

TED[®] Extension, Category 3 Choice and Spaghetti Sauce

Overview

Mensa for Kids' TED Extensions are short, easy-to-use guides that help teachers, parents and youth use TED talks in a classroom or home setting. They are not written in a lesson plan format, but they do have a list of discussion questions, all at higher levels of thinking.



Watch the TED talk at:

www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/malcolm_gladwell_on_spaghetti_sauce.html

THINK ABOUT IT:

1. Gladwell says that Howard Moskowitz has perhaps done as much as anyone to make people happy over the past 20 years. Can you think of three other people who have made people happy in the last 20 years and how they did it?

2. Psychophysics is the study of how people perceive stimuli. It is a branch of psychology. Howard Moskowitz uses it to determine how people perceive food (in this talk), but it can be used to study how people perceive light, pain, or any other stimuli. If you could measure how people respond to stimuli, what stimuli would you rather measure — temperature or light?

3. The eureka moment for Howard Moskowitz was when he realized that they were looking for the perfect Pepsis (plural), not the perfect Pepsi (singular). Can you think of three other food or beverage items that people need multiple choices of to be happy with the product?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

4. What were the qualities Gladwell shared that made Prego® superior to Ragu®?



5. In the “bowl test” Prego and Ragu sauces were each poured over a plate of spaghetti. The Ragu went straight to the bottom (a thin sauce), while the thicker Prego sauce stayed on top of the noodles. Prego had better “adherence.” What are some of the qualities that make a good cereal? What ways could you test cereal to find the qualities people are looking for in a cereal?

6. When Moskowitz tested the Prego, he used 45 varieties with different qualities (sweetness, garlic, “visible solids”). What happened when the data came in, and how did Moskowitz deal with that issue?

7. People liked extra chunky sauce but didn't buy it because it wasn't available. Try to imagine some food item that you think people would like, but that isn't available right now. What would it be?

8. Gladwell describes how the food industry went from looking for cooking universals (the one best way) to variability (multiple best ways). How has this changed grocery shopping?

9. Gladwell says the difference between a coffee that people rate a 60 and one that people rate a 75 is the difference between a “wince” and “deliriously happy.” Do you think the difference would be as noticeable between a coffee rated a 40 and one rated a 55 or one rated a 75 versus 90? Are all gaps equally important? If not, where do you think the key divide is?



10. Gladwell says that by embracing diversity we find a surer way to true happiness. For what other areas is this true besides food?

DO IT:

- Read a study done on how teens respond to school food: www.mji-designlab.com/fileadmin/mji/articles/TeenCraveWriteUp102008.pdf and then design your own study of the foods available in your home or school. Create a survey, determine the qualities, and see how you can use descriptive language to make the food/beverages more or less appealing.
- Watch this 1984 video of a Prego commercial and analyze how Prego uses the code words for spaghetti sauce qualities and emotional triggers in the commercial: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2J87QekxQVI
- Conduct a taste test on cereal with your friends or family. Gather a selection of cereals, have the testers rate them, and see if you can divide cereal into classifications as Moskowitz did with spaghetti sauce.

READ ABOUT IT:

- Learn more about psychophysics here:
- www.bps-research-digest.blogspot.com/2007/04/introduction-to-psychophysics.html
- Read about the history of ten popular food logos here: www.neatorama.com/2009/01/22/stories-behind-10-famous-food-logos/

WATCH IT:

- A large variety of food commercials around the world:
www.bestadsonline.com/category/32/Food
 - This fascinating TED talk explores how we make choices:
www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/sheena_ayengar_on_the_art_of_choosing.html
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SURF IT:

- Visit Malcolm Gladwell's Web site: www.gladwell.com
- Visit Howard Moskowitz's Web site: www.mji-designlab.com