the latest social issue.

Your experience at LSU should introduce you to the great ideas in our civilization. You will be asked to explore the thoughts that have revolutionized our concepts of man and his place in the universe. Through the study of sciences, the humanities and arts you will come to see the world profoundly differently. You will then become part of something bigger than yourself. And then perhaps you will be able to contribute to this history and in so doing bring about a change in the world beyond just teaching people to be a better consumer.

Good bye, Good luck in your LSU experience and be happy.

And oh yes,

GO, TIGERS!

End of remarks.

Ask the students to write any final comments on their papers, suggestions for improvements etc. then let them hand their papers in.