



**UNIT 3:
FOOD AND POWER**

L.31

THE INVALUABLE SEED

Note to Teachers

Seeds are key to our past, present and future. Seeds help link us to our past, while seed breeding helps to ensure agriculture’s resilience for the future. Diversity not only protects our food supply from the catastrophes of climate change, drought and disease, but also helps to promote a varied diet.

The video around which this lesson is organized also encourages students to see the breeding and saving of seeds as central to food sovereignty—that is, a community’s self determination with regards to its food supply.

Goals *In this lesson, students will*

- appreciate seeds as a carrier of life and culture
- understand the significant loss of seed varieties that accompanied industrial farming, and the importance of the efforts to preserve the seeds that remain
- learn that saving seeds protects the rights of peoples to choose the foods they eat

Objectives

- Students will build a list of characteristics of seeds from their own experience and from a short text.
- Students will use a video to deepen and extend their thinking about seeds, particularly as a source of environmental and cultural conservation.

Materials

- Jahren, chapter 3, from *Lab Girl*
- Discussion questions for the video
- “Seed: The Untold Story” (Siegel and Betz, 2016)
- Projection equipment

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Please use this margin to notate how to best adapt this curriculum to your students.

Instructions

Part I: Introduction

1. **FOCUSED FREE WRITE:** What is a seed? (5 minutes)
Share a sampling of students' responses.
Listen for functional knowledge as well as language. Perhaps write key ideas on chart paper or the board.
2. Distribute the two-page chapter on the seed from Hope Jahren's *Lab Girl*. Do a read around or ask students to read it silently and to annotate.
Ask students to look for the ways that the text might echo the ideas in their FFW, and what new ideas they encounter.
3. When students have completed the reading, ask them to add to or adjust their list.
4. Review key ideas that have come up so far in discussion.
5. Inform students that they will be watching a video that should enhance their understanding and appreciation of seeds.

Part II: Video

1. Distribute the attached handout. Ask students to read the questions in the advance of the video. Encourage them to watch the video carefully, but to take down a few notes that help them to answer these questions.
2. Show video. There is a 90-minute version and a 60-minute version. The 90-minute version is better, but the 60-minute version is also very good. Show whichever one you have time for.
3. Before you open the discussion, give students time to jot down notes about the film, answering the questions posed in the handout.
4. Depending on the time available, begin discussion with small groups. Ask your groups to go through the questions systematically and to answer them as completely as possible, using examples from the film to support their answers.
5. Ask one group to answer the first question, and elicit responses from the other groups. Use this technique to discuss big ideas, and to use the insights and information of subsequent groups to show how one can build an even stronger answer to a question.
6. Once you have worked through the questions, open the floor for further questions and comments.
7. At the end of class, return to the question posed at the beginning: What is a Seed?
Listen for the ways in which your students have developed and extended their ideas.



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Part III: Cooking Lab

Beans and rice are both seeds and, both separately and together, they are central components of many cuisines.

Because they are both “core” foods, as anthropologist Sidney Mintz describes them, the spices and sauces that cooks add to them often reflect the palate and preferences of a culture. Beans and rice, in other words, help to carry the culture and its identity through the specific bean and rice varieties used and the ingredients used to flavor them. Seeds, as the documentary illustrates, transmit culture from one season to the next, and from one generation to another.

In the lab, select a recipe that reflects the cultural origins of at least some of your students. For example, you could prepare a Dominican red bean and rice dish, or an Indian Kitchari. Encourage students who identify with those cultural origins to talk about the dish, and to imagine a world where those beans and rice are no longer available.



This program is made possible by generous support from Unilever.



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“SEED: THE UNTOLD STORY”

(Siegel and Betz, 2016)

Seeds speak to issues of culture, our relationships to the environment, and questions of power. This documentary explores seeds’ multifaceted meanings.

Questions for Consideration:

1. Will Bonsai uses the image of the “ark” to describe his work as a seed saver. What does he tell us about why he uses this term, and why he understands his work to be of such pressing importance?

2. According to the film, what is at stake when we lose seeds?

3. What role do Patrick and Joe Simcox play in the seed saving movement?

4. How did the Green Revolution alter agriculture? What examples does the documentary provide of the changes it set into play?

5. Many scholars stress the importance of Food Sovereignty. On the basis of what you have seen in this documentary, what is food sovereignty, why is it important, and how do we achieve it?

