**SECONDARY SCHOOL II: B2/C1 or 16-18**

**TABLE TALKS**

“Dried dates change shape when they are soaked in milk, and carrots rich and strange turn magically sweet when deftly covered with green nutty shavings and smatterings of silver.” (Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days*)

Food is not only our way of inhabiting the world – where we eat it, who we eat it with, how we prepare it, and who we prepare it for – but it is also a mode of connecting with and relating to other people, of sharing memories and stories that permeate cultures all over the world.

*Table talks* is a form of classroom interaction where students gather around four tables and engage in lip-smacking and mouth-watering discussions about food consumption and production. The tables are thematically organized. The students take rounds in recounting and reflecting upon their own experiences gyrating around the kitchen as a space to be explored, inhabited and appropriated.

By telling stories and sharing memories about food consumption and production at home and around the world, the students become aware of the multifaceted realities that food can bring forth as a social, political and cultural constituent of identity formation. In linguistic terms they will increase their vocabulary on this topic and use it by telling stories, discussing literary and non-literary texts and sharing memories.

The four sections outlined below provide ideas for table talks associated with food consumption and food production from various places around the world. Prior to orchestrating this form of classroom interaction – mainly communicative and dialogical in principle – the students bring food items to class and appealingly arrange them on the tables. It is a kind of a potluck that makes participants come together, precisely because there is food to be gorged on and food to be discussed.

**Table I: Food in Short Stories**

Ben Okri (Nigeria): “The Mysterious Anxiety of Them and Us”

Pippa Goldschmidt (Scotland): “Potato Pancakes”

**Table II: Food Poetry**Lewis Carroll (England): “The Walrus and the Carpenter”

William Carlos Williams (America): “For Viola: De Gustibus”

**Table III: Food in Novel**

Sara Suleri (Pakistan): *Meatless Days,* Chapter “Meatless Days”

**Table IV:** **Food Production and Food Chain**

Jonathan Foers (America): *Eating Animals*, Chapter “Story Telling”

**PROCEDURES**

1. The texts should be prepared beforehand. The short stories and poems are rather short (roughly 3-5 minutes of reading time) and can be found in *Cooked Up: Food Fiction from Around the World* or online (Okri’s text is also available as an audiophile), chapter 2 of Suleri’s autobiography and chapter 1 of Foer’s non-fiction book have to be ordered and copied out (20 minutes of reading time).
2. For each table there are two tasks based upon the material at hand. The first task can be done without much preparation as it combines text-based moments and autobiographical memories. The second one requires additional research (internet).
3. Rearrange the desks so that four to six students (depending on the size of the class) can gather around them and be seated comfortably.
4. Place food items on the tables (students bring items to class based upon topics at hand) and arrange them pleasingly (table cloth, napkins, cutlery, candles etc.).
5. Ask students to select and approach one desk and choose one item as a warm-up for a story revolving around this item (Prompt: *Tell a story in the past and make sure you are part of it!*).
6. Divide the class into four groups. Each group chooses one table.
7. For each task the students have about 20 minutes at their disposal. The students take turns in sharing their experiences and memories and ask questions as they feel fit.

**MATERIAL**

* Food items
* Decorating material for table talks
* Task sheets Table I-IV
* Appendix

**READING LIST**

Carroll, L. (1872). The Walrus and the Carpenter. *Lewis Carroll*. <http://www.jabberwocky.com/carroll/walrus.html>

Foer, J. S. (2009). *Eating Animals*, Chapter Storytelling (pp. 1-19). New York: Hachette Book Group.

Goldschmidt, P. (2015). Potato Pancakes. In E. Chiew (Hrsg.), *Cooked UP: Food Fiction From Around the World* (pp. 66-67). Oxford: New Internationalist.

Okri, B. (2015). The Mysterious Anxiety of Them and Us. In E. Chiew (Hrsg.), *Cooked UP: Food Fiction From Around the World* (pp. 9-10). Oxford: New Internationalist.

Okri, B. (Writer and Director) (2010). The Mysterious Anxiety of Them and Us. <http://www.pen.org/book/ben-okri-reads-the-mysterious-anxiety-of-them-and-us>

Suleri, S. (1989). *Meatless Days,* Chapter Meatless Days (pp.18-32). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

William, C.W. (1912). For Viola: De Gustibus. *Poem Hunter*. <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/for-viola-de-gustibus>

**B2-C1\_MATERIAL FOR THE TEACHER**

**Table I:** **Food in short stories**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Ben Okri: | “The Mysterious Anxiety of Them and Us” |
|  | The narrator recounts a seemingly uneventful episode associated with a lavish feast during which some of the attendees start eating while the others are waiting for no apparent reason. The ones who eat feel guilty. |
|  | **Task I:** Describe a feast which you have attended. What was the setting like, what kind of food was served, how did people get ready for it, what was the significance of this get-together for you and your family or friends? Recount what happened on this very day, yet this time from the perspective of a small child who happened to be there. |
|  | **Task II:** If you were to shoot a movie about this short story, what elements would you include and how would you interpret the ending when the narrator and his wife file out and walk off? |
| Pippa Goldschmidt: | “Potato Pancakes” |
|  |  |
|  | The narrator revisits her childhood days in which an elderly woman – nobody really knows where she came from – is remembered for her culinary skills. When the latter gets sick and is bed-ridden, the narrator brings her pancakes prepared with a bit of a twist. |
|  | **Task I:** Discuss the quote, “*Food is a way of seeing and participating in the world*.” Do you agree with this statement? How does the protagonist perceive the world and its inhabitants through the very food she tastes and eats? Do you associate certain food items with specific persons and if so, who are they? Next, recount an unforgettable episode – a “kitchen story” – you have experienced. If you are short of one, make one up and tell it as plausibly as you can. |
|  | **Task II:** Write down two of your favourite dishes (look up ingredients) and describe where you tasted them for the first time. Who prepared these dishes and how did this person prepare them? Tell your deskmate how one of the dishes gets prepared without naming the dish. The other person is supposed to find out what the dish is called. Switch roles. |

**B2-C1\_MATERIAL FOR THE TEACHER**

**Table II:** **Food Poetry**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Lewis Carroll: | “The Walrus and the Carpenter” |
|  | **Task I:** In the first phase, summarize the poem in a couple of sentences. Would you agree with the claim that this poem merely represents different phases in the food chain? How does food get produced in your country (for instance, animal farming and vegetable production)? |
|  | The city of Saufigen has recently announced new plans to open an animal farm (mainly pigs) to boost, among other things, the city’s dire economic situation. It seeks to organize an information gathering where speakers can give vent to their opinions and reasoning. |
|  | Student A: you are against this project  Student B: you are for it  Student C: you represent one of the owners of the animal farm and describe your rationale why you wish to start a firm in Saufingen.  Student D: you take the role of a city representative.  Student E: you take the role of the host leading through the discussion |
|  | **Tasks II:** Oysters are considered to be a delicacy in many countries around the world. For some people oysters are simply a slimy blend of salty and gelatin-like pulp, while others praise them as being the epitome of culinary rarities and hence savor them in ritualistic ceremonies. What culinary rarities do you have in your country (trips, brain, tête de veau, snails, frog legs) and what time period and setting can they be traced back to? |
| William Carlos Williams: | “For Viola: De Gustibus” |
|  | **Task I:** Read the poem aloud and discuss who the poem was written for? How does Williams address his beloved and why, in your opinion, does he liken his beloved to food? Write a poem consisting of six lines in which you select one food staple and give it a feel of temporal art. The other students will have to find out what food item you beautified poetically. |
|  | **Task II:** Focus on the words *caviar, herring, pimento* and find out where these ingredients are part of culinary traditions. Do some research into these traditions and explain them to your deskmates. |

**B2-C1\_MATERIAL FOR THE TEACHER**

**Table III:** **Food in Novel**

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| --- | --- |
| Sara Suleri: | *Meatless Days,* “Meatless Days” (2nd chapter) |
|  | Sara Suleri’s Meatless Days is an autobiographical narrative about the relationship between India and Pakistan in 1947. It orchestrates the different phases of political leadership resulting in the partition of Indian subcontinent. This chapter zeroes in on the Muslim festival of Eid and offers insights into different ways of preparing food. The protagonist learns that the dish she had formerly associated with “sweetbreads” turns out to be testicles. This revelation elicits memorable kitchen episodes and makes the reader understand the significance of food in a country deprived of meat for two days a week after the partition of India. |
|  | **Task I:** Read this chapter and discuss the quote, “Most of us have fond memories of food from our childhood. Whether it was our mom's homemade lasagna or a memorable chocolate birthday cake, food has a way of transporting us back to the past” (Homaro Cantu). How does Suleri transport the reader back to her past and what significance does food have for her life? |
|  | **Task II:** What food items have you once tasted and even liked, but could not trick yourself into eating now? What food items do you dislike and why? Write down two items and describe them to the others: how do they taste, what do they look like, when did you taste them for the first time etc.? |

**B2-C1\_MATERIAL FOR THE TEACHER**

**Table IV: Food Production and Food Chain**

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| --- | --- |
| Jonathan Safran Foer: | *Eating* *Animals,* “Story Telling” (1st chapter) |
|  | The questions *where does food come from and how do you make food choices on a daily basis?* constitute the starting point for the author to gather lots of material on this topic. Intent upon informing his son of what ends up on a plate the author explores various venues of food production and takes the reader into the bleak machinery of animal farming. |
|  | **Task I:** What choices do you make when eating? What is important for you when it comes to having food on the plate? Let’s suppose you were to design a food plan for your school cafeteria that seeks to offer a well-balanced diet, what culinary and nutritional choices would you make? What does the term “healthy eating” entail? Make a group poster. |
|  | **Task II:** Based upon Foer’s research investigate how animals are treated in your own country. What laws does your country have to protect animals? Where does one find big farms with hundreds or thousands of animals (penned up, free range, organic, factory farming, etc.)? Describe one day in the life of a cow, pig, horse in your own country? Then, find out how these animals get butchered and how the meat gets processed. |

**Appendix**

Lewis Carroll

“The Walrus and the Carpenter”

The sun was shining on the sea,  
Shining with all his might:  
He did his very best to make  
The billows smooth and bright--  
And this was odd, because it was  
The middle of the night.

The moon was shining sulkily,  
Because she thought the sun  
Had got no business to be there  
After the day was done--  
"It's very rude of him," she said,  
"To come and spoil the fun!"

The sea was wet as wet could be,  
The sands were dry as dry.  
You could not see a cloud, because  
No cloud was in the sky:  
No birds were flying overhead--  
There were no birds to fly.

The Walrus and the Carpenter  
Were walking close at hand;  
They wept like anything to see  
Such quantities of sand:  
"If this were only cleared away,"  
They said, "it would be grand!"

"If seven maids with seven mops  
Swept it for half a year.  
Do you suppose," the Walrus said,  
"That they could get it clear?"  
"I doubt it," said the Carpenter,  
And shed a bitter tear.

"O Oysters, come and walk with us!"  
The Walrus did beseech.  
"A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk,  
Along the briny beach:  
We cannot do with more than four,  
To give a hand to each."

The eldest Oyster looked at him,  
But never a word he said:  
The eldest Oyster winked his eye,  
And shook his heavy head--  
Meaning to say he did not choose  
To leave the oyster-bed.

But four young Oysters hurried up,  
All eager for the treat:  
Their coats were brushed, their faces washed,  
Their shoes were clean and neat--  
And this was odd, because, you know,  
They hadn't any feet.

Four other Oysters followed them,  
And yet another four;  
And thick and fast they came at last,  
And more, and more, and more--  
All hopping through the frothy waves,  
And scrambling to the shore.

The Walrus and the Carpenter  
Walked on a mile or so,  
And then they rested on a rock  
Conveniently low:  
And all the little Oysters stood  
And waited in a row.

"The time has come," the Walrus said,  
"To talk of many things:  
Of shoes--and ships--and sealing-wax--  
Of cabbages--and kings--  
And why the sea is boiling hot--  
And whether pigs have wings."

"But wait a bit," the Oysters cried,  
"Before we have our chat;  
For some of us are out of breath,  
And all of us are fat!"  
"No hurry!" said the Carpenter.  
They thanked him much for that.

"A loaf of bread," the Walrus said,  
"Is what we chiefly need:  
Pepper and vinegar besides  
Are very good indeed--  
Now if you're ready, Oysters dear,  
We can begin to feed."

"But not on us!" the Oysters cried,  
Turning a little blue.  
"After such kindness, that would be  
A dismal thing to do!"  
"The night is fine," the Walrus said.  
"Do you admire the view?

"It was so kind of you to come!  
And you are very nice!"  
The Carpenter said nothing but  
"Cut us another slice:  
I wish you were not quite so deaf--  
I've had to ask you twice!"

"It seems a shame," the Walrus said,  
"To play them such a trick,  
After we've brought them out so far,  
And made them trot so quick!"  
The Carpenter said nothing but  
"The butter's spread too thick!"

"I weep for you," the Walrus said:  
"I deeply sympathize."  
With sobs and tears he sorted out  
Those of the largest size,  
Holding his pocket-handkerchief  
Before his streaming eyes.

"O Oysters," said the Carpenter,  
"You've had a pleasant run!  
Shall we be trotting home again?'  
But answer came there none--  
And this was scarcely odd, because  
They'd eaten every one.

William Carlos Williams

“De Gustibus”

*Beloved you are  
Caviar of Caviar  
Of all I love you best  
O my Japanese bird nest  
No herring from Norway  
Can touch you for flavor. Nay  
Pimento itself  
is flat as an empty shelf  
When compared to your piquancy  
O quince of my despondency.*