

School, Taste and Comté

Developing children's tasting skills and food awareness



Ecole de Port Lesney in the Jura, France is a school that understands the power of connecting with children through their taste buds. The school recently had a fantastic visit from Claire Perrot, who runs cheese tasting workshops in schools across the Comte region of eastern France. She brought her skills and experience as a professional taster into the classroom to teach children the importance of a positive relationship with food.

Comté tasting in school is carried out in two different ways.

- A one day course involving general knowledge, hands-on experience of the manufacturing process, perceptions and tasting.
- An extensive eighteen hour course in 9 sessions dealing with all the different aspects of tasting: the importance of the 5 senses; An experimental approach to flavour sensations (sweet, salty, bitter, acidic) ; retro-olfaction (the interplay of taste and smell) and trigeminal sensations (the physical effect of food: spicy, sharp, fresh)

Both these approaches aim at developing tasting skills and food awareness in children. In the process, they also enhance a number of individual and group skills.

1 - Le Comté à l'école (Comté in School)

The workshop is aimed at 8 to 11 year old children. Its purpose is to get children to recognise, differentiate and appreciate this symbolic product of our region. It teaches them how to taste and makes them aware of the importance of quality food. It takes one full school day (6 hours) and is divided into 4 parts.

1. Illustrated presentation of the story of Comté in its regional context and of the 3 types of work connected to it : farmer, cheese maker, affineur (cellar master).
2. Making of a mini Comté cheese. It is very much like the real thing except that one litre of milk is used instead of 450 litres.



3. Introduction to tasting. Presentation of the five senses completed with a tasting workshop: blind smelling and blind tasting of 4 savors (sweet, salty, bitter, acidic), discovery of retro-



olfaction.

4. Tasting of 3 different Comté cheeses. Children apply their learnings from the previous sessions to Comté. The children observe, smell then taste Comté and are encouraged to express their perceptions and sensations in their own words

2 - Les Classes du Goût (Learning about Taste)

These classes are promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. They are organized as 8 two hour sessions with a possible 9th session about Comté. Their purpose is twofold:

- to arouse curiosity, develop tasting skills, encourage children to express their perceptions and sensations in their own words.
- to enable children to acknowledge and tolerate their differences and their uniqueness. To enhance self esteem, self-confidence and autonomy.

Lesson 1 : The five senses in tasting

- Fun exercises involving various kinds of vegetables.

Lesson 2 : The savors

- Blind identification of the 4 savors (sweet, salty, bitter, acidic) followed by an application through four categories of food.



Lesson 3 : Smelling and memory

- Guessing game about smells, and experiments with retro-olfaction.

Lesson 4 : Sight

- Several games to reveal the importance of sight in choosing food and the way in which it can influence or even trick our sense of taste.

Lesson 5 : Touch and hearing

- Feeling and describing something that is hidden in a bag.
- Listening to “food” sounds (crack, fizz, pop...)

Lesson 6 : Taste in its larger sense

- Discovery of trigeminal sensations (astringent, fresh, spicy)
- The importance of chewing

Lesson 7 : Food heritage - Local products

- Tasting of 3 PDO (Appellation of Origin) regional cheeses.

Lesson 8 : Labelling, packaging. How to read a label

- Tasting of 4 different orange juices (from the most adulterated drink to fresh juice)

Lesson 9 : Comté tasting

- The last session is hands-on. The lessons learnt in the previous 8 sessions are applied through the tasting of four distinct Comte cheeses

Claire Perrot has worked in a variety of schools throughout the region sharing her enthusiasm with children from a diverse set of backgrounds. If you would like to contact Claire to discover more about her work, she can be reached at miam@claireperrot.fr Her web address is www.claireperrot.fr