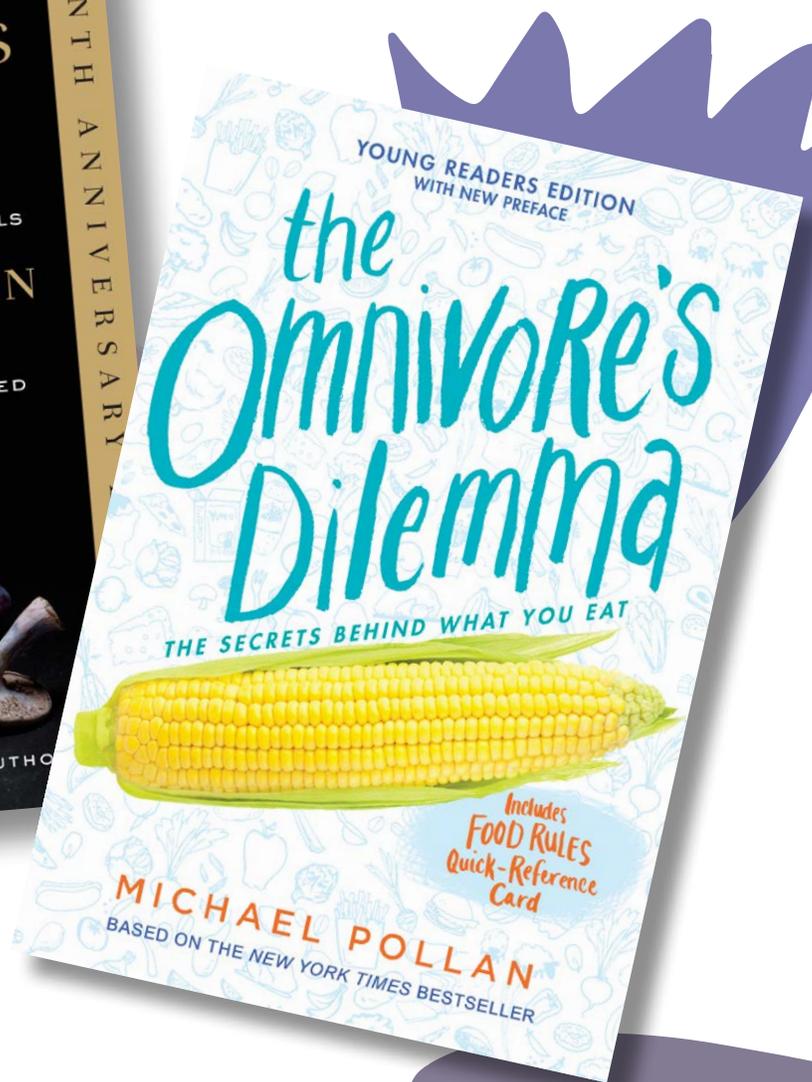
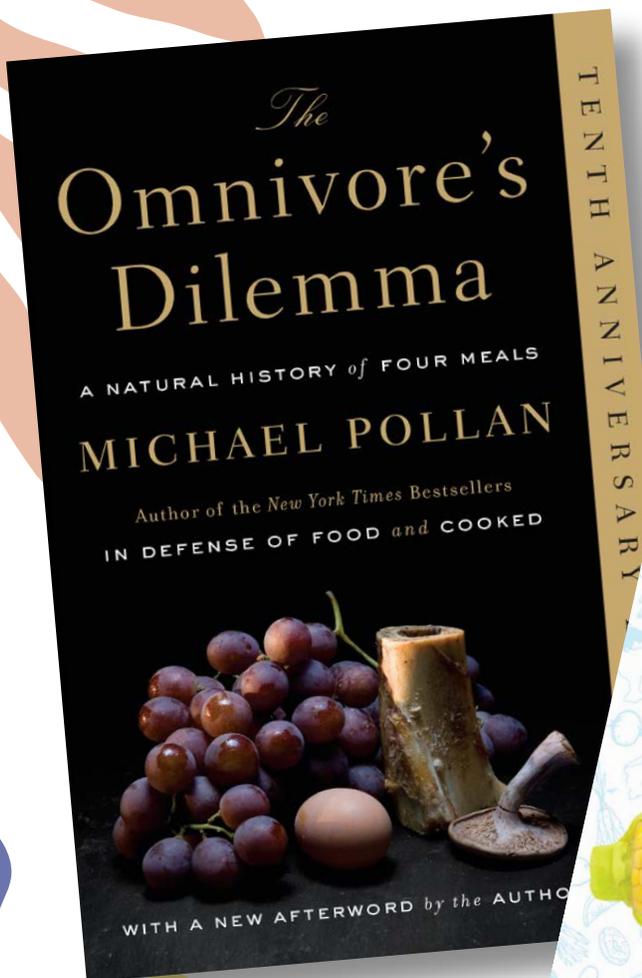


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FAMILY BOOK CLUB



ESSENTIAL THEMES

Review and discuss overarching themes present in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.

OMNIVORE'S DILEMMA: Compared to specialized eaters in the animal kingdom, humans face a quandary. The omnivore's dilemma refers to the age-old human problem of deciding what to eat. Pollan is interested in the modern omnivore's dilemma that Americans face, one that is even more confused by advertising, almost-unlimited food choices, food science innovations, and diet and nutrition advice. *What guides your eating decisions?*

CORN: Pollan shows us that corn is everywhere — from the grocery store to the gas tank — and asserts that it has taken on an unhealthy role in agricultural production and in the foods Americans eat. *What impact has the dominance of corn had on farmers and consumers?*

MAN VS. NATURE: Pollan is concerned about how innovative and clever at producing food humans have become without considering closely the many ways human technological advances conflict with nature. *What has industrial agriculture done to reshape the natural world and how does that impact us—soil to stomach? What could be done to shape things differently?*

FOOD CHAINS: To answer the question of what to eat, Pollan explores four food chains, looking at industrial, industrial organic, local sustainable, and hunter-gatherer systems of growing, processing, and distributing food. *Which of Pollan's four meals based on food chains would you choose to eat or feed your family?*

ANIMAL CRUELTY: The book includes details how the animals we eat are raised, contrasting the treatment of animals used in industrial agriculture with those at Polyface Farm. *How does sustainable agriculture involve animals? How could we change the way we raise animals for meat?*

FARMING: As he investigates different food chains, Pollan comments on the differences he finds between historical farming practices, traditional farming methods, and how an industrial/factory farm works. Pollan concludes that management-intensive grazing is more natural and sustainable than overproduction of corn and CAFOs. *Do you agree with Pollan? Explain how this model could work.*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the following questions for book club conversations.

INTRODUCTION

1. What is an omnivore? What does dilemma mean? What is the omnivore's dilemma?

2. What do you know about the four food chains that Pollan will follow in this book? What do you think you might learn?

PART ONE:

The Industrial Meal: Food from Corn

1. How is the corn we eat hidden or disguised? Are you aware of how much corn you consume?

2. What are the implications of deriving so many products and ingredients from one crop?

3. Why is hybrid corn a big deal? What impact did it have on farmers growing their own seed?

4. What is a genetically modified organism (GMO)? Do you have concerns about GMO crops? How are corporations such as Monsanto able to patent GMO corn?

5. How did the federal government help launch the chemical fertilizer industry? How does chemical fertilizer impact farming and diversity on farms?

6. How are fossil fuels used on an industrial farm? Is the use of fossil fuels to grow industrial crops, like corn, a sustainable method of farming?

7. What are farm subsidies? How do government farm policies hurt farmers? Who benefits from current farm policy? What role do you play in the continuation of America's farm policy?

8. What is a commodity? How do you think of corn, as a commodity or as food?

9. In looking at the graph of "Where the National Corn Crop Goes," were you surprised to learn how this crop gets used?

10. What is a CAFO? What is the impact of CAFOs on cattle? On humans? On the environment? On your own eating habits?

11. If you are a beef eater, how do you feel about eating it after learning about what cattle are fed on CAFOs and what they should be eating instead?

12. What does a "wet mill" do? What role does it play in processed food?

13. How did processed ingredients such as high-fructose corn syrup become such a big part of the American diet? How much are processed foods part of your own diet?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

14. The causes of obesity are complex and include environmental, biological, genetic, economic, social, and individual factors. According to Pollan, what is the fundamental cause of America's obesity epidemic? Do you agree or disagree with Pollan? Why or why not?

15. "The government says it wants you to eat healthy, then it makes sure that the cheapest calories in the supermarket are the unhealthiest." What policies do you think could help change that?

16. How did Americans lose the solution to the omnivore's dilemma? How can we get it back?

17. Why are food cultures important in solving the omnivore's dilemma? How do you think global industrial food companies affect food cultures around the world?

18. Pollan ends his look at the industrial food chain with a visit to McDonald's with his family. What does he mean when he says, "We would be eating alone together."?

19. What are the real costs—economic, human, environmental—of the cheap calories provided by corn-based food? How are we making "great

PART TWO:

The Industrial Organic Meal

20 In Pollan's thinking, how should the term "organic" be defined? How would you define it? What should we expect from organic foods?

21. How did the organic food movement start? What was a turning point in the organic movement? How has the movement evolved? What do you think Kahn means when he says, "This is just lunch for most people. Just lunch."?

22. What are the similarities between conventional industrial farms and large-scale organic farms? What are some consequences of industrial organic farming techniques?

23. Do you think that energy consumption and the resources for packaging and shipping organic foods should factor into what "organic" means? Why or why not?

24. What did you think "free-range" means? Do you think "free-range" is an accurate descriptor? What should be considered a "free-range" animal?

25 According to Pollan, are organic foods better for you? Safer? More nutritious? Tastier? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

PART THREE:

The Local Sustainable Meal: Food from Grass

26. Why does Pollan visit Polyface Farm? Why does Joel Salatin call himself a "grass farmer"?

27. Salatin calls his farm "beyond organic." What are the differences between how his chickens are raised and those produced by "big organic"?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

28. What is the “law of the second bite”? What does Salatin do to abide by that law and what kind of effort is involved?

29. How are grasslands good at reducing carbon in the atmosphere? What are some other benefits of grass farming to the land?

30. What is the Eggmobile? How do the hens act as a sanitation crew?

31. What did Pollan find to be the most morally troubling thing about killing chickens? Do you find anything troubling about killing animals for food? Do you think you could kill a chicken? Why or why not?

32. Do you or don't you “find it odd that people will put more work into choosing their mechanic or house contractor than they will into choosing the person who grows their food?” What relationship, if any, do you have with people who grow or raise the food you eat?

33. Do you think people's unwillingness to pay more for food is always solely a matter of how much they can afford? Why does Salatin say that clean food is “actually the cheapest food you can buy”?

34. What does it mean when different foods are “in season”? Do you think people are out of touch with the seasonal nature of what they eat?

35. In cooking his Polyface chicken, what does Pollan do to give himself “some distance from the reality of the slaughterhouse”? When you buy or eat meat, what, if any, thought do you give to the animal that provided it? “in season”?

36. Why do pastured animals provide meat, eggs, and milk that are better for humans? Better how? Why does “the type of animal you eat matter less than what the animal you're eating has itself eaten”?

37. Why does Pollan want to make a meal from completely from foods that he has hunted, gathered, or grown himself? What does it mean to be an “active and conscious eater”? Do you consider yourself one? Why or why not?

38. How did looking for food in nature change the way Pollan looked at nature? What do you pay attention to when you are out in nature?

39. Pollan decides that animal suffering is real, but different from human suffering. How are factory farms cruel to animals? What does the food industry talk about instead of animal suffering?

40. What conclusions did Pollan's experiment with vegetarianism help him draw? Do you agree with what he decided? Why or why not?

41. How are mushrooms different from plants? How is hunting for mushrooms different from picking food in a garden?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

42. How, if at all, has reading this book changed the way you think about food or what you choose to eat?

43. What does it mean to “vote with your fork”? What kinds of food chain are you voting for now through what you eat? Are you interested/willing/able to change the food you eat? Why or why not?

44. Why does Pollan say that “it’s an exciting time to be an eater in America”?

THE OMNIVORE'S SOLUTION:

Some Tips for Eating

45. Which, if any, of these recommendations for improved eating do you hope to embrace? Why?