

Food, Culture, and Society

Pile Sorts

These two variations on pile sort activities complement class discussions about socially and culturally constructed patterns of eating practices and distinction in food practices.

Related Readings

- Douglas, Mary. 1972. Deciphering a Meal. In *Daedalus*, 101(1): 61-8.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. *Distinction*. New York: Routledge.
- Johnston, Josée and Shyon Bauman. 2014. *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*. New York: Routledge.

Pile Sort #1 (related to Douglas 1972 and structured meal patterns)

When students are in pairs or small groups, have them sort the first set of images into groups of similar items. Once all the groups have finished, have they look at how the different groups sorted the images. Discuss the following questions:

- What groups did your group come up with? Why?
- Were there debates within your group about the sorting? Over what details?
- How does the sorting activity reveal cultural classifications about food and the meanings that are assigned to certain foods?
- How do “food categories encode social events” (Douglas 1972)?
- What do we take away from this exercise?

Pile Sort #2 (Distinction pile sort)

Students get into pairs or small groups. In contrast to typical pile sorts, students are instructed to order the cards from the most refined/elite foods to the least refined/elite foods. Once all the groups have finished, students share their top 3-5 and their bottom 3-5 images. Discuss the following questions:

- What are your top 3? Bottom 3?
- Any debates within your group?
- How does the sorting activity reveal cultural classifications about food and the meanings that are assigned to certain foods?
- What kind of symbols and meaning are tied to food and certain eating practices?
- What do we take away from this exercise?