

Eat Drink Your Homework

By Elizabeth Graf

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Chicago, Illinois

Amount of Time Needed for Lesson Plan: One week (five days).

Purpose: To show the connections between the traditions of a culture and food.

Materials Needed: A copy of Ang Lee's 1994 film, *Eat Drink Man Woman*.



Eat Drink Man Woman is a delightful and thoughtful comedy by Ang Lee, who directed the box office hits *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), and *Brokeback Mountain* (2006). The title is a quote from the *Li Ji*, a Confucian classic, but the action is in contemporary Taiwan. The story concerns Mr. Chu, a widower, who is a master Chinese chef, and his three daughters, each of whom challenges any rigid definition of traditional Chinese culture: one is an airlines executive, one is a Christian, and

one works at Wendy's. Each Sunday Mr. Chu makes a glorious banquet for his daughters, shown in mouth-watering detail. This dinner table is also the family forum to which each daughter brings "announcements" as they wrestle with love, romance, and independence (there are a few moments involving sexual themes). As the plot unwinds, the family negotiates the transition from traditional "father knows best" to a new tradition that encompasses old values in new forms. (Film description written by National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) Instructor, Charles Hayford.)

Before Viewing the Film:

1. Have the students write a one-page journal on the topic, "What is your favorite meal?"
2. Allow students five to ten minutes to free-write, then begin a discussion on the same topic.
3. Next, assign the paper as outlined below.
 - Sit down for a minute and think. When was the last time you had a really good meal. No, not just *good*, but I mean delicious. So wonderful that you could almost cry. Sitting at the table, plate in front of you, you wish that it wouldn't end.

- Pick any dish from Asian or Asian-American cuisine. Be sure you have eaten this dish before, and know the nuances and delights of the meal.
- Take it apart—find a recipe for the dish you have in mind. When possible, ask someone who is familiar with its preparation.
- When needed, (and it is strongly suggested) do your best to enjoy the meal again.
- Then, using your full stomach and the recipe, analyze the dish.
- What is the country of origin of each particular ingredient?
- Which ethnic group, social group, or class, etc., brought this dish to the US?
- For what occasion—wedding, funeral, on Sunday—is the dish best eaten?
- In a two-to-three-page essay, explain how the dish is eaten (such as utensils used), what the dish tastes like (use sensory details), and include a recipe.
- Be mindful, you will be asked to present your findings to the class. Be prepared.

Show the Film:

While the students are 'stewing' over their respective, prospective recipes, show the film *Eat Drink Man Woman*, which will take approximately three days of class.

The day before the student-produced papers are due, which should be the day after the film was shown in class, have a discussion.

Use these questions, or concoct some of your own:

- How does tradition affect the family?
- How does food affect the family?
- How do these two themes interact? Intersect?
- How is the tradition of food passed down in a family?
- How is it passed down in your family?
- Who cooks at your home?
- Do you know any of the recipes?

(Continue along this route, if the discussion is working.)

Students' Understanding Can Be Assessed As Follows:

1. Content of discussion—Are students making the connections? Is everyone alert and involved?
2. Content of paper—Are all criteria (as outlined on sheet) met? Does the paper follow all conventions? Has the student made the connection between meals eaten and traditions established within their culture? Paper is worth 100 points.
3. Presentation—Was it lively and pertinent? Were visuals used? If so, was it well constructed? Presentation is worth 50 points.

RESOURCES

http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/eat_drink_man_woman/about.php

ELIZABETH GRAF teaches Asian and Latino Literature classes at Whitney Young High School, on Chicago's near west side. An avid reader and scholar, she is always on the lookout for new and enticing ways in which to teach her students. This lesson plan was the result of an innovative spin she hoped to put on the hackneyed research paper. She figured, what better way to avoid the age-old excuse of "the dog ate my homework" than have the students eat theirs? She hopes her lesson plan is similarly enjoyed.