

**EAST-WEST SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS SUMMER TASK
GRADE 7**

DUE DATE: September 2017

TASK: After reading the research articles provided that describe the different ways a fast food diet impacted the health of filmmaker, Morgan Spurlock, write an essay that argues your position on personal responsibility for one's health. Consider the question: Is big business really responsible for your health?

Support your position with evidence taken from both articles. You may use additional articles if you wish.

Questions? You can email Ms. Seide at sseide@ewsis.org

Weighing the Impact of Super Size Me

Is "Super Size Me" just another documentary? Or is it helping change the face of the Fast Food industry?

Last year, Morgan Spurlock began filming an experiment that would answer the question, "Is fast food *really* all that bad?"

His mission was to eat nothing but McDonald's for 30 days. During the 30 days he followed very specific guidelines. He had to try everything on the menu at least once, he could only super size a meal if offered, and -- most importantly -- if he couldn't get it over the McDonald's counter, he couldn't eat it. These rules weren't arbitrary. They were determined as a result of Judge Robert Sweet's 64 page decision which dismissed the case of Pelman v. McDonald's. This was the well known case which inspired Spurlock's dive into the world of Biggie Fries and McFlurries. I'm sure you've heard about it. A bunch of obese teens and their parents decided to sue McDonald's for making them fat. Ah, crazy lawsuits. Almost more typically American than obesity.

The case was in fact dismissed because the teens' attorneys failed to show that a McDonald's-only diet could alone cause serious health problems. When he heard about Pelman v. McDonald's on the news after a filling Thanksgiving feast, Morgan Spurlock decided to take the matter into his own hands. Maybe the lawyers couldn't prove beyond a reasonable doubt that McDonald's can be lethal, but then they probably weren't willing to eat nothing but McFood for 30 days. Well, Spurlock was. And lucky for us, and for the fat land we call America, he filmed it.

He starts out by consulting three physicians and a nutritionist, the same professionals who will track his progress and health over the course of the month. They all say his starting health is above average for someone his age. They also all say he will most probably gain a bit of weight on his McDiet, but that's about it.

Spurlock gets his first chance to super size a meal on the second day of the experiment. After taking about 45 minutes to eat his whole super sized happy meal, he then proceeds to vomit out his car window all over the parking lot. Yum. As he trudges through the 30 days, it's pretty clear that the diet is doing a lot of damage to our young filmmaker's health. However, along with obvious repercussions -- like rapid weight gain -- Spurlock experiences some surprising side effects. He becomes depressed and lethargic between meals, but feels really good when he's eating. The doctor tells him this describes an addiction. An addiction to fast food? Kinda gross, huh. Don't worry, it gets worse.

Okay, so now the serious stuff. In just a month, Spurlock gains 25 pounds, his cholesterol increases sharply, and he suffers severe liver damage. In the last few days, the doctor tells him that his liver resembles an alcoholic's and if he continues the diet much longer, it could entirely wipe out his liver. The results have everyone shocked. By the end of the film, the doctors are begging Spurlock to discontinue the diet.

So, what did the film accomplish other than destroying Morgan Spurlock's health? Well, it won the top documentary director award at the Sundance Film Festival. Then, six weeks later, McDonald's took the "super size" option off of its menu. Furthermore, McDonald's "Go Active" adult happy meals were introduced the day before "Super Size Me" was scheduled to open. McDonald's is also currently featuring ads where children talk about the healthy options they can get at their favorite fast food chain. Personally, I think it's pretty clear that McDonald's took action because of the film. In the end of the movie, Spurlock specifically asks the restaurant to take the super size option off the menu and to give him a choice besides fries and fries. The fast food chain, however, denies any connection between its recent changes and the documentary. Spurlock doesn't claim that his film is the only reason for McDonald's newly found concern for nutrition, but he does believe the film's launching helped speed up the process of bringing healthy alternatives to the menu.

Here's what I took from the movie "Super Size Me." Spurlock's documentary was not just an experiment in determining the dangers of fast food or discovering the state of physical health in our country. It certainly was those things, but it was more. "Super Size Me" was an experiment in filmmaking and activism. This teeny tiny movie with its great big voice has made an enormous impact. Corporate America is not an easy thing to change. There's a reason the McDonald's menu has been filled with fat, sodium, sugar, and cholesterol for years and years. It's because that's what people will pay for. Why should the fast food industry take into account 'corporate responsibility' when its interests are at stake? (These interests, of course, being profits.) But Morgan Spurlock was somehow able to scare a major corporation into changing. That's huge.

One relatively unknown man, armed with a low budget and a video camera, was able to make a highly popular film, send an incredible message, change the fast food industry, and most importantly, educate. Spurlock proves that if you give yourself a chance, you can give yourself a voice. And if you give yourself a voice, you've got all the power in the world. That's what activism's all about. In that sense, "Super Size Me" may be turning out to truly be "a film of epic portions.'

After Super Size Me: In Conversation with Morgan Spurlock

By [Paula Crossfield](#) on [November 16, 2010](#)

In 2004, [Morgan Spurlock](#)'s documentary film *Super Size Me* debuted. In it, Spurlock eats McDonald's food for 30 days straight. This extreme experiment sought to document the adverse health effects of the all-to-common practice of over-eating fast food, using himself as test subject. Indeed, Spurlock gained weight, scared his doctors when his liver went south, felt depressed, and more. But the film also became a sort of watershed moment, shocking general audiences and thereby playing a big role in spurring growth of the food movement. I met Spurlock recently while picking up my weekly farm share (we belong to the same local CSA), and he kindly agreed to talk about the food movement, changes in the fast food industry, and how his McDonald's binge has affected his long-term health.

McDonald's has gotten a lot of heat since *Super Size Me* came out. I thought it was amazing, for example, how much media attention that [non-decomposing Happy Meal photography project](#) recently got. Do you think your movie inspired people to be more brazen in taking on fast food companies?

I think people were already questioning them. Maybe it gave them reason to know they would not get sued afterward! I do think the film did open people's eyes, and at least opened the door to an even bigger conversation.

Are you surprised at how the interest in food and agriculture has grown since you made *Super Size Me*?

Yeah, I think there's a big trend, which I am also joining. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), locally grown produce, whole farmshares and landshares are happening now. It seems like there has been, even a post-Slow Food movement—people wanting to get a healthier, better, more sustainable way of eating and living, which I think is fantastic.

You were an early pioneer of the food documentary. Do you ever consider making others?

There are great films that are out there that deal with food, [and] I think if there's a way I can help champion some of those other filmmakers, I'd rather do that than go into making another food movie. For me, movies have to be something that if you don't [make them], then you are going to go crazy. If you don't tell this story, if you don't put it on a page, if you don't put it on film, then it is literally going to effect your brain from this moment forward. There may be something that comes along that kind of strikes me in that way, and if it does, I'll have to tell it.

In what ways did making *Super Size Me* change the way you eat?

It was really after the film that I decided that I wanted to become part of a CSA, I wanted to support this whole locally grown movement. I think the biggest thing that happened after that movie was that it really turned me into someone who reads labels. It made me a really conscious consumer in a way I never had been, and I think that's the greatest thing that could happen. I'm not going to tell anybody, *hey, don't eat fast food*. I'm somebody who still loves to have a good burger, but I'm not eating a burger everyday. I may have a burger once a month.

Do you still eat fast food?

Never. [laughs]. When I am in California, I go to an In-and-Out Burger, and that is a fast food chain. But it's a much smaller, and even more sustainable fast food chain. The meat when it comes in is still in a patty form, the french fries are still potatoes. There is a process of actually cooking food that happens at In-and-Out Burger. Part of the blessing of living in New York City, is that we can get all kinds of food fast. We can get good Italian food fast, we can get good Mexican food fast, I can get great Chinese food fast from a little mom-and-pop shop around the corner.

Have there been any long-term health effects following your McDonald's binge?

I think the biggest thing is my ability to gain weight. Ever since making the movie, I can put on four or five pounds in a weekend so easily. It's incredible how my body has kind of lost its resiliency. Part of that comes with age, but it also comes with your body having all these additional fat cells that weren't in your body before. As you create fat cells to store fat and you lose weight and those fat cells get smaller, they don't magically vanish. They are still in your body, still swimming around waiting for you to overeat so they can store more fat.

For those of us who will never conduct such an experiment—Could you describe in one word how you felt physically after a month of eating only McDonald's food?

Nauseous.

What do you think about the regulation of Happy Meal toys in San Francisco?

I think toys do make kids want to go to these places. But I think parents need to be brave enough to tell kids no. Parents need to claim some responsibility.

What needs to happen for fast food companies' role to change in our society?

One of the things that is already happening is they are making companies put the calories and the fat content right up on the menus, which I think is a great idea. I think the more you can arm consumers with information, the more you start to leave the choice in their hands. In the movie we were trying to find the nutrition information [in McDonald's stores], and it was behind a door or in the basement. They didn't even have it out. It's almost like they don't even want you to know how bad the food is. [I think they should] let people know. Are people going to stop suddenly eating fast food? No. I mean, people haven't stopped smoking cigarettes. That's a product [that] when used correctly will kill you. So I think we need to arm people with as much information as possible and then ultimately let them make that choice.

You are from West Virginia. What did you think of Jaime Oliver's Food Revolution?

I love Jaime Oliver and I loved his show. [But] I think that there were people, even people I've spoken to, who were turned off by the fact that there was a Brit in America kind of telling them what to do. I think that threw off audiences quite a bit and made it less accessible than it should have been. I know they are getting ready to do another version of the show, and what I think would be great in this next season is to really empower people to grow their own food. Go into these schools and build community gardens, like Alice Waters did. Get the kids hands in the dirt, get the community's hands in the dirt. Let them do things that not only support their schools but support their local communities.

What would be your last meal on Earth?

A home-cooked meal by my mom. She is such a great cook. I would have mom cook up some pepper steak, mashed potatoes and green beans. And I am a big pie fan, but I love her chocolate cake. I'd probably have her make a three-layer chocolate cake with white icing.

- See more at:

<http://civileats.com/2010/11/16/after-super-size-me-in-conversation-with-morgan-spurlock/#sthash.HCBINs6M.dpuf>