

American Fast Food (The Hamburger): A Cultural Lesson

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- **Target Students Level:** Intermediate High
- **Time:** 100 minutes (50 for each class)

Introduction

A strong motivation for increased mastery of a second language is the teaching of the culture underpinning the target language learners are studying. This satisfies their natural curiosity to know more about the country where the target language is spoken. Motivation is not the only reason why culture should be taught in the classroom. Rather, an understanding of the similarities and differences between one's own culture and that of another's enhances inter-cultural tolerance and effective global communication.

This lesson is an introduction to the multifaceted aspects of a target culture. Food, being a cultural product, is selected as the primary stimulus to further exploration of the perspectives, practices, history and geography of the target culture. This should create a meaningful and exciting language learning experience.

Through being introduced to some typical foods, students will learn certain properties and values of the target culture, as well as gain some insight into stereotypes of other cultures' lifestyles.

Three points need to be mentioned.

- One, the activities to be used in this lesson will consider the meaning-making and sense-making communicative purpose. The aim is not to teach forms of the target language, it is to enable students to use the language in a meaningful context.
- Two, emphasis will be placed on training and directing students to practice top-down strategies; that is, listening for global understanding, and guessing meaning from context.
- Three, these activities will link American fast food, as a cultural product, to the perspectives and practices of American culture as a whole.

A. Objectives

Function.

Students will be able to use the Internet as a research tool to learn more about the target culture's foods. They will identify vocabulary related to food, compare and contrast similarities and differences between food in American culture and their own culture. They will also discuss and present the relationship between a cultural product, such as food, lifestyle, costumes, geography or history of the target culture; use the language function that is appropriate for their level; and predict what some of the fast-foods of the future might be.

Performance

Students will practice top-down strategies: listening for global understanding, and guessing meaning from context, etc. Students will listen to and comprehend a short talk about *The Hamburger: Its History and Popularity* (see Appendix 1). This short talk should be recorded by the teacher so students may listen to it multiple times. Teachers can make up their own talk or adopt this one or one similar to it. Students will create a network structure depicting the relationship between food and culture. They will orally suggest

other types of food and possible reasons or factor governing eating behaviors or consumption of some specific type of food. They will write a short essay about the class topic or a related experience.

Grammar

The aspect of the language suggested by the short talk is the preposition, especially of, on, at, for, by, and to. Teachers are welcome and encouraged to consider other grammatical aspects. Instead of initially teaching the forgoing aspects, the emphasis will be placed on practicing these linguistic elements and reinforcing them. This will be done indirectly, while building on the comprehension phase. Also, students will be directed to apply these skills when making oral presentations and when writing their compositions.

Culture

After listening to the recorded talk, students will:

- compare and contrast the similarities and differences between American foods, fast-food in particular, and their own foods
- discuss the relationship between a cultural product such as food, the lifestyle, customs, and geography of the target culture.

The short talk will introduce them to the history, popularity, and cultural significance of the hamburger. They will learn that efficiency and convenience are important to American people. They will also learn that Americans place a high value on personal independence and self-sufficiency. This will enable students to engage in cross-cultural exchanges.

B. Equipment and Materials

- Computer with access to Internet
- Digital overhead projector and Electronic White Board
- Still pictures of food
- A recording by the teacher of *The Hamburger: Its History and Popularity*
- Artificial hamburger sandwich sample

C. Procedures

1. Day One

Anticipatory Set (2 min.). The teacher will start the class by talking briefly about food, more precisely, its significant role in human life and how important it is to eat healthy food. Students will be asked to discuss the relationship between culture and food.

Warm-Up Activity (8 min.). The class will begin with an activity that will help them to relate the food they eat with their lifestyle, perspectives, geography or history. Hence, two warm-up activities will be implemented.

First, in order to generate a general discussion and engage students in participating in the content of the class, they will be shown some fast-food pictures taken from some food websites available on the Internet. Then some possible questions will be asked:

- What do you see in the picture?
- What do people sometimes put on a hamburger?
- What is your favorite food?

Second, after discussing the relationship between food and cultural environment, students will be asked to create a structure network depicting this relationship. In constructing their structure network, students will be directed to use a software called Inspiration to help them organize their thoughts and communicate their ideas visually (see Appendix 2).

Presentation (15 min.). After having a discussion on the relationship between food and cultural environment or historical and graphical factors, the class will listen to a short talk about *The Hamburger*. To facilitate the top-down strategies, students will be listen to the recorded talk for the first time and report to the class what they remember about the presentation. The aim is to train students to be able to extract ideas as opposed to bottom-up strategies where students perform a discrete task, such as

discriminating among and recognizing sentencings patterns, identifying key words, and the like.

Guided Practice (25 min.) The students' task here is to listen to the recorded talk again and recognize the main idea, supporting ideas, and details. For this activity they will be given a chart to complete and put into groups, and then they will be asked to sequence events (See Appendix 3).

Students will be encouraged to think of possible reasons why the hamburger is a typical and popular food in America.

- Could it be because it is convenient, or efficient or because American society is obsessed with time and speed?
- What do students think the advantages and disadvantages of fast foods are, and what do they think some fast foods of the future might be?

(See Appendix 3)

For this activity students will be given the choice of making their prediction through any written form, drawing, or the like. Furthermore, they will be asked if they consider a fast food restaurant to be impersonal or dehumanizing when compared to eating a meal at home.

The remainder of class time will be devoted to informing students about the research project they will be assigned, the next meeting, and finding information about a particular food in American culture through the use of the Internet. After dividing into groups, they will spend the rest of the time brainstorming about some descriptors that would help them get to related websites. Students will be assigned, as homework, the following responsibilities:

- to identify some food that is representative of American culture
- to discuss the similarities and differences between food in American culture and food in their own culture
- to search for more information that might possibly help explain the existence of certain foods in the culture or factors that influence eating behaviors
- present the information to the class

Students will be informed that some of the information they look for may not be available on the web. In these cases students may have to look to other resources, or just make-do with whatever information they have.

2. Day Two

Next Class (10 min. for each presentation). The class will begin with the instructor asking the students to recall and summarize what we discussed in the previous class. Then each group will present its report. In order to motivate learning and develop learners' language skills, students will be given choices in how to present their research. As a result, depending on the preference and consensus of each group, they will be allowed the option to select the format for their presentation, such as a formal presentation, dialogue, an art presentation, or a cooking demonstration. They will be encouraged to use a presentational program such as PowerPoint.

Independent Practice (20 min). Students will be given the choice of writing a short essay reflecting on what took place in the class. They will be instructed to consider writing about one of the following topics: (a) discuss briefly what have you learned from the class; (b) would you regard American food as a product of American culture; and (c) try to relate what has been presented in the class to a personal experience that you went through. They may talk about a time when they ate dinner at an American family's home or about a time when they ate at a restaurant.

Anticipated problems. Some potential problems may occur which can be attributed to the following: Students may argue that there is no single set of values for all Americans. After all, not all Americans eat hamburgers. In searching the Internet, learners may stumble upon websites that are not appropriate from an educational perspective. Some of the requested information may not be found on the Internet. Some of the encountered material may be difficult to understand.

Appendix 1

The Short Talk about The HAMBURGER: Its History and Popularity

Today, we are re going to be talking briefly about two main issues. The first one is the history of the hamburger and the second is popularity of hamburger.

Let's start by talking a little bit about the history of the hamburger. The word hamburger can refer to different things, but our concern here is the sandwich that consists of a patty of beef served inside a roll that has been cut in half. It is not known for sure what the origin of hamburger is. That is why many people still think "hamburger" somehow related to "ham." It is believed that the hamburger got its name from the German town named Hamburg. Hamburg was known for its ground steak. It is said that in the early 19th century German immigrants to the United States introduced the hamburger steak. Hamburger steak were served on buns for the first time in 1904 at the St. Louis World's Fair. Since that time, serving hamburgers on buns became the regular way of eating hamburgers.

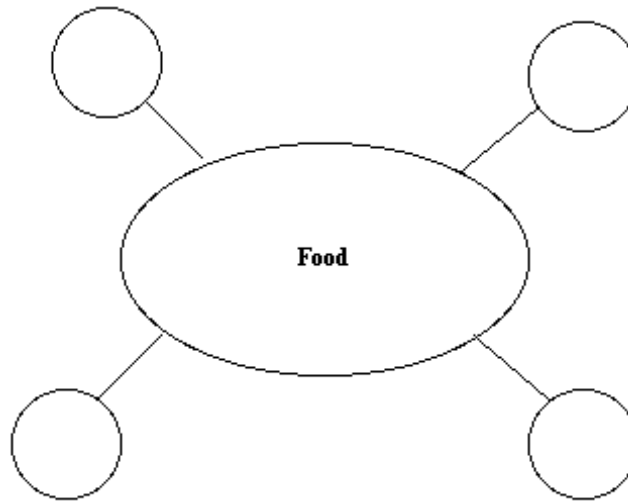
Now, we will discuss the popularity of hamburgers. Over the years, hamburgers became the most popular American food. One reason for its popularity is the way it is served. People think hamburgers on buns is a convenient way to eat them and that it makes the taste much better. Another reason is the growth of the fast food restaurant, McDonald's. When the first McDonald's was opened in San Bernardino, California, in 1949, Hamburgers were the main item on its menu. McDonald's restaurants soon became part of almost every community in the United States. Today, McDonald's includes other items on the menu, but the hamburger still remains the main item.

For further information, please check:

- The New Encyclopedia Britannica. (1997). Volume 5. p. 656. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.
- Broukal, B. and Murphy, P. (1991). All About the USA: A cultural Reader. New York: Longman

Appendix 2

Semantic Map Depicting the Relationship between Food and Culture



Appendix 3

