

# Is food merely an everyday necessity?

By Lau Yi Yi (16A11)

It is common knowledge that food is universal — the fact that all living things need air, food and water to live is an oft-repeated axiom in science textbooks and it is almost impossible to escape its ubiquitous and necessary presence in our lives. Food is, without a doubt, an everyday necessity; we need to eat to ensure that our bodies have enough energy to function and, today, food is still a highly relevant concern to global sustenance. Non-profit initiatives such as the Food Bank and World Food Programme are still striving to ensure that developing countries with food shortages can meet basic dietary needs of the people and alleviate the perennial issues of hunger and malnutrition. Food, at its core, is understood to be a universal right and an everyday necessity; nevertheless, I believe that it has so much more to offer and it is a complex, multi-faceted aspect of life that plays a much more significant role in our society than we think it does.

It is first necessary to establish that food is an essential part of daily life and it is the only source of energy for the human body to carry out life processes. The practice of eating at least three balanced meals a day pervades most societies regardless of culture and nationality; not only that, it is regarded as the benchmark for health and wellbeing. The Health Promotion Board of Singapore constantly stresses the need for a balanced diet and healthy eating through nationwide campaigns and initiatives, such as implementing nutritious meal guidelines in schools. This evidently shows how we accord such importance to food simply because it is such an indispensable necessity in our lives and it definitely contributes to the health and wellbeing of a country's citizens.

However, it is myopic to regard food merely as an everyday necessity because of its pivotal role in shaping cultural and national identity. It is exactly because food is something that we inevitably encounter every day, that it is an intimate and complex aspect of the human condition with a longstanding tradition since time immemorial. Food, therefore, becomes a mechanism for cultures and ethnicities to express certain features or specialties which often reflect the ideals and values of different societies. This way, food transcends the boundaries of daily life and individual diets, becoming cuisines that serve as national emblems and sources of national pride. One key example that exhibits this is Japanese cuisine; the tea ceremony is an icon of Japanese culture and its detailed, heavily spiritual nature reflects its Zen Buddhist roots as well as the importance of harmony and humility in Japanese society. Traditional Japanese haute cuisine, also known as kaiseki ryori, has a reputation for using only the freshest of seasonal ingredients as a display of reverence to nature and the environment. Not only that, Japanese cuisine pushes beyond the barriers of locality and has made a name for itself around the globe, with countries like the United States and China offering their own versions of Japanese cuisine as well. All these are testament to how food can serve as a vibrant cultural export and an irreplaceable cornerstone of national identity.

In addition, food is also a powerful social force especially when harnessed with the limitless capabilities of technology and new media. Social gatherings and communal life have always revolved around food since the beginning of time; yet what makes it especially potent today is the use of food as a status symbol of social life, as shared in the form of Instagram photos and blog posts. The 'cafe hopping' scene in Singapore is a classic example of this; with the rising affluence of the middle class, more and more people have the time and luxury to dine at trendy, bohemian cafes. The demand is real: in the year 2015 alone, about 370 new cafes had opened and it is no surprise that they are often located at upper-middle class districts such as Tiong Bahru and Holland Village. The popularity of these cafes also comes at a time when the emergence of social media has allowed for greater proliferation of food culture; should one walk to any hipster café, it is almost a given to find youngsters snapping away at their food while they are eating. While some have criticised such behaviour to be mindless and superficial, it is undeniable that food is no longer treated as a mere

necessity. In this day and age, it has become a tool for people to display certain behaviours to assert how 'trendy' they are, and one cannot ignore how it has influenced the way we view food as a vital ingredient in our social lives.

Furthermore, in the age of consumerism and modernity, food also reflects and shapes different trends and patterns in our lifestyle choices. The food and beverage industry is a capitalist behemoth that offers virtually everything ranging from fast food to organically-produced artisanal cuisine. Given that there is an undeniably intricate relationship between consumers and food, the choices and options which we are offered with invariably influence how we choose to lead our lives. The most telling example of this would be fad diets. Veganism has been on the rise since the 2010s and many people, especially young women in developed countries, are now seeking healthier alternatives to a largely unhealthy food industry that is ridden with preservatives and other harmful substances. Many internet personalities on sites like Instagram and YouTube now specialise in 'vegan blogging' and share tips on how to prepare homemade vegan meals and such. Their influence is widespread, with some of them having millions of followers. These reflect a stark change in mindset from the past to present. Vegan diets were definitely not a necessity to many decades ago, but now, more and more people are embracing it as an instrumental basis for their lifestyles. This illustrates how food has a significant impact on how we choose to lead our lives and in the light of this, it evidently pushes beyond the mundane boundaries of mere survival.

In conclusion, food is a universal necessity for all of us — we literally cannot live without it. However, it is highly near-sighted to merely view it as a singular aspect of daily life, and it is only right that we recognise the vast benefits it can give us for a truly meaningful life.

**Comments:**

*Your last argument seems similar to the previous point stated in the fourth paragraph. Arguments could have been structured better to ensure clearer differentiation. Nonetheless, an insightful essay here that demonstrates your knowledge and passion for food! I especially like the refreshing and diverse examples given here. You have strong potential in language but do continue to challenge yourself further in the use of vocabulary.*



