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Reading Guide and Journal Assignment for *French Kids Eat Everything*

We are reading this book to help develop our sociological imaginations by viewing eating practices as social phenomenon rather than simply functions of individual tastes, habits, biological drives, or willpower. In other words, eating is a *cultural* practice that we are *socialized* to do in a particular way. To view eating this way, we will:

1. Bring to conscious awareness the often taken-for-granted practices that we, as a society and as individual Americans, demonstrate. What, when, where, how, and with whom do we produce, acquire, prepare, and consume food? What rituals do we associate with food? What restrictions (“food rules”) do we impose on ourselves, explicitly or otherwise?
2. Explore the socialization processes around eating practices in France and America. How (in what settings, with what forms of communication, etc.) does each society teach food behaviors to its members?
3. Discuss the ways in which social rituals shape biological and psychological motivations for eating.
4. Explore the relationship between food culture and the broader culture. What norms and values (e.g., self-restraint, efficiency) show themselves in the way each society’s members eat?
5. Explore the institutional and structural arrangements that support different eating practices in France and America. What systems of food production and acquisition does each society use, and what foods are subsequently available to the society as a whole? What foods are made available in different settings, and alternatively, where is food made “off-limits”?

Below are questions to answer as you read each chapter. You are to keep a typed journal of your answers to these questions that is due in class on **Th Jan 24**. Please include a cover page with the following:

French Kids Eat Everything Reading Journal for [student ID]
Sociology 1, Fall 2012
Dr. Randle

There are no length requirements for each answer, but thoughtful answers that receive full credit will probably be at least three sentences long. As a general rule, the questions worth more points should have longer answers.

This assignment is worth 125 points, and the points received for each question follow each question in brackets.

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Most questions include multiple sub-questions. Your answer should respond to all of these sub-questions, but you are free to structure your answer however you would like. When asked a yes/no question, please explain your choice.

Proof-read your answers. Two grammatical errors will be tolerated; any further errors will result in points lost.

We will discuss the book in class on Jan 24. I will check in with you periodically in lecture, and I highly encourage you to ask questions as needed.

Chapter-by-Chapter Questions

Prologue and Chapter 1:

1. Why does Karen Le Billon identify this topic as an important one to write about? Put differently, what are the cultural and historical contexts in which this book is being written? (5 points)
2. Is this a scientific study? What methods does Karen use to draw conclusions about the ways Americans and French eat? Should we trust the conclusions that she draws? (10 points)

Chapter 2

3. What explicit lessons and indirect messages about food choices do you recall from your childhood? Explicit lessons might include things your parent taught you or discussions of the “food pyramid” in school. Indirect messages might include television commercials and things you saw your friends eat at school. Be sure to describe specific examples of both. (15 points)
4. Karen argues that social rituals associated with eating shape biological and psychological motivations that people develop for eating. How does how we eat affect why we eat? (Hint: see especially pp. 25-26) (10 points)

Chapter 3

5. Karen describes the ways in which French schools assume an active role in children’s food education, by structuring the types of foods available and the settings in which children may eat. In what ways is this the case in American schools as well? In what ways is this not the case in American schools? Be sure to give at least one example of each, and at least three examples total. (15 points)

Chapter 4

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6. In this chapter and the previous one, Karen identifies autonomy as a key value associated with American eating practices, and a primary reason for Americans' comparative lack of interest in children's food education. Now consider the quote at p 68 from an exasperated Frenchman: "Sure, Americans are free to choose, but they end up making terrible choices!" Under what conditions do you think children should be offered food choices, especially between "healthy" and "unhealthy" alternatives? For example, do you think elementary school children should be able to choose between a pizza and a salad for lunch? Do you think that providing only one meal option harms their autonomy? Do you think that being able to choose one food over another is a central aspect of personal autonomy and identity that should be protected even in childhood? (10 points)
7. What core French value or values are reflected in the way the French eat? (There are multiple possible correct answers.) (5 points)
8. Other than autonomy, describe one value, belief, or aspect of American culture that is reflected in the way Americans eat **and** in the way they act in another setting. For example: Americans believe that "bigger is better," and it shows both in the large portion sizes at restaurants and the large cars that they drive. (10 points)
9. How does ethnocentrism show itself among the French in this chapter? (5 points)

Chapter 5

10. What was the relationship, if any, between the way you were parented generally and the way you were parented about food? Be sure to offer specific examples of similarities and/or differences. (10 points)

Chapter 7

11. A leading American childhood nutritionist, Ellyn Satter, is a proponent of structured snacking between meals, arguing that children need to eat every 2-3 hours. She argues that depriving them of food for longer periods of time can cause hunger pangs that lead to poor concentration in school and the tendency to overeat at mealtimes (one factor in obesity). Yet French children apparently wait 4-5 hours between mealtimes without such consequences. Let's assume that both Satter and *French Kids Eat Everything* are correct. What about French eating culture/structure allows children to go for longer periods between meals? What about American eating culture/structure makes kids require food more frequently? (15 points)

Chapter 8

12. *French Kids Eat Everything* argues that cultural preferences, rather than structural constraints, push the French to cook at home more often than do Americans.

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Think about the last time you ate at a fast food restaurant. What alternatives were available to you, and why did you forego those in favor of your choice to eat at that fast food restaurant? Were your reasons social (e.g., going along with a crowd) cultural (e.g., in the mood for a particular taste), structural (e.g., no other restaurant was open at 2 a.m.), etc.? (5 points)

Chapter 9

13. What food behaviors do Karen's children start demonstrating upon their return to North America? (5 points)
14. What structural and cultural obstacles does Karen face to maintaining French-style eating practices upon their return? (5 points)