Food for Thought

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About the author

Summary
Joe is working on his uncle’s farm for the summer holidays. Then someone starts ruining the crops on the neighbouring farm because they are GM (genetically modified). Joe has a lot to think about – a lot of ‘food for thought’. Who is behind the destruction and why? Are GM crop trials safe or not? Who is right – the government and its scientists, or the protesters who trash these crops? Only a week later, during a storm, Joe has to decide. Can Kate, the daughter of a GM farmer, still be Joe’s friend? And will Anna, one of the protesters, still like him if he doesn’t help her?

Chapter 1: One summer, Joe reluctantly agrees to work on his uncle’s organic farm in Cornwall. He starts work. His aunt and uncle are worried about the genetically modified (GM) crops being grown by the neighbouring farmers, the Ladocks.

Chapter 2: Much to the annoyance of his aunt and uncle (and a girl called Anna, who is working on their farm for the summer), Joe makes friends and goes surfing with Kate, the Ladocks’ daughter. He defends Kate when Anna criticizes her, but is secretly attracted to Anna.

Chapter 3: After an encounter with a group of protesters dressed as vegetables and an afternoon’s surfing with Kate, Joe is taken by Anna into the neighbouring farm, where she explains the dangers of GM crops. They meet Kate, who admits that she was one of the protesters dressed as vegetables. Anna, however, is still unfriendly to her and refuses to go surfing with them.

Chapter 4: That night, Kate and Joe see Anna with a group of people looking at a map near a bridge. The next day, Anna denies being near the bridge, and Joe begins to think he cannot trust her. When she invites Joe to help her trash the neighbouring field of GM crops, he refuses but promises not to tell anyone about her plans.

Chapter 5: Anna and her friends destroy the crops but are seen by Mrs Ladock, who calls the police. Kate and her parents are furious with Joe for not warning them about Anna’s plans. Joe visits the Ladocks a few days later to apologize but also to explain why he couldn’t tell them. He had made a promise to a friend, and that was important to him. Eventually, Kate says she forgives him, and Joe realizes that he can trust her more than he can Anna.

Background and themes
GM Crops: Genetically Modified (GM) food is one of the biggest issues facing our society. It involves introducing different genes into a plant’s own genetic material to make the plant more resistant to pests, extremes of weather or herbicides, or to speed up the plant’s growing process. Some people say that there are many advantages to GM food.

Advantages:
• GM crops can give us healthier food, produced in a more efficient, environmentally-friendly way, as there will be no need for the use of pesticides and other harmful chemicals.
• GM crops will be cheaper and more convenient for farmers to grow.
• Food will be safer to eat; for example, allergy-producing proteins could be removed.
• Biotechnology companies will be encouraged to invest in research and development.
• It will be easier to produce cheap food in the developing world and will help ease world hunger.

The opponents of GM food, however, have a number of counter-arguments.

Disadvantages:
• No one knows what effect GM crops will have on the environment and natural food-chains. Genes used to modify crops could escape into wild plants, creating ‘superweeds’ that are resistant to pests.
• Other types of farming, particularly organic farming, will be badly affected.
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- Will GM crops disturb natural ecosystems and harm wildlife?
- Only multinational biotech companies will benefit.
- No one knows the long-term effects on health.
- GM technology can be used to create unnatural organisms.
- If GM crops are approved, other crops will be quickly and irreversibly contaminated.

GM crops in the world: At the time of writing, worldwide, over eight million farmers in sixteen countries grow GM crops, accounting for more than a quarter of all arable land. Crops are grown in the United States of America, Argentina, Canada, China, Brazil, Australia, Bulgaria, Colombia, Honduras, India, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain and Uruguay. The biggest producer is the United States. The four main crops grown are soya beans, maize, cotton and oilseed rape. No crops have been approved for commercial growing in the UK, but scientists have grown GM crops outdoors in the UK in tightly-regulated experiments called the Farm Scale Evaluation – a four-year experiment to assess the impact of growing GM crops on the environment.

Surfing: Surfing originated in Oceania and was highly developed in Hawaii by the end of the eighteenth century. It developed as a recreation and sport in California and Hawaii in the twentieth century. Surfing was particularly developed in the 1950s and 1960s in many other parts of the world. The first World Amateur Championships were staged in 1964. The first World Professional Championships were held in 1970. The best surf is found in Hawaii, where waves can reach 9m in height. Many Australian beaches, such as Bondi, also provide ideal conditions. The best surfing beach in England is Fistral Beach, near Newquay, Cornwall, where this story is set.

Friendship and trust: This story deals with the problem of friendship between children of families who are enemies. It also deals with the issue of trust.

Discussion activities

Introduction

Before reading

1 Discuss: Have students read the Introduction and answer these questions. (a) Why do you think the story is called Food for Thought? (b) What other meaning does ‘food for thought’ have? (Use a dictionary.) (c) Who are the people in the picture on the cover?

2 Check: Ask students to look at the pictures in the book and find on which page they can see (a) a protester? (b) a field of maize? (c) a surfboard?

3 Research: Ask students to find information from the Internet about organic farms in their country. They should find their names, where they are located, who the owners are and why they operate an organic farm. They should also find out whether they are private companies, non-profit-making organisations or government-funded businesses.

Chapter 1

While reading

4 Role play: Put students into pairs and ask them to imagine and act out this conversation. Student A: You are Joe. You want to persuade Tom, your good friend, to go on holiday with you. Say why. Student B: You are Tom. You have other plans and cannot go on holiday with Joe. Say why.

5 Discuss: Joe’s aunt and uncle don’t eat meat. Ask the class these questions. What is the word for someone who doesn’t eat meat? (a vegetarian) Why do some people refuse to eat meat? Is it a good idea or not?

After reading

6 Write: You are Joe. You don’t like staying on your uncle’s farm. Write an email to your mum telling her how you feel about your first day on the farm.

7 Research: Divide the class into small groups. Ask them to find information from books or the Internet about GM and organic crops. Have each group talk about these questions: How are plants genetically modified? What are organic crops? Do you think organic crops are environmentally friendly? Why are organic vegetables expensive? Do organic vegetables taste better than conventional vegetables? What are the arguments for and against genetically modified crops?

8 Artwork: A beautiful scene is described on pages 2 and 3: ‘The sky was blue and white clouds hurried across it in the strong wind. The fields were full of sheep and there were farmhouses here and there on the hills. Yellow wild flowers shone in the sun.’ Ask the student to draw the scene according to the description.

Chapter 2

Before reading

9 Discuss: Ask students to talk about these questions. Are there many shops where you live? Which ones do you like best? Where can you buy organic vegetables?

10 Guess: When Jenny saw Kate in the café, she became angry. Ask students to guess why. What will happen next? Give your reasons.

11 Check: Ask students to check whether their predictions in activity 10 were correct.

12 Role play: Put students into pairs and ask them to act out this conversation.
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*Student A:* You are Dave. You want Mr Ladock to change to organic farming. Say why.

*Student B:* You are Mr Ladock. You want Dave to change to GM farming. Say why.

**13 Pair work:** Put students into pairs and ask them to discuss the following: *How do you think Joe feels about Kate and Anna? Which of them does Joe prefer? Why?*

**Chapter 3**

**Before reading**

**14 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss these questions: *What do people protest about in your country? What do you think about protests? Are they useful?*

**15 Write:** Suppose the students are in protest against environmental pollution. They bring along their slogans to urge for environmental protection. Have them write a slogan (e.g. Ban nuclear power; Clean Air for Everyone).

**While reading**

**16 Guess:** When Joe asked if Kate saw the protesters in the market square dressed as vegetables, Kate replied with a little smile that Joe didn’t notice. Ask students to guess why she smiled.

**17 Check:** Ask students to check whether their predictions in activity 16 were correct.

**After reading**

**18 Research:** Ask students to find out information about what kind of weather and sea conditions are favourable to surfing. And under what conditions does surfing become dangerous? (e.g. sharks in the sea)

**19 Artwork:** Ask students to imagine they work for Newquay's tourist office. Create a poster about the sport of surfing at Fistral Beach. Say why you think Fistral Beach is the best place for surfing and why people enjoy it.

**20 Discuss:** Put students into small groups and ask them to talk about the following: *Joe asks Kate: 'What do you think about your father’s crop trial?' What does Kate answer? Do you understand the Ladocks' problem? What should they do?*

**Chapter 4**

**Before reading**

**21 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss: *What are the differences between small lies and big lies? Do you ever think of the results of lying? Have your lies ever brought you trouble? Have you ever been sorry for telling a lie? Why (not)?*

**22 Guess:** Ask students to guess which character is going to lie and what the reasons for the lie are. They guess if the lie is good or bad.

**After reading**

**23 Role play:** Put students into pairs and ask them to act out this conversation.

*Student A:* You don’t like GM crops. You think peaceful protest is the best thing to do. Say why.

*Student B:* You don’t like GM crops either, but you think action is better than words. You want to trash a farmer’s field. Tell your partner why.

**24 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss these questions: *Is Anna crying or not at the end of Chapter 4? Will Joe keep his promise to Anna? What will Kate say to Joe if she finds out about his promise to Anna?*

**Chapter 5**

**Before reading**

**25 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss:

*What are the differences between small lies and big lies? Do you ever think of the results of lying? Have your lies ever brought you trouble? Have you ever been sorry for telling a lie? Why (not)?*

**26 Guess:** Joe knows Anna is carrying out some secret plan and he feels guilty. Ask students to guess why. Have students state their reasons.

**While reading**

**27 Check:** Ask students to check whether their predictions in activity 26 were correct.

**28 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss these questions: *What rights do people have in the protest? What sort of actions in the protest would break the law? Do you think we shouldn’t break the law during a protest? Give your reasons.*

**29 Role play:** Put students into pairs and ask them to act out this conversation.

*Student A:* You are Kate. You want to see Joe again and think your father should forgive him. Tell him why.

*Student B:* You are Mr Ladock. You don’t want Kate to see Joe again. Tell her why.

**After reading**

**30 Discuss:** Ask students to talk about these questions. *Have you ever protested in public about anything? Imagine that you want to protest about something in public. What will your parents say?*

**31 Write:** Ask students to think of something that makes them angry or unhappy. Write a letter to a newspaper about it.

**Vocabulary activities**

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.