



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 5 to 7  
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# Looks Good Enough to Eat

## Overview

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This lesson looks at food photography and the different techniques used by food stylists to make foods look appealing in advertisements. The lesson begins with a discussion about the challenges involved in food photography and how traditional elements of photography may be combined with "food tricks" to achieve the desired effects. After reviewing some food photography "tricks of the trade," students plan and shoot their own food advertisements.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students demonstrate:

- an awareness of the different techniques used to enhance the appearance of foods in ads.
- an awareness of the format and structure of food ads.
- an understanding of their own reactions, as consumers, to these advertisements.

A good introduction to this unit would be to invite a food stylist or a commercial photographer into your class to discuss the methods they use to create food advertisements or features. There are many food stylists listed on the Internet, and local colleges may provide courses in food photography.

If this is not possible, another effective introduction is the half-hour video *Buy Me That 3! A Kid's Guide to Food Advertising*. (Look for it at your school board's media center.) This video features a food stylist demonstrating the techniques used to prepare food for a hamburger ad.

*Esquire* magazine, December, 1989, features an article entitled: "Why Our Christmas Dinner Looks Better Than Yours" which shows a few tricks of the trade in preparing a photograph of a "delicious" looking Christmas Dinner.

## Preparation and Materials

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**Note: For the jigsaw activity in this lesson you will need five computers with Internet connections.**

Have the following handouts available:

- Try to arrange for a photographer to speak to the class, or obtain a copy of *Buy Me That 3! A Kid's Guide to Food Advertising*
- Equipment needed: a regular or Polaroid camera, film, coloured bristol board, fabric, lights.
- Each student is to collect food ads from magazines.



- Photocopies of handout *Food for Thought*.

## The Lesson

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### Guided Discussion

With the popularity of home and cooking magazines, and advertisements for food products and restaurants, food photography has become big business.

In addition to being a good photographer, food photography requires special styling and skill to make food look appealing, realistic and appetizing on film. Preparing food for a photography shot is meticulous, precise work that demands patience and hours of concentration.

Sometimes, photographers will hire food stylists to help them prepare food. Other times, photographers will do everything themselves. People who are in the food styling business say that although it's lots of fun, it's also very challenging.

Begin by asking your students:

- What is a food photographer's goal when photographing food for an advertisement? (They want to make the food look as delicious as possible - their goal is to make you hungry just looking at their ad.)
- What challenges might a photographer face when photographing food? (Things melt, wilt, get soggy, dry-up under lights, or just don't photograph well.)
- What are some ways that photographers can make food look more interesting? (Lighting, background, undercooking or 'touching up' the food so that it looks better, composition and placement of food and props in photograph.) Show students some samples of food photography from magazines and have them analyze how these elements contribute to the total effect of the photo.

### Class Activity

In this activity students discuss how they would launch an online campaign for a group that is promoting tolerance.

- As a class, have students brainstorm and record the various strategies and tools they would use to get their message out and attract members and supporters.
- Have a student record this initial plan on paper while you discuss it as a class. Once you've developed something students feel confident with, move on to the jigsaw activity.

Distribute *Food for Thought* to students.

After describing these techniques or viewing the film *Buy Me That!*, ask your students whether or not they think that it is fair to create these illusions.

(It's important for students to understand that not all food stylists use food substitutes in their photography, and where food substitutes are used, it's not necessarily because they want to deceive consumers. It's just that it's often easier



and more practical to use food substitutes, which can be controlled and look better on film, than to use real food. Many food stylists who use real food still have to have a few tricks up their sleeves. For example, a food stylist who needs ice-cream for a photo shoot might use dry ice to freeze the ice cream rock hard, so that it can be handled and arranged as desired.)

- What foods do students think would be easy to photograph?
- What foods would be problematic? Why?

### Activity

Divide your students into groups. They are to plan a photo shoot for a food advertisement. Points to consider are:

- The types of food that they are going to use.
- The arrangement of the food for the ad.
- Techniques used to keep their food looking great in their final advertisement, as well as looking fresh for the duration of the shoot.
- The background used with the food (students may want to experiment with different colours, textures, fabrics to see how this affects the look of their product).
- The lighting to be used (what angle of lighting makes their food look bigger or better looking?)
- The camera angle when they photograph their product.

When students have completed their shoots, create a "food gallery" with the finished product, and an outline written by the students telling how they achieved their "look."

### Extension Activity

As a vocabulary exercise, have students incorporate "food words" with their photos to create their own food ads. Have students look at ads in magazines and compile a list of words that are commonly used in these types of advertisements. Then, have them create an ad with the list words they have selected and their photographs.



## Food for Thought: Making Food Look Good

### Have you ever wondered how they make food look so good in ads?

Because working with real food can be quite challenging, some food stylists use these "tricks of the trade" to make the food they photograph look delicious.

- That luscious-looking roasted turkey has been washed in dish washing detergent, cooked briefly, painted with ten coats of food colouring, and blowtorched (to give it that lovely roasted look!)
- Those natural-looking bunches of grapes are sprayed with baby powder deodorant.
- The molded cream pudding is hard as a rock, because it contains ten times the amount of gelatin than a regular pudding would. (We don't want it to melt under those hot lights!)
- The ice you see in that frosty beverage is most likely acrylic "ice," that refracts light better than real ice and doesn't melt.
- The rich-looking syrup being poured over pancakes? Motor oil works well here.
- Like that milkshake? It's a combination of food colouring, and whipped shortening! And don't go for the ice cream instead - it's shortening too!
- That great looking bowl of cereal on the cover of your cereal box is actually cereal and white glue, instead of milk, to prevent the cereal from getting soggy. (No one wants to buy a box of mush!)
- Those veggies that look as if if they were just picked and dew-covered? Mix glycerine into a spray bottle with water and the drops will stay on for about 15 minutes. (Glycerin can be used to give any food a juicy, glistening appearance.)
- Want your Barbecued ribs to look mouth-watering? Half-cook the ribs, paint with wood stain and BBQ sauce.
- Those french fries in a carton? Each one has been individually selected, from hundreds of fries, and secured to a styrofoam base inside the package so that they stand up straight and fan out nicely.



- That hamburger that makes you want to run to your nearest fast-food outlet, is the product of a process that includes:
  - frying the hamburger for 20 seconds on each side
  - using red-hot skewers pressed against the meat to give it that "grilled" look
  - painting the hamburger with food colouring to give it that plump, brown, juicy appearance.
  - picking the best out of hundreds of hamburger buns (strategically gluing on extra sesame seeds if necessary)
  - lining the buns with cardboard so that they don't get soggy
  - snipping and spreading the burger from behind so that it looks bigger in the bun
  - selecting only the most perfect condiments and securing them in place with toothpicks
  - securing the top of the bun to the hamburger with toothpicks
  - The finishing touch to a hot food photo-shoot? Artificial 'steam' placed behind the food to give it that 'fresh from the oven' appearance.

