

## What Did You **Expect**?

**Background:** When was the last time you really thought about why you purchase a certain brand of potato chips or soda? Why are we so willing to pay high prices to eat at a high-end or trendy restaurant? These are things that we usually don't think about or question because we are so accustomed to buying certain brand names or going to our favorite restaurant. The amount and type of food that we eat does not only depend on our appetite or cravings but there are other factors that influence our consuming behavior. The names of foods, labeling, presentation, appearance and pricing all influence what we expect a food will taste like.

### Objectives:

- Develop an understanding that a person's expectations about the taste of a food can trick them into thinking a food tastes much better or worse than it actually does.
- Learn the importance of how appearance, naming, labeling and pricing affect a consumer's perception of the food that they are eating.
- Explain how descriptive labels in restaurants and at the kitchen table make people think that the product or food tastes better.

## Index



### Fun Choices for Activities:

- Great Expectations- Explores why our expectations about the taste of a food can trick us into thinking a food tastes much better or worse than it actually does.
- The Name Game- Demonstrates and explores the influence that descriptive words and appearance can have on the way we perceive the taste of a food.



### Frequently Asked Questions:

- FAQ about Great Expectations
- FAQ about The Name Game



### Additional Information:

- Extended background on the basis for the module



### Handouts/ Tip sheets:

- Handy Tips Bookmark

## **Title: *Great Expectations***

**Background Information:** Do you have a favorite type of food or brand of soda? Could you tell the difference between Coca- cola and Pepsi if the labels were gone? The fact is that we usually taste what we *think* we will taste. Our taste buds can trick us into thinking food tastes better or worse than it actually does. This lesson is designed to use fun activities to make the learners aware that our expectation of how a food will taste influences whether we think it tastes good or not.

### **Objectives:**

- Develop and understanding that a person’s expectations about the taste of a food can trick them into thinking a food tastes much better or worse than it actually does.
- Determine the importance of appearance, naming, labeling and pricing that effect a consumer’s perception of the food that they are eating.

### **Materials:**

- Blindfolds (if available)
- Several types of foods for tasting activities: yogurt, cookies, fruits, brownies, etc.
- Paper plates and some nicer style of serving plates
- At least three brand of cola or type of drink

<b>Outline</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<p><b>Lesson Starter:</b></p> <p><i>Do you judge a book by its cover?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display a number of different types of foods and treats. For each food there should be an expensive name brand and a no-name general brand. (can use slides)</li> <li>• Ask the students which brand would taste better?</li> <li>• Get students to think about why they think a certain brand tastes better than the other</li> </ul>
<p><b>Content:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give the class some background information.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the importance and relevance of the objectives</li> </ul>
<p><b>Activity 1: Looks can be deceiving</b></p>  <p><i>This activity will emphasize the influence that the presentation of food can have on the taster's perception of quality.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Split the participants into 2 groups.</li> <li>• Serve a brownie on a paper plate to one group and on a more elegant plate to the other group</li> <li>• Have students rate the taste and appearance of their brownies</li> <li>• Discuss why they rated the brownies how they did and determine if the presentation had an influence.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> <i>If the activity proves the theory true, the group who received the brownie on the more elegant plate will rate the brownie as tasting better than the group who received it on a paper plate.</i></p>
<p><b>Activity 2: The Cola Challenge</b></p>  <p><i>Students will assess the effect that labeling and pricing have on taste expectations.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will be asked what their favorite type of drink is; facilitator should encourage brand loyalty to make a point.</li> <li>• Students will then be served different brands of cola anonymously and asked to identify which was their favorite tasting cola.</li> <li>• Students will see if their previous loyalty to a certain brand is due to labeling or taste preference.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Written Activity:</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell the students to imagine that they were going to have a dinner party at their house.</li> <li>• What would they do to increase expectations and make their guests enjoy the meal more?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Discussion:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does popular labeling and packaging influence our expectations?</li> <li>• Is it worth it to be loyal to a certain brand?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Review:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can our expectations trick us into thinking a food tastes better or worse?</li> <li>• How does appearance and labeling influence our perception of taste?</li> <li>• Does it pay to buy the more popular expensive brands?</li> <li>• Encourage students to be aware of tricky labeling and popular brands.</li> <li>• Distribute bookmarks</li> </ul>
<p><b>Extension Activities:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage students to try the cola challenge at home. They can buy a popular cola and a generic brand, then cover the labels and mix up the cans. They will see if they can tell the difference or not.</li> </ul>

## **Title: *The Name Game***

**Background Information:** Why are high end restaurants able to charge such high prices for their food? There are several reasons such as atmosphere, presentation and reputation, but one major reason is the descriptive labels that are used on their menus. Foods with descriptive names are rated as more appealing and tastier. Consumers are also willing to pay more for foods that sound trendy, luxurious, or yummy. The use of vivid adjectives triggers our expectations before we even taste the food. This lesson demonstrates and explores the influence that descriptive words can have on the way we perceive the taste of a food.

### **Objectives:**

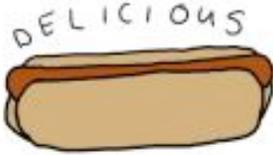
- Explain how descriptive labels in restaurants and at the kitchen table make people think that the product or food tastes better.
- Explore why enticing words can make consumers pay more for a product.

### **Materials:**

- Blindfolds (if available)
- Several types of foods for tasting activities: yogurt, cookies, fruits, brownies, etc.
- Paper plates and some nicer style of serving plates.
- At least three brands of Cola or type of drink.

<b>Outline</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<p><b>Lesson Starter:</b></p> <p><i>Do you want steak or a Glazed BBQ Sirloin?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you notice food descriptions on menus?</li> <li>• Does it affect what you order?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Content:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give the class some background information</li> <li>• Explain the importance and relevance of the objectives</li> </ul>

### Activity 1: Delicious Descriptors



*In pairs, students will investigate the effect that different names or words can have on the way that a person perceives taste*

- One student will be a blindfolded taster, and one will be the server. (Blindfolds are optional)
- The server will give different foods (cookies, fruit, etc.) to the taster; tell them the name of the food. The taster will be asked to rate the food.
- The taster is given the same food but the name is changed to a more elegant or enticing name. The taster will be asked to rate that food.
- Students will explore and describe the influence that the name of a food has on the way it is perceived

### Activity 2: Dining in the Dark



Nice restaurant hey?...  
Did I mention how lovely you look tonight?...

*This activity allows students to the influence of the name of a food on taste perceptio*

- One student will be a blindfolded taster, and one will be the server. (Blindfolds are optional)
- The server will give the taster chocolate yogurt, except they will tell them that it is strawberry flavored.
- The taster will then be asked how they liked the “strawberry” yogurt and how it rates to other strawberry yogurt they have had.
- Students will explore and describe the influence that the name of a food has on the way it is perceived

### Activity 3: Menu Madness



*This activity allows students to explore the influence of descriptive adjectives on food preference*

- Select two students to take the roles of restaurant owners and each will have a different menu to offer.
- One menu will have basic food names and the other has descriptive food names.
- The rest of the class is allowed to choose two items from either menu; the choices can then be tallied for the whole class.
- Discuss how the names of the menu items influence their choices

<p><b>Written Activity:</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students take the role of a restaurant owner or a chef.</li> <li>• Ask them to create their own menu that would entice people to eat from their menu.</li> <li>• Poll the class to see whose menu sounded the tastiest</li> </ul>
<p><b>Discussion:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why does the name of our food make such a difference?</li> <li>• Talk about how a normal household cook could use this information</li> </ul>
<p><b>Review:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foods with descriptive names are rated as more appealing and tastier than the same food with a less attractive name.</li> <li>• At home a cook can use words such as succulent, Cajun or traditional to cause their eaters to think the food tastes better.</li> <li>• Descriptive words can even allow one brand to charge much more money for their product than a product with a less appealing name.</li> <li>• Distribute bookmarks</li> </ul>
<p><b>Extension Activities:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students can compare the menus and prices for food at a fancy restaurant and a place like McDonalds.</li> <li>• Encourage learners that seductive descriptors can be used in settings other than a restaurant</li> </ul>



## FAQ's:

### **1. How can our taste buds trick us?**

Our expectations of how a food will taste can trick us into thinking a food tastes much better or worse than it actually does. If a food has a descriptive name, a nice presentation, a popular label, or even a higher price we expect that the food will taste good before we even eat it.

### **2. Why does the menu matter?**

There is a definite difference between a menu with basic food names and a menu that uses descriptive food names. A study by the Cornell Food & Brands Lab showed that in a college cafeteria, consumers bought foods with descriptive names such as succulent and tender 27% more than foods with a basic name.

### **3. How do descriptive names trigger our expectations?**

Labels can influence our expectations in several ways. Words can create an image or ideology that is associated with the food, words can make us think of the past and fond memories. Describing the taste, smell, and other characteristics of the food can raise our expectations.

### **4. How do brands help to raise our expectations?**

Our taste is influenced very easily, so small cues such as a brand name that you are familiar with help reassure you that the product must taste good. People usually claim to be loyal to a certain brand, but when the labels are taken off consumers really can't tell the difference between store brands, like Sam's club or Wegman's brand, and popular brands, such as Coca Cola and Pepsi.

### **5. How does the price of a product influence my expectations?**

The price of a product is another factor that can raise or lower our expectations of how it will taste. If you pay \$50 for a meal you are going to expect that it will taste amazing compared to a \$9 meal. If a wine or beverage is expensive we expect that it will taste good, so even if it doesn't taste good, we may perceive it to taste great. When buying food or beverages do not be fooled by the price...the cheaper brand may taste just as good.



## Extended Background Information:

Contrary to what we would normally believe much of our taste resides not only in our mouths, but our minds play a crucial role in the way that we perceive taste. Our expectations of what a food will taste like can “trick” our taste buds into thinking the food tastes better than it does. Popular brands, descriptive names, appearance, nice china and silverware and even toppings can trick us into thinking a food tastes better or worse than it actually does. There have been several studies that look at how these factors influence our perception of how good a food tastes. The research highlights key trends in the way that labeling naming and presentation influence our expectations. A study at the University of Illinois cafeteria explored the influence that the name of a food had on its appeal. They found that foods with descriptive names such as succulent or delightful calamari sold 27% more than food served with basic names like seafood. This teaching module provides two lessons with several activities to explore and explain how our taste buds can trick us.

The appearance and display of a food can also influence what we taste. Expectations can be peaked through manipulating the atmosphere. A nice atmosphere creates expectations that become reality in terms of our taste buds. Dimming the lights and dining by candlelight can also make a meal much more enjoyable. At the same Illinois cafeteria 120 people were given a free brownie dusted with powdered sugar. The difference is that 40 people were given their brownie on a white piece of china, 40 were given their brownie on a paper plate, and 40 were given theirs on a napkin. The people given the brownie on china rated it as excellent, those with a paper plate said the brownie was good, and the ones who were handed their brownie on a napkin said it was okay. This study proves that our expectation truly influence our perceptions of the food we eat.

Our expectations are also peaked by brand names and labeling. Some people claim to be 100% loyal to a certain brand of cola. The fact is that when the labels are taken off people cannot pick their favorite cola out from the other brands. People think that the popular brands such as coke are better than the others because of influences like advertising, packaging and pricing. Because people believe the popular brands taste better they are willing to pay more for those products.

### *Helpful facts about Eating Expectations*

- Our **expectations** can make a food taste better or worse
- Names, labels, and appearances affect whether we think a food tastes good or not
- Beware of the **HYPE**: popular brands don't always taste better
- Foods with descriptive names are rated as more appealing and tasty
- We are willing to pay more **\$** for foods that have enticing names
- Food served on a nice plate tends to taste better to the eater.



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