FOOD, INC.

A FILM BY ROBERT KENNER

JANUARY 28, 2010 | 11:30AM
TRIBECA CINEMAS

STUDY GUIDE

TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES

DOCS ON THE SHORTLIST JUNIOR
How much do we actually know about the food we buy and eat everyday? In Food Inc., director Robert Kenner explores America’s food industry and exposes shocking information that—until now—has been deliberately kept hidden from us. Most people don’t realize that our food supply is controlled by just a few large corporations who don’t care about the environment, the livelihood of the farmers who produce the food, the safety of workers, or even the health of their consumers. Kenner’s film reveals the truth behind the food we eat, the way it’s produced, and what this means for us as a nation.

Robert Kenner worked for over six years to make Food, Inc. While he originally planned to make a film about the fast food industry, he soon realized there were larger human rights issues that needed to be explored. Kenner has received several awards and recognition for his non-fiction filmmaking. He is known for his ability to draw out intimate stories through compassionate interviews with real people, and for creating a rich emotional and authentic feel in his documentaries. Some of his other notable documentaries include Two Days in October, a film about how the Vietnam War affected the US, and The Blue Series, a documentary series on American music he co-directed with Martin Scorsese. He has also worked on several National Geographic specials, as well as commercial work for eBay and Hallmark. He hopes that Food, Inc. will inspire viewers to work towards creating large-scale change in the food industry.

“I hope people know that things can change in this country. It changed against the big tobacco companies. We have to influence the government and readjust these scales back into the interests of the consumer. We did it before, and we can do it again.”

- Robert Kenner
UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS

GLOSSARY

- **FOOD SYSTEM**: a term used to describe all the steps involved in feeding a population, including the growing, harvesting, packaging, selling, consuming and disposing of food.

- **ORGANIC**: Food produced without synthetic pesticides, artificial fertilizers, hormones, antibiotics, or genetic modification.

- **SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE**: describes a method of farming that is both long-lasting and harmless to the environment.

- **LOCAL FOOD**: a movement focused on only eating food that is grown or produced within an immediate geographic area, which both supports local farms and eliminates the “middle man” in food production.

- **GENETICALLY MODIFIED**: Describes food that has been manipulated using genetic engineering. Some common examples of genetically modified organisms—also called GMOs—are chickens that are bred to produce more meat or tomatoes that have been modified to stay fresh longer.

- **PROCESSED**: Describes food that has been prepared in a variety of ways (peeled, sliced, packaged, etc.) to be more appealing for sale. While processing food has the benefit of making food more available to a larger population, it also strips food of its naturally-occurring nutritional value and creates excess waste.

SOME FACTS ABOUT YOUR FOOD

Adapted from foodincmovie.com

- In the 1970s, the top five beef packers controlled only about 25% of the market. Today the top four control more than 80% of the market.

- In 1972, the Food and Drug Administration conducted 50,000 food safety inspections. In 2006, they conducted only 9,164.

- The average chicken farmer spends over $500,000 to run their farm, but earns only $18,000 a year.

- The average American eats over 200 lbs. of meat a year.

- 70% of processed foods contain genetically modified ingredients.

- 30% of land in the U.S. is used for planting corn.

- Corn products include: ketchup, cheese, Twinkies, batteries, peanut butter, Cheez-Its, salad dressings, Coke, jelly, Sweet & Low, syrup, juice, Kool-Aid, charcoal, diapers, Motrin, meat and fast food.

- 1 in 3 Americans born after 2000 will contract early onset diabetes; among minorities, the rate will be 1 in 2.

- In the past 20 years, rates of obesity in children have tripled. Experts suspect the increase in sweetened drinks such as soda is a main factor.
MAKE A DIFFERENCE

FIVE THINGS YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

Adapted from foodincmovie.com

1. Stop drinking Cokes, Snapples, Vitamin Waters and other sweetened drinks. NYC tap water is healthy, delicious and free!

2. Forget McDonalds and other fast food and have dinner at home instead.

3. Tell your school to stop selling unhealthy junk food, sodas and sports drinks. You can also take a minute to sign your name to a national petition that would help provide healthier food in schools at: http://foodincmovie.com/sign-the-petition.php

4. Start a new tradition of Meatless Mondays (or any day!) Going without meat even one day a week can make a big impact. Check out www.meatlessmonday.com for more information.

5. When you have the option, go organic. Look for this label:

FIND LOCAL FOOD IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

You don’t have to live in the country to eat the healthy food you see in the film. New York City has dozens of farmers markets, where you can buy fresh and affordable food directly from farms. Many of these markets are year-round, and many accept food stamps as a payment method.

BRONX
Lincoln Hospital
New York Botanical Garden

BROOKLYN
Greenpoint McCarren Park
Fort Greene Park
Grand Army Plaza
Cortelyou Road
Sunset Park
Bay Ridge

MANHATTAN
Union Square
Staten Island Ferry Whitehall Terminal
Tompkins Square
77th Street
Inwood

QUEENS
Astoria
Jackson Heights
Sunnyside
Corona

And there are many more locations! Check out www.cenyc.org/ourmarkets for detailed information
HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Check out these organizations around New York City for opportunities to get more involved and help change our food system.

GROWING CHEFS: www.growingchefs.com
Take classes in farming, gardening and cooking, and have a chance to work at Rooftop Farms in Greenpoint.

COUNCIL ON THE ENVIRONMENT OF NEW YORK CITY: www.cenyc.org
Take a look at the “Youthmarket” section of their website for information on paying jobs working in New York City farmers markets.

ADDED VALUE: www.added-value.org/youth-empowerment
Work for a season at Red Hook Community Farm, where you’ll not only learn farming skills, but also explore issues affecting the local community such as unemployment and obesity.

IN THE CLASSROOM

FURTHER WATCHING

Super Size Me
As a way to investigate the obesity epidemic facing America, writer and director Morgan Spurlock undergoes an experiment in which he eats only McDonalds’ food for 30 days straight. The film documents the physical and psychological effects this takes on Spurlock, and also examines larger issues of the fast food corporation, namely how companies encourage poor nutrition for the sake of profit.

The Future of Food
This film explores the rise of genetically modified foods, or GMO’s, over the past ten years, and their devastating effects on our food system. While the facts presented in the film are often times frightening, ultimately the film presents a hopeful perspective, and highlights ways in which everyday people can join the food revolution by demanding natural, healthy food choices.

Media That Matters: Good Food
Media That Matters brings together a collection of short films, all of which deal with issues affecting our food system. Films include Asparagus: A Stalkumentary, a charming documentary about an underestimated vegetable, and Don’t Worry, an expose on Sunny-D’s questionable child-oriented marketing practices.

Fresh
This film takes a more optimistic look at the future of food, and celebrates the farmers, thinkers and business people across America who are re-inventing our food system. The movie profiles people who have created healthier, sustainable alternatives to how we produce our food, and offers a practical vision for the future of our food and our planet.
IN THE CLASSROOM (CONT.)

FURTHER READING

In Defense of Food
by Michael Pollan

The Omnivore’s Dilemma
by Michael Pollan

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life
by Barbara Kingsolver

Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should Be Good, Clean and Fair
by Alice Waters

Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty
by Mark Winne

Fast Food Nation
by Eric Schlosser

Everything I Want to Do Is Illegal: War Stories from the Local Food Front
by Joel Salatin

Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influence Nutrition and Health
by Marion Nestle

ONLINE RESOURCES

www.foodincmovie.com
Official website for Food Inc. with information and educational materials related to the film and the issues it presents.

www.ecoliteracy.org
Resources and support for education that promotes sustainable living.

www.coolfoodscampaign.org
Detailed information to help make environmentally responsible food choices.

www.saynotogmos.org
Information and resources on genetically modified foods.

www.eatwellguide.org
Search for local and organic food by geographic location.
These suggested activities are aligned with the New York City Department of Education’s *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts: The Moving Image*, which outlines learning strands for grades K-12, focusing on the five areas: making moving images, literacy, making connections, community and cultural resources, and careers and lifelong learning. For more information on the *Blueprint*, please visit: [http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/index2.html](http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/index2.html)

**PREP FOR SCREENING**

**Discussion:**
**Understanding Documentary Filmmaking**

**Objective:** The goal of this guided discussion is to help introduce and/or review important elements of documentary filmmaking including the formal elements of documentaries, the production process, careers involved in filmmaking, and the impact various artistic, social, and cultural influences may have on the final product.

1. What is a documentary? How is a documentary different from a narrative film? What are some examples of documentaries you’ve seen or heard of?

2. What do you imagine is involved in the process of making a documentary? What must the filmmaker do to prepare?

3. What are some common elements you could find in a documentary? (interviews, historical footage, reenactments, etc.)

4. What do you think makes an interesting subject for a documentary? What makes a bad subject for a documentary?

5. What is the goal of a documentary filmmaker?

6. What other roles are important in the making of a documentary? How can the editor, screenwriter, cinematographer, music supervisor, etc. support the filmmaker’s goal?

7. What is activism? Is it possible for a documentary to be a form of activism?
FOR EDUCATORS

Activity:
Pitch Your Own Documentary

Objective: Students will think more critically about both the artistic and business choices involved in filmmaking, experience the collaborative nature of movie production, and explore ways to cinematically express their ideas.

- Think of familiar subjects (current topics from a classroom curriculum, issues affecting the school or local community, etc.) and assign students the task of creating a pitch for a documentary film on the subject. Alternately, students can decide on their own subject through group discussion.

- Divide students into five small production team groups, each of which must consider the following questions in the creation of their documentary:
  - Producers: How will you raise money to fund the project? What will you do to promote the film once it is completed?
  - Writers: What are the key chapters in the film? Who will you interview, and what will you ask them?
  - Cinematographers: What sort of “look” will the film have? Are there certain types of camera movements, angles, or framing you would like to use?
  - Editors: What sort of “feel” will the film have? What parts of the story will you emphasize?
  - Music supervisors: What type of music will you use in the film? Are there particular songs that are appropriate to use?

- After brainstorming in small groups, students pitch their ideas to the whole group. Ideas can be presented in the form of a worksheet, an artistic rendering, a written essay, or a role-playing mock-production meeting.

- Reflection (group discussion or written assignment): Did you enjoy your role, why or why not? Did your ideas line up with the other teams’ ideas? What was challenging?

DEBRIEF AFTER THE SCREENING

Discussion Questions

1. One of the most touching stories in the film is the death of two year old Kevin, who died from eating a contaminated hamburger. Based on what you saw in the film, who do you think is responsible for Kevin’s death? In general, who do you think should be responsible for monitoring the health of the American people?

2. Do you think eating local, organic food is a realistic goal for all Americans? Why or why not? What challenges might prevent people from buying and eating healthy food, and what can be done to change that?

3. Do you think animals deserve certain rights? If so, how does one decide what exactly those rights are?

4. The film portrays the many illegal immigrants who work in meatpacking factories. Do you think these workers are being treated fairly? Is it important to think about the workers who produced the meat we eat?

5. Food expert Michael Pollan encourages viewers to “vote with their fork.” What do you think he means by this statement?

6. Do you think Food Inc. is a form of activism? Is it successful?
Activity:
A Closer Look At Labels

Objective: This activity helps make information from Food Inc. more relevant to students’ lives by encouraging them to examine the packaged food products they likely consume everyday.

- Discuss food science professor Larry Johnson’s quote from the film: “If you go and look on the supermarket shelf, I’ll bet you 90 percent of [the products] would contain either a corn or soybean ingredient. And most of the time, it’ll contain both.” Why do you think it’s potentially problematic to have corn and soybeans in so many processed foods?
- Provide students with a variety of packaged products, and have them carefully read the labels and check off any of the listed products they come across.

Discuss the results. Were you surprised at what you found? Compare with friends or classmates—how many corn or soybean products did they find? Which product had the most?

As a further step, students can research any listed ingredients they found but aren’t familiar with.

Project:
Create a PSA

Objective: This project serves as a synthesis of the pre-screening “Pitch Your Own Documentary” activity and the “Closer Look at Labels” activity by challenging students to demonstrate their new knowledge about the food industry through a moving image medium. Students should be encouraged to think not only about the content of the PSA, but also what cinematic techniques they will use as documentary filmmakers.

Goal: Students develop a PSA that shares their new knowledge about packaged food products with their school community. There are a variety of ways to approach this project. Students can:

- Create detailed storyboards outlining a plan for their commercial;
- Write a script that includes dialogue, production notes and music cues;
- Use still cameras to create a photo montage;
- Adapt the PSA into a print ad and make posters;
- Shoot and edit a short film.