

Meat on Trial

Introduction

Explain to the class that “meat” has been accused of some terrible crimes against human health. These crimes include increasing a person’s risk of heart disease, strokes, certain types of cancer, diabetes and obesity. “Meat” will now be put on trial, and it’s up to students to prepare cases for the defence and prosecution. A jury will then decide whether “meat” is guilty on all counts, guilty on some counts or innocent.

Practicalities

Divide the class into two groups – the prosecution and the defence. From these two groups, create six subgroups or pairs: “general”, heart disease, strokes, diabetes, cancer and obesity. Each group or pair should be given the handout **Meat on Trial**. You should read through this handout before students start their research. You should also print out a picture of some meat. This picture will later serve as the “defendant”.

Trial Preparation

Each pair or group of three should research the health issue that it’s been assigned. For example, if the students in the group or pair are on the “heart disease” prosecution team, they should find as much evidence as possible that eating meat increases a person’s chance of developing heart disease. If they’re on the “heart disease” defence team, they should try to find evidence disproving a link between meat-eating and heart disease. Students in the “general” groups should confer with the others on their team and prepare an opening statement. Opening statements should be clear and well organised and rely on persuasive techniques (such as rhetorical questions). They could also question the credibility of the opposition’s “witnesses” (for the purposes of this lesson, “witnesses” could be meat industry websites, nutritionists’ advice, vegetarian organisations’ websites, newspaper reports and so on). The trial preparation could be assigned as homework so that class time could be devoted to the trial itself. Advise students that a useful way to find information is to enter the disease they’re researching into a search engine along with the word “meat”.

The Trial

Choose 12 students for the jury (they should be chosen from both the prosecution and the defence) and have them sit separately in a group. Alternatively you may wish to arrange for students from another class to sit as the jury, to encourage a non-biased verdict. The teacher (or perhaps a confident student) should preside as the judge. The prosecution and defence should take turns reading their opening statements. After they’re finished, the defence should call its witnesses, and each of the subgroups should succinctly tell the court what they discovered about each disease’s purported link to meat consumption. The defence should then report its findings. Next, call for a short break to allow the prosecution and the defence to plan their closing statements (based on what they have heard). Finally, the teams should present their closing statements, and the jury should give its verdict. If meat is found guilty, you may want to give it a “sentence” (e.g., reduced meat consumption required, no meat consumption permitted, etc.).



Background

This lesson looks at opposing views on meat consumption. Some people and organisations claim that meat is good for you while others say that a vegetarian or vegan diet is healthier than a diet that includes meat and that meat consumption can actually contribute to a number of serious health problems. This lesson uses the format of a court case to engage students and encourage lively interaction.

Learning Objectives

Students should learn the following:

- To explore the purported health benefits of a meat free diet
- To use the internet to find information and evidence
- To evaluate arguments and draw their own conclusions
- To contribute to a structured oral presentation in front of the class

Accompanying Materials

Meat on Trial (student handout)

Extension Ideas

- Hold a class discussion. Were students surprised by the evidence presented at the trial? What did they think of the different websites they visited and how the information was presented? Were references given? Will the trial have any effect on their future dietary choices?

Useful Webpages

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics:

eatright.org/food/nutrition/vegetarian-and-special-diets/vegetarianism-the-basic-facts

British Dietetic Association:

bda.uk.com/resource/vegetarian-vegan-plant-based-diet.html

Meat and Health: meatandhealth.com

NHS: nhs.uk/livewell/vegetarianhealth/pages/vegetarianhealthhome.aspx

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM): pcrm.org/health

Meat Free Monday: meatfreemondays.com/category/health-and-wellness

Meat on Trial

“Meat” has been accused of increasing the risk of heart disease, strokes, certain types of cancer, diabetes and obesity. There have been countless studies and many newspaper articles pointing to a link between meat consumption and these health problems.

<p>General “Eating meat ‘raises risk of heart disease, diabetes and pneumonia’” – The Guardian theguardian.com/food/2021/mar/02/eating-meat-raises-risk-of-heart-disease-diabetes-and-pneumonia</p> <p>“Vegetarian diet proved to fight disease” – The Daily Mail dailymail.co.uk/health/article-56669/Vegetariandiet-proved-fight-disease.htm</p>	<p>Cancer “Vegetarians ‘avoid more cancers’” – BBC news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/8127215.stm</p> <p>“Even moderate intake of red meat raises cancer risk, study finds” – The Guardian theguardian.com/society/2019/apr/17/even-moderate-intake-of-red-meat-raises-cancer-risk-study-finds</p>
<p>Heart Disease “Heart attack: One of the best diets to significantly reduce your risk of deathly condition” – The Express express.co.uk/life-style/health/1473027/heart-attack-diet-vegan-meat-reduce-risk</p> <p>“From omnivore to vegan: The dietary education of Bill Clinton” – CNN edition.cnn.com/2011/HEALTH/08/18/bill.clinton.diet.vegan/index.html</p>	<p>Diabetes “Major study examines meat-diabetes link” – Fox News foxnews.com/health/2013/06/18/major-study-examines-meat-diabetes-link</p> <p>“Brits who eat more steak and sausages are a third more likely to get diabetes, study warns” – The Sun thesun.co.uk/news/14207000/eating-more-red-meat-increased-chance-diabetes</p>
<p>Strokes “A vegetarian or vegan diet could reduce the risk of stroke by up to 10 per cent, say researchers” – iNews inews.co.uk/news/health/vegetarian-and-vegan-reduces-risk-of-strokes-907603</p> <p>“Going vegetarian could lower your risk of stroke, says study” – Metro metro.co.uk/2020/02/27/going-vegetarian-lower-risk-stroke-says-study-12311348</p>	<p>Obesity “Rejecting meat ‘keeps weight low’” – BBC news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4801570.stm</p> <p>“Doctors ‘to call for cigarette-style health warnings on red and processed meat’” – The Mirror mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/doctors-to-call-cigarette-style-13911641</p>

Preparing for the Trial Prosecution

Find as much evidence as you can to prove that eating meat increases the risk of heart disease, strokes, cancer, diabetes and obesity.

Defence

Find as much evidence as you can to disprove a link between meat consumption and an increased risk of heart disease, strokes, cancer, diabetes and obesity.

Tips

- Keep any quotes that you use short and succinct.
- Use reputable websites and studies rather than blogs or forums.
- Practice summarising your information with a partner.

