

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Omnivore's Dilemma Reading Guide

Part I: The Industrial Meal

1. Name some ways that corn is "hidden" in food.
2. How has the number and diversity of farms changed throughout the years? What are some potential benefits of growing a diversity of crops and keeping a variety of animals on a farm?
3. What do cows eat naturally? Why is eating corn a problem for them?
4. What is HFCS? What is it made of?
5. Why is HFCS so helpful to soft drink companies and why does Pollan say is it such a problem versus cane sugar?
6. Why would Pollan say that the abundance of food in modern America actually makes the omnivore's dilemma worse?
7. Discuss the chemical components of a chicken nugget. Specifically, what is TBHQ?

Part II: The Organic Industrial Meal

1. What role did Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* play in making organic more mainstream?
2. What does Pollan mean by the term "industrial organic" and why do you think this term may be contradictory?
3. Describe the great debate surrounding organic foods.
4. What are some examples of how the word "organic" has been stretched and twisted to admit the very sort of industrial practices for which it once offered a critique and an alternative?
5. Describe the life of a Rosie Organic chicken. What does "free range" mean? Do these chickens ever go outside? Why/why not?
6. Why does organic lettuce last longer than conventional lettuce?
7. Explain Pollan's discussion of whether or not organic is better and healthier in terms of nutrients for you.
8. What is the NPK ratio? Why do plants need this? What else do they need?

Part III: The Local Sustainable Meal

1. What did Joel Salatin say that he farmed?
2. Compare George Naylor's corn farm to Salatin's Polyface farm.
3. What is the Eggmobile?
4. What is Salatin's electric blanket for his cows?
5. Explain Salatin's "free lunch".
6. What types of people would you stereotypically assume to be the market for Salatin's food? How does this stereotype match up with reality?
7. What does Salatin mean when he says clean food is actually the cheapest food one can buy?
8. Describe the "slow food" movement.

Part IV: The Do It Yourself Meal

1. Who is Angelo Garro? How did Pollan find him?
2. Describe Singer's argument.
3. Why would animal liberation not be a winning strategy?
4. Who is Temple Grandin? What is her job?
5. Describe how long there has been brutality in America's industrial food system. How does this compare with other countries?
6. Why did Pollan decide not to save steer 534?
7. What is Pollan's initial emotional reaction to killing the pig? Why is he surprised?
8. How do Pollan's feelings toward killing the pig change as he and Angelo "dress" it?
9. What's a mycophile?
10. Why are mushrooms so hard to study?

11. Explain why mushrooms might produce poisons.

12. Describe the relationship between morels and fire.

13. Why couldn't Pollan use the salt he mined?

14. Describe how Pollan's Omnivore's Thanksgiving was different from a typical meal.

15. Why did people tell Pollan that they couldn't finish the book? What is his response?

16. How did the book change Pollan and his family?