

Lesson Plan: Pigs

Summary

In this session, Blade sketched a toy pig and shared both personal family stories and historical context. He explained how pigs split from other mammals about 20 million years ago and were domesticated independently in the Near East and China about 10,000 years ago. He discussed cultural reasons some societies rejected pork, the introduction of pigs to the Americas, and today's feral hog problem in Texas. He highlighted pig intelligence, health concerns around pork, and global consumption levels.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Yud97aLyOn0?si=jZkUHLph4tFIFGRX>

Objective

Students will learn about the biological history, domestication, cultural significance, environmental impact, and dietary role of pigs across human history.

Materials

- 9 Fun Facts about Pigs (provided)
- Worksheet (provided)
- Optional: images of wild boar, domesticated pigs, and feral hog damage

Introduction

Ask students what comes to mind when they think of pigs: farm animals, bacon, or wild hogs. Explain that pigs have a long biological history, have been domesticated in more than one place, and play complicated roles in cultures, economies, and ecosystems.

Activity

1. Read through the 9 Fun Facts about pigs as a class.
2. Discuss differences between wild boar, domestic pigs, and feral pigs.
3. Compare reasons for cultural acceptance or rejection of pork.
4. Explore modern environmental and health issues connected to pigs.

Assessment

Students will answer worksheet questions covering biological history, domestication, cultural context, feral hog problems, and dietary health concerns.

Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)
Understanding of pig history	Thorough and accurate	Mostly accurate	Some inaccuracies	Major inaccuracies
Cultural and environmental context	Clear explanations	Adequate detail	Limited detail	Lacks understanding
Participation in discussion	Active and thoughtful	Participates occasionally	Minimal participation	No participation
Worksheet completion	Fully complete and correct	Mostly correct	Partially correct	Incomplete

9 Fun Facts About Pigs

1. Suids are an ancient lineage. The pig family Suidae originated at least 20 million years ago, long before humans showed up. That deep timeline sets the stage for wild boar spreading across Eurasia and later giving rise to domestic pigs.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26526544/>

2. Pigs were domesticated in at least two places. Independent domestication happened in the Near East by about 7500 BC and in China by about 6000 BC, shown by archaeology and ancient DNA. The picture is messy after that, because domestic pigs and wild boar kept interbreeding.

<https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/128524>

3. Some cultures refused pork. Archaeological and textual evidence shows that in ancient Israel, pork consumption was avoided as a clear identity marker setting communities apart from their neighbors. This pattern carried forward into broader cultural and religious practice.

https://www.academia.edu/83670204/Pork_Consumption_as_an_Identity_Marker_in_Ancient_Israel_The_Textual_Evidence_JSJ_53_4_5_2022_

4. Pigs reached the Americas with Spanish expeditions. De Soto landed in Florida in 1539 with a herd of pigs, and free ranging plus escapes seeded early feral populations across the Southeast. Colonists and later settlers spread swine widely after that.

<https://swine.extension.org/pork-fact-book-2002-2003-history-of-the-pig-and-the-u-s-pork-industry/>

5. In the U.S., “wild hogs” are usually feral, or hybrids. Today’s free range pigs here are a mix of feral domestic swine, imported Eurasian wild boar, and their hybrids. Agencies classify them as invasive because of crop damage, disease risks, and ecosystem impacts.

https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/nuisance/feral_hogs/

6. Texas allows feral hog hunting year round with almost no restrictions. They are classified as invasive, so there is no closed season, no bag limit, and methods range from night hunting to helicopter hunts if properly permitted. Landowner permission is required, but otherwise Texas law is among the most permissive in the U.S.

<https://captainexperiences.com/blog/hunting-texas-hog-hunting-regulations>

7. Health arguments against pork focus on fat content and processing. Nutrition writers highlight that pork often contains more unhealthy saturated fat and sodium than beef, especially in processed forms like bacon and ham. These factors raise concerns about cardiovascular health and cancer risk.

<https://electwellness.com/health-fitness-blog/choose-beef-over-pork/>

8. Arguments in favor point to moderation and nutrients. Health outlets note that lean cuts of pork provide high quality protein, essential B vitamins, selenium, and zinc. When eaten in moderation and cooked properly, pork can be part of a balanced diet.

<https://www.eatingwell.com/article/8044814/is-pork-bad-for-you/>

9. How much pork people eat, globally and in the U.S. Pork is the most consumed meat in the world, making up over one third of all meat eaten. China leads in total consumption, while countries like Croatia, Serbia, and Austria top per capita lists, with U.S. consumption averaging around 66 pounds per person annually.

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/pork-consumption-by-country>

Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Review

1. How many years ago did pigs split from other mammals?
2. Where were pigs domesticated independently?

Discussion

3. Why did some Near Eastern cultures reject pork?
4. What differences exist between wild boar, domestic pigs, and feral pigs?

Data Analysis

5. Texas has no closed season on feral hogs. What does this tell you about the size of the feral hog population?

Reflection

7. Pigs are as smart as a toddler but not self-aware. Does this affect how you think about eating pork? Why or why not?
8. Considering both the health risks and benefits of pork, what advice would you give someone deciding whether to include it in their diet?