

Is food merely an everyday necessity?

By Mai Ting Kai (17S31)

Fundamentally speaking, food is any source of nourishment that provides Man energy and vitamins pertinent for our survival. Following our earliest records dating back to more than 100,000 years ago, food had humble beginnings in the form of simple nuts, berries and roots. As Man evolved to become more intelligent, so did the sophistication in the taste for food; we learnt how to use fire to make food tastier, and food thus evolved from here into a multitude of varieties and types as history continued down its path to the present, from soups to bread to meat. In the present context, food is now no longer just a necessity, but rather a way to enjoy life. Leaving impoverished countries starving for food out of the question, food has become a way of life, involving many varieties, tastes, flavours and textures, all coming together in a sort of potpourri to fulfil our innate desire for delicious food. As such, in the modern context, in many developed parts of the world, food is no longer merely an everyday necessity, but instead a pleasure to live with.

Food used to be merely nourishment, but now has also taken on a new role in our lives – that is, to provide us with pleasure and comfort. This idea is especially prominent in the concept of fine dining. High-class restaurants providing sophisticated delicacies are growing in popularity around the world, employing the latest techniques in food science such as molecular gastronomy, the art of using chemical methods to prepare food. Fine dining provides us with a smorgasbord of appetizing, irresistible food varieties that would make anyone happy just to have a bite. Thus, we can see from here a correlation, that increasing numbers of people are now willing to pay for more expensive food to obtain that ‘high’ from consuming the said food, further reinforcing the notion that food has transcended beyond just being something to fill the stomach and sate the appetite. This can be supported by considering Singapore’s heartlands; in recent years, dedicated restaurants providing high-class delicacies such as Gordon Ramsay’s “Bread Street Kitchen” are growing in numbers to capitalize on the country’s growing hunger for delicious food. Therefore, this is an instance on how food is now more than just a necessity.

Another way to show that food is more than an everyday necessity can be seen in a different type of pleasure food provides, namely entertainment. Turn on any television set in the world and browse the channels; one is likely to find a cooking show, a food competition, or a documentary on food. Basically, food is now also used to bring us pleasure via entertainment, either as spectators or participants. The growth rate of the popularity of “food-for-sport” is unprecedentedly high – everyday, many new cooking channels are aired, hundreds of cooking competitions are held, and thousands of documentaries are played. In addition, many people treat their “food-for-sport” seriously, with new concepts such as competitive eating coming into the limelight. For example, Japanese competitive eater Takeru Kobayashi, 39, holds eight Guinness Records for achievements such as eating many hotdogs and meatballs. He trains for annual hotdog competitions by chewing mouthfuls of chewing gum at a time, and scarfing down cups of water and hotdogs-on-a-bun, alternating between the two, before hurling everything up only to repeat the process. Therefore, there is an undeniable notion that food is no longer just an everyday necessity, but also a form of entertainment as well.

On the other side of the coin, the aforementioned idea about food being not just a necessity cannot hold water in impoverished or under-developed countries around the world, such as Ethiopia and North Korea. There is a shocking disparity in comparing the two worlds, where one has too much food and uses it for pleasure, and the other barely having any to the point of millions dying from starvation annually. Obviously, in these places, food is literally to die for, and food is eaten simply for

survival, very much like in the early beginnings of Man. However, the lack of food can be very extreme in some places, for example, North Korea. Referencing the book "Dear Leader: My Escape from North Korea" written by Jang Jin-Sung, a high-ranking government official who defected and sought asylum in South Korea, the food situation forces people to literally eat off the floor. There are many cases of how people resort to eating the grass, leaves and even trees and plants growing in plants just to live another day, or how people would sell off their mothers and sisters as slaves just to sate their hunger. This exemplifies that despite food being a luxury to many in the world, there are even more people that find food to be a necessity that is hard-pressed to come by.

Ultimately, to people living in developed countries, food is no longer just a necessity to live by. It is instead a way of life, where it is utilised to bring pleasure in various forms such as fine dining and food-related entertainment. However, there is still a large majority in the world who treat food as a necessity, mainly attributed to an environment where food is scarce. Therefore, to strictly answer the question, food is no longer merely an everyday necessity to some, but we must keep in mind that to a large majority, it still is.

Comments:

Very well written piece - sensible arguments with consistent use of illustration which are relevant and current. Wide range of vocabulary, interesting turns of phrase and a good flow of ideas. Scope can be broadened further for a more comprehensive discussion.