Animal, Vegetable, Miracle Study Guide

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle by Barbara Kingsolver

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Summary

Kingsolver, Barbara Animal, Vegetable, Mineral, Harper Colins, 2007. Kindle AZW file.

Barbara Kingsolver's family consists of her husband, Steven L. Hopp, and daughters Camille and Lily. They lived in Tucson, Arizona, where she began to feel that they were an unnecessary drain on local resources, especially water. The family owned property in the Appalachia region and spent their summers there. When Camille was a year away from college and Lily was about to enter third grade, the family made the permanent move to the farm.

They spent some time settling into their new lives with plans to begin a year-long experiment aimed at eating local food. They had multiple reasons and goals, but the main two were taste and the desire to lessen their impact on the negative side of food consumption. The taste was easy to explain. Food that was grown in their own gardens or in the gardens of their neighbors was fresher and naturally tasted better. The second part of their reason was more complex and more difficult to explain.

Most commercial farmers use an array of chemicals in their production of food. They spray for weeds and pests. Many modern commercial seeds are genetically altered to handle diseases and maximize yield. These changes have impacted taste and quality, but also introduce negative chemicals, including carcinogens, to the land, water, animals, and even the humans who consume them. Choosing organically grown produce can make a difference on this front, but large operations do not always consider what was on the land in previous years.

Probably the most important aspect of the experiment for Barbara's family was the desire to lessen their carbon footprint. Their food choices could do that. They stopped buying produce that was shipped long distances. They stopped buying food that had to be hauled in refrigerated trucks. They cited the extremely high cost of producing and transporting processed corn syrup and eliminated all foods that used it, including sodas. The cost of fuel for shipping and handling was a major factor in their buying decisions.

Another factor was the farms where the food was raised. Barbara talked about some “experts” who insisted it was the duty of Americans to buy from the foreign farmers who depended on their jobs as a means of life. She said that farmer lived a substandard life because of his dependence on foreign companies for a subsistence wage. She cited the work of organizations that were helping introduce programs that would ultimately help that farmer provide a better life for his family by raising his own food.

While vegetables and fruits were a big part of their experiment, they also needed to change their meat choices as well. They had stopped buying meat altogether for awhile because they hated the conditions the animals faced. They returned to buying meat but raised some of their own and bought the rest from local farmers, so they knew the animals had a clean, good life. Barbara and the rest of the family dreaded slaughtering their animals, but they did it as part of their lifestyle.

Both Barbara and Steven address the idea that people can make a difference in their own lives without going to an extreme. Barbara compares it to a person who begins to exercise three days a week, saying that is a difference that can matter, and that no one will criticize them for not exercising seven days a week. They each give suggestions for making choices that would lessen the carbon footprint of each family, pointing out that every small change can add up to saving the planet for the next generation.

Chapters 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1 is titled “Called Home.” Barbara tells how she and her family made the decision to leave their home in Tucson, Arizona, to live in a rural area of the Appalachians. Her family, including husband Steven and daughters Camille and Lily, planned to change their food choices. There were many aspects of their lives that made the decision easier. The country was in a drought and the desert area around Tucson was suffering. The people of the Tucson area were using water faster than it was replenished. There was a new canal bringing water from the Colorado River to the city. While officials said it was perfectly safe for human consumption, they warned that the water should not be used for fish. With no other option, Barbara and her family began consuming the water.

As the family left the state, they encountered a girl at a convenience store that was upset because it might rain on her day off. By contrast, a girl in a restaurant near their farm was glad to see the rain, but worried that it was raining so hard it might hurt the crops. Barbara points to that as a huge difference in attitudes between urban teens and rural teens.

Barbara touches on a number of concerns in the first chapter, including that many people have no idea how to raise their own food and often know nothing about how to find local produce. Barbara also points out that most people think dirt is dirty, and do not want to think about their food touching the dirt.

Other facts from this chapter are that 85% of the cost of food is for processing, marketing, and transportation, meaning the farmers get a relatively small share. Barbara also notes that America took a huge step in the wrong direction when corporations decided what crops they would buy from farmers. The lack of variety in crops purchased has resulted in a sharp decrease in the number of varieties produced. People eat far more calories than they need, mainly because they consume so much corn syrup. People have stopped being able to differentiate between what they need and what they want, so larges packages have become the norm.

Barbara then points out that many people know there are problems with their eating habits, and they are trying to find solutions. Some individuals read labels and look for food without additives. The unhealthy lifestyles have created a turn in longevity, with the next generation predicted to live shorter lives than their parents.

A sidebar by Steven indicates that people argue that commercial farming is the only way to produce enough food to feed the world, but he counters that smaller operations are more profitable and sustainable than commercial farms. Barbara concludes the chapter by talking about their plan to make good food choices for a year.

Chapter 2 is titled “Waiting for Asparagus, Late March.” The family had several months to settle into their new home and could not really pick an appropriate time for their experiment to begin. At the heart of their plan was to buy things only from their region unless there was an “extraordinary reason,” and that wanting it did not qualify as a reason. As she had in every home they'd had in recent years, Barbara created an asparagus bed. She felt the arrival of the first asparagus was a good time to begin.

Their farm was between two mountains with a spring-fed creek at the bottom. They chose the south-facing mountain for their garden spot because it was their best option. She talked at length about the life cycle of asparagus, a perennial that produces for years. Barbara states that most people try to spend as little as possible on food, but she points out that for just a little more, because can get fresher and more local food that is truly worth the cost and the wait.

In April, when the family had harvested asparagus from their patch twice, they decided it was time to begin their year of better food choices. They were not just trying to eat healthy, but also to eliminate their part in the fuel consumption to transport goods, meaning they would eat local and in season. That eliminated the possibility of cucumbers, which were shipped from southern states in that time of year. Barbara urged her family to think about things that were available to them, instead of things that were not. They agreed to buy olive oil and grains from the grocery, because there was no local option, but that would be all. Honey was readily available instead of sugar. They did agree that each person would have one “luxury item in limited quantities,” but they would find the best option that was most beneficial to the farmer. Steven chose coffee. Camille's was fruit, and Lily's was hot chocolate.

Camille desperately wanted fresh fruit but Barbara took them instead to the local farmers market. The first day of the market was cold and she bought something from each vendor, hoping to help encourage them to keep returning. She found rhubarb, which she called a “stand-in” for fruit. She said they might never have discovered some delicious rhubarb recipes if they had not made their conscious food choices.

Camille addressed one of parent's biggest problems with children – how to get them to try new foods. She said her mother never made her eat asparagus but always offered it. Camille eventually tried it and found it delicious. Though she wanted to keep refusing on principle, she loved it too much to pass it up.

In Chapter 3, “Spring Forward,” Barbara and Lily planted seeds inside and kept them on a shelf until it seemed safe to put them outdoors. Barbara noted that the farmers often rushed to take them inside when temperatures dropped too low. Barbara talked at length about how much she enjoyed looking through seed catalogs, finding the perfect varieties and discovering new options. Many seed companies no longer offer heirloom seeds – varieties that are not genetically altered. The main reason for heirlooms is that the farmer can save seeds that will grow the same vegetables next season. Genetically altered seeds do not produce a true plant on the second growing season. Barbara includes a list of heirloom seed organizations, including the Seed Savers Exchange and Native Seeds/Search.

Camille focuses her sidebar in this chapter on the nutritional value of spring greens, with attention to color, and ended with a recipe for Eggs in a Nest that uses brown rice, chard, and eggs as the main ingredients.

Analysis

The premise of the Kingslover family experiment is that most food has traveled great distances to land at the local grocery store. With that in mind, it is easy to make the next assumption, that it took a great deal of fossil fuel to transport, refrigerate, and process the food. Barbara's family wanted to eliminate, as nearly as possible, their role in that fossil fuel consumption. The next obvious question is why did they not simply do that in Tucson, Arizona, and why they made the move before starting their year-long experience. The answer is that they felt they were making just as big a drain on the local resources by trying to raise their own food in Tucson. There was a shortage of water and they felt they were making an unnecessary drain on that area, including - but not limited to - their desire to raise more of their own food.

Some readers may expect a “how-to book aimed at getting you cranking out your own food.” Barbara writes that this is not what she wants to accomplish with the book. Instead of urging one specific set of changes, Barbara, Steven, and Camille seem intent on making readers think about their choices and how to eat in a way that lessens the reliance on fossil fuels and promotes sustainable farming, all while consuming a product that tastes better.

Barbara exhibits her seemingly natural sarcasm and wit throughout the book. For example, she talks about “fad diets” and says that an “unofficial survey” indicates “Nine out of ten nutritionists view this as evidence that we have entirely lost our marbles” (Location 349). These kinds of comments appear fairly regularly and make it more fun to read.

Barbara talks at length about the financial impact of their choices, both in Chapter 2 and near the end of the book. At the end, she focuses on the positive difference they made in their food budget. Here, she talks about the fact that she had lived through a time when her earnings were pitifully small. Now she had the financial stability to buy what her family wanted from the grocery store, but they had voluntarily decided to make a change. She says she never wanted to pretend to be poor because she had really been poor. But she also believed the family could have good food without buying all the food items they wanted.

Both Barbara and Steven write about the heirloom seeds and the negatives of genetically-altered varieties. Commercial operations required the genetically-altered varieties and only a few companies monopolized the strains. In addition, some corporations patented genes and sued farmers who obtained the genes in their own crops, even if they obtained them through natural pollination. The reader will realize that Barbara and Steven are thoroughly opposed to conglomerates and their manipulation of

seeds and food, and it is left to the reader to decide if that affects their overall believability.

Vocabulary

nostalgic, tributary, vagrancy, provenance, plausible, petulant, surreptitiously, agnostics, proclivity, idyllic, ubiquitously, burgeons

Chapters 4-6

Summary

In Chapter 4, “Stalking the Vegetannual,” Barbara points out that most vegetables are flowering plants. The exceptions are seaweed, mushrooms, and pinenuts. She tells the reader to think of all garden produce as one plant that she called the “vegetannual.” It would send up edible shoots in the early spring, then leaves, flowers, and small green fruits that ripen. The final stages are hard-shelled fruits, and finally roots and tubers. She then compares those stages to the actual foods available to her family in their region, beginning with spinach, kale, lettuce and chard in the spring followed by broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and romaine. The early peas, baby squash, and cucumbers are next with green beans, peppers, and tomatoes by July. The “hard shell” produce included cantaloupes, melons, pumpkins, and winter squash, with the root crops wrapping up the year.

Barbara again addresses the need to wait for food in season, admitting that it was difficult to wait for some things, including watermelons. Steven talks again about the cost of transportation and that little of the money winds up in the hands of the actual laborers (farmers). He says people have stopped justifying the use of child labor in sweatshops, and that farming is similar. Buying produce from foreign markets mainly supports the corporations with little going to the farmer.

Barbara wraps up the chapter by pointing out the economic advantages of supporting a local farmers market. Buying there means the money remains in the community longer, supporting local businesses and organizations. Barbara says it requires a change of mindset from focusing on deprivation to focusing on availability.

Chapter 5 is titled “Molly Mooching, April.” Barbara opens the chapter by talking about how the previous owner, Stanford Webb, established the farm that Steven later bought. Webb had established fruit trees that were still in production. Webb's descendants still lived in the area and Barbara counted them among their friends. For a short window of time each spring, the family could find mushrooms in a former goat enclosure known as Old Charley's Lot. People of the region hunted mushrooms where they knew they would grow. They also found ginseng and a garlic-like plant known as ramp.

With spring near, they planted seed potatoes that had been stored in the bottom of the refrigerator alongside carrots, broccoli, peas, and onions. They planned what they thought they would need for the coming winter, such as two onions per week. She also talked about varieties available in specific regions and that cole crops, including broccoli and kale, could withstand the temperature variations of spring.

Camille's sidebar is about the shopping, which she says is easier when done mostly at the farmers market. The options are clear and she claims she doesn't miss what isn't there. She talks about the first strawberries of the year and how she does not have to

think twice before buying them. She ends with a recipe for Asparagus and Morel Bread Pudding.

Chapter 6, “The Birds and the Bees,” opens with Barbara writing that she apologized in advance to the postal workers at their local post office for the bizarre mail she might receive. The Postmistress was named Anne. One morning, she called with the news that Lily's much-awaited baby chicks had arrived and were “making a pretty good racket” (Location 1537) Barbara had allowed Lily to miss school that morning so she could be on hand to greet the chicks and get them settled. When they arrived at the post office, they discovered that a local beekeeper had received a package of bees and that honey was dripping out of the box.

When they arrived at school, Barbara was not sure whether Lily's absence would be excused. When they explained the situation, the secretary entered the code for “Excused. Agriculture.”

Barbara had welcomed a package of baby turkeys a week earlier. They were Bourbon Reds, a heritage breed Barbara selected because she hoped it would be the beginning of a self-populating flock. She said that some people “pretend” their meat was never alive and was never killed, but the farmer who raised meat for himself or for others does not have that luxury.

Lily planned to sell eggs in order to save money to buy a horse. Barbara had pledged to match the money she saved, meaning Lily had to save half. They had discussions before making the initial order about meat production and Lily agreed that she would focus mainly on eggs, but would also raise some roosters for meat.

Camille's sidebar at the end of the chapter is titled “Eating my Sister's Chickens.” She talks about explaining once that she only ate free-range meat, and what that meant, then went on to talk about the need to insure adequate vitamin consumption, and that the best way to do that was through a healthy diet.

Analysis

One of the issues Barbara addresses - and dismisses - is cost. She says many people can afford to spend more on food than they do. She never suggests that the produce at the farmers market or purchased locally from farmers will be cheaper, only that it will lessen the carbon footprint because of virtually zero transportation costs and that it will taste much better. While those are valid arguments, there are people who have stretched budgets as far as they can go and there are many people who are dependent on government assistance for the majority of their food. At one point, Steven says that there were government subsidies that help people buy fresh produce, and that was often accepted at farmers markets and local produce stands. He cited the overall amount of that subsidy but failed to address that the amount per household was typically very low, meaning people could not make a significant impact to their overall

spending through that program. As with the entire book, these are issues that each reader must evaluate for himself.

Another aspect of this is seen in Camille's attitude when fresh strawberries became available at the farmers market. She implies that she always considered those purchases at the grocery store, thinking about whether they were the right price and whether they would mold before she ate them, but she did not have to think about that at the farmers market. The strawberries are fresher at the market, but she implied that she does not consider the cost each year when the first arrive in the market. Not every buyer has that option.

Barbara goes into details about the reason she chose a heritage breed of turkeys for her flock. She says the majority of turkeys raised commercially are Broad Breasted Whites. They are bred specifically for fast-growing meat and are literally unable to sustain their own lives past a few months. They cannot reproduce on their own and new generations are created by artificial means. Barbara wanted to be sure that her turkeys would survive their first years, and that they would be a self-sustaining flock.

Vocabulary

terrestrial, angiosperms, conspicuously, appreciable, epicures, quixotic, paradigm, paradox, vegetarian, vegan, lethargy, margin, surmised, unfazed

Chapters 7-9

Summary

Chapter 7 is titled, “Gratitude, May.” Barbara talks about a tradition among those who grow plants that one should never say “thank-you” for a live plant. She said no one could explain the origin of that tradition, but that everyone was adamant about it, saying the plant would die. When they gave friends and neighbors the traditional tomato plant on Mother's Day, the older women responded by saying things such as, “Look at that.” Their enthusiasm was meant to convey their appreciation.

Barbara then tells about the chores on the farm, including more planting and lots of weeding. She said their labor reminded them of the reason for the cost of food. Barbara had a birthday approaching and they decided to have a party in May. They worried about feeding so many people while keeping to their recent plan but called on Kay, a friend who “cooks for a living.” She began to take stock of what was available from local farmers. They came up with “lamb kabobs, chicken pizza with goat cheese, asparagus frittata, an enormous salad of spring greens, and a strawberry rhubarb crisp” (Location 1859). Barbara outlined her work the week leading up to the party, including harvesting from their own early produce. The party was a huge success and she said no one voiced disappointment over what was not including, such as shrimp. At her request, guests gave her plants instead of gifts.

Camille wrapped up the chapter with a sidebar that included two recipes from that party.

Chapter 8 is titled, “Growing Trust, Mid-June.” Barbara writes that their farming friends all cite “lost mobility” as one of the biggest challenges of their lifestyle. She said mid-June was the only time during the growing season when they could get away for a short time. They mulched the garden thoroughly with newspapers and mulch to slow weeds, keep plants moist, and discourage blight. The day before they were due to leave, cherries began falling from their trees. They rushed to preserve the fruit in the freezer, putting an end to their “fructose celibacy” (Location 2012).

Barbara writes about the decreasing number of farms and the need for increasing diversity, specifically toward “cottage industries” and taking the risk for new crops. Barbara writes at length about costs and options, saying Americans spend “a lower proportion of our income on food than people in any other country” (Location 2046). People use cost as a means of defending poor food choices, Barbara states. Steven then talks about the cost of convenience food, including subsidies for corporate farms, cleanup for overused chemicals, and healthcare for food-related diseases.

The first stop on their family trip was to visit friends in Ashfield, Massachusetts, where they had tomatoes from a local greenhouse gardener named Amy. She and her husband, Paul, had experimented and come up with effective measures for growing in the greenhouses. Though they practiced organic gardening, Amy chose not to spend

the $700 it could cost for certification. She said local people bought her produce. They knew her and her practices, making the certification a moot point.

Barbara writes about organic farming and the efforts of large farms to still cut corners and to get rules on organic farming loosened. Barbara ends the chapter by asserting that there is no way to fully mandate the complexities of sustainable farming on a corporate level, but that farmers who produce for local customers are building a level of trust.

Chapter 9 is titled, “Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast, Late June.” Barbara writes about the tendency to hurry through everything and cites the advantage of looking at things in a way that might make the day better. Barbara understands that most people struggle to have time for everything they need to do. She says she is dependent on the dishwasher and that she does not object to eating out. She also realizes that most people do not have the ability to grow a significant portion of their own food, but she says that does not mean they have to give up cooking. She cites the positive impact of having meals as a family. She says it is reasonable to require the husband and children of the family to participate.

Barbara often depended on the crockpot during their year experiment. She doubled the recipe on complex dishes so they could eat another meal without having to cook it. Each Friday was pizza night so that everyone knew what was happening and what was expected. Cooking was also an important way for their family to include local foods in their daily diets.

Barbara talked about the satisfaction that came with creating dishes and meals, including cheese. The “Cheese Queen,” Ricki Carroll, invited Barbara and some friends to sit in on one of her cheese workshops. While making cheese seemed a daunting task to some, Barbara had been using Ricki's book, and making mozzarella at home. With some practice, her family routinely made homemade mozzarella for their meals at home, in just a half hour. Barbara also spent some time talking about milk, including that humans are not natural adult milk consumers at first, which is why many people are lactose intolerant.

Camille wraps up the chapter with a sidebar titled “Growing Up in the Kitchen.” She talks about her own memories of spending time in the kitchen and the impact that it has had on her own healthy food habits. She says it also made her more self-reliant because the confidence to make a meal in the kitchen translated to confidence in other areas. She includes a recipe for mozzarella and for “Friday Night Pizza.”

Analysis

Barbara's sense of humor comes through at the end of Chapter 7 as she talks about her 50th birthday party. She says she thanked her parents for giving her life, the farmers for food, and offered other thanks as well, but she did not say “thank you” to anyone for the

plants she received as gifts. She ends that by saying her garden is still alive, intimating that it might have died if she had said “thank you.”

Barbara addresses the idea that affluent people are more likely to depend more heavily on packaged meals or take-out options than their less-affluent counterparts. Ironically, Barbara refers to these less-affluent folks as mainly rural. She and her family have deliberately chosen a rural lifestyle but other people have no choice in that matter. An important aspect of this section is the recognition that affluent people made fewer good eating choices because they depended so heavily on convenience. Poor people may be forced into cooking more meals from individual ingredients, but the result is that they ultimately have a healthier meal than their wealthy counterparts. Barbara points out that the “link between economic success and nutritional failure” had been named “nutrition transition” (Location 2295).

Barbara's idea that affluent people make poorer food choices counters the idea that the wealthy people have the ability to eat better than the poor. There are some levels to her claim that the reader should consider before taking that at face value. The first is the definition of “affluent.” Barbara does not take any other factors into consideration, such as disposable income. Some relatively “poor” people with very modest incomes have little overhead (bills), and are, therefore, just as likely to depend on fast food and convenience foods as their affluent counterparts. By contrast, some very wealthy people hardly ever see their homes and depend on others to cook for them, including restaurants.

A valid point some readers may make is that Barbara and Steven are working to impact one aspect of the environment, but do not mention others. A family that depends heavily on convenience foods such as prepackaged dinners of the “heat and eat” variety, may have a stringent recycling program in their households. Others may be dependent on solar power and using a clothesline for drying their clothes. While Barbara's family made a specific set of choices to do their part, there are other options available. That is not to lessen Barbara's choices, but only to help readers remember that all choices with a positive impact on the environment would make steps in the direction Barbara and Steven advocate.

Barbara writes about the satisfaction that comes from cooking their own meals. She says the family sometimes experiments, changing recipes just to see the result. She has grown vegetables just to see what they taste like, and the family has made pasta, lattice-topped cherry pies, and homemade ravioli, just to see if they can. She says the satisfaction from completing a process is not unique to their family and not limited to cooking. She points out that people have hobbies such as knitting and building model airplanes, often because they desire the ability to control an entire process. She says workers who participate in all phases of a job were more likely to take pride in their work than a worker who just slaps one bolt on one part of every car that comes down the assembly line. Barbara suggests that people feel that lack of accomplishment with food as well, and that is why so many people make bad food choices, over and over.

BOOKRAGS

Vocabulary

facetiously, acquisition, prodigious, vegetal, analogous, bodacious, conglomerates, implicitly, denomination, quotidian, legions, remuneration, aplomb, caboodle

Chapters 10-12

Summary

Chapter 10 is titled, “Eating Neighborly, Late-June.” Barbara's family continued their vacation trip, stopping at a diner owned by Tod Murphy and Pam Van Deursen. The Farmers Diner served local foods, including locally-produced beef that never went through one of the conglomerate feed lots. Barbara said that was a special occasion for them since they seldom found restaurants that did not rely on beef from the giant producers. Barbara said that was the first time Lily had ever had a hamburger from a restaurant.

Tod and Pam had created jobs other than the diner, allying with other local businesses and tapping into every local resource to buy everything possible “within an hour's drive” of the diner (Location 2676). They even purchased buns and bread from a local bakery and another local business in the same town produced ravioli and spaghetti. They sought the best alternative for items not locally available, including coffee, which they bought from a “fair-trade organic” organization. Barbara writes that the diner was not trying to “preach” or even “educate” people about food, but was just serving wholesome foods to locals and guests while supporting the local economy. Tod said that restaurants could make a big difference if they just bought a portion of their food locally.

Steven writes a sidebar titled “Speaking up,” in which he says some businesses are able to buy more local foods, and that customers who make that request can sometimes make a difference in buying habits, which will ultimately help local farmers.

Chapter 11 is titled “Slow Feed Nations, Late June.” The family arrived in Petite Italie, Montreal. They visited relatives and checked out local food options. They left and traveled south again, to the Ohio home of Elsie and David, an Amish couple who farmed and ran a dairy with the help of their grown children. Barbara makes the point that David and Elsie are not “Audubon Club members” but are living a practical, farming life. They depend on natural farming methods because those are the best option.

Steven writes a sidebar explaining the negatives of extended chemical use in, including the creation of chemical-resistant bugs and weeds.

David was a writer and edited a small magazine about sustainable farming. The family used mechanical milking machines. Their Amish community did not abhor mechanics or technology as a whole, but only those things that could not improve their lives. The mechanical milking eliminated the need to haul heavy buckets of milk, meaning more of the family could help with the process. David said that limiting technology created boundaries that made their Amish community healthier. They used horses for plowing, which limited the size of their farms. They could not travel far, which maintained their close-knit community.

Barbara and Steven drove a hybrid car and they were driving across David's farm late one evening. At the low speed, the car was running solely on battery power, meaning it was very quiet. David had them stop and turn off the headlights, flashing them back on for a second. The field lit up with fireflies that were responding to the flash. The phenomenon happened several times before the fireflies ignored the flashes. They refer to the scene as their version of fireworks.

As an irony, Barbara writes about meeting David when he was in an area near her home talking to dairy farmers about sustainable farming. Those farmers were facing financial crisis because they had followed USDA mandates to expand their farms as far as possible and were now paying the cost of overpopulation and failing farms. The farmers gathered to hear advice from the one farmer in the room who had remained small and was thriving because of it.

Chapter 12 is titled “Zucchini Larceny, July.” The family returned to the farm to find that weeds were quickly coming through the mulch and taking over the garden. Some of those “weeds” were edible, such as purslane, but were growing where they should not be. There were other gardening chores as well, and they stayed busy. At this time, the garden began to produce in earnest. They harvested an array of food, including cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, and lots of squash. It was also harvest time for onions and beets, and a myriad of other gardening chores. While Barbara's family had not become commercial farmers, they had committed to the year-long project and, with the book as part of the project, the garden became an important piece in their livelihood. Barbara had to remind herself of that when the work became demanding, just as any second job would for anyone. She did find, however, that her time in the garden was relaxing in that there were no deadlines, telephones, or questions from editors.

She writes about the correlation between dependence on corporations and governments, and the possibility that structure could collapse, which pushes people right back to the farms. She also addresses the negative perceptions about that lifestyle.

Lily's flock was growing and she was looking for that one rooster that would make a good protector for her flock and be the father for future generations. One early morning, the roosters began to try to crow and the family gathered to listen, laughing hysterically at the attempts.

Meanwhile, the squash plants gave off far more squash than they needed and they sought every possible way to use up the surplus. The squash grew to large sizes in a matter of a day or two, and the kitchen counters were soon overrun, even while Barbara and her family sought creative ways to use as much as possible.

Camille's sidebar is about a July get-together with friends, and their food choices. The menu was Cucumber Yogurt Soup, Grilled Vegetable Panini, and Cherry Sorbet. The recipes are included, along with several recipes for creative ways to use zucchini.

Analysis

Barbara talks at length about their reasons for avoiding hamburger from the large corporations and how that affected the family's buying choices. The family has seen the over-sized feed lots where animals stand in their own filth, further polluting the area, and eat food they would not naturally consume. Those animals are fed antibiotics that helps diseases adapt to a more aggressive and antibiotic-resistant form, and are stretched to their physical and psychological limits. Barbara's family's effort to support local farmers instead of big corporations is one of many aspects of their choice. An interesting aspect of their dedication is that Barbara packed lunches for Lily when the choices at school included hamburger. She says their choices were made deliberately, and that they felt their choices were worth the effort. That level of dedication may be difficult for some readers to believe, and some may feel overwhelmed by the level of work required. However, Barbara and Steven each write about the need to take steps, even if those steps are small, because all those small changes add up to big differences.

David makes an important point about the lack of technology and mechanics the Amish utilized related to the limits placed on their communities. They plowed with horses, which limited the size of the farm. Most modern readers may disagree with that idea because there is a modern mindset that bigger is almost always better. With that mindset, a bigger farm would be more productive and more profitable. Steven and Barbara argue against this mindset throughout the book. Barbara and Steven point out that a small farm usually produces more per acre than an oversized commercial farm. The small farmer makes decisions that lessen the impact on the environment and that ends with a better product. It is left to the reader to decide if these ideas are simply outdated, or if they hold merit in today's world.

Barbara talks about the excess of squash, specifically zucchini, and what that means for the small gardener. She insisted they lock the doors when they left home so no one could get inside to leave them surplus zucchini. While this may sound like exaggerations to the non-gardening reader, those who have raised squash will likely find themselves laughing in agreement. This is one of many places where Barbara's humor shines through, and where the reader who has experience raising gardens and animals will fully understand what she is saying.

Vocabulary

stalwart, domineering, abstraction, exhorts, transcends, ogliarchy, radical, tundra, amalgamated, intrinsic, gargantuan, nominal, acerbically, surreal, behemoth

Chapters 13-15

Summary

Chapter 13 is titled “Life in a Red State, August.”

Barbara sates that smaller farmers are being forced to make decisions as they search for ways to continue to survive as small farm owners. In some cases, those choices are clear; in other cases, the farmers are pushed to take chances in order to figure out new ways to make a profit. The Appalachian Market was one way some farmers came together to try to keep their farms. Overall, the farmers had a new market with a better way to sell their product, but it was still risky. At one point, farmers delivered tomatoes based on a grocer's agreement to buy. At the last minute, the grocer backed out, opting for a slightly cheaper product from a distant market. With no binding contract, the grocery store was free to do so. Many of the local tomatoes went to waste but some were donated to poor families in the region. A farmer who said they were glad the tomatoes were used, also pointed out that the farmers really needed the money from those tomatoes. He said the people who had the smallest amount of resources were often pushed into making big concessions.

Barbara kept a gardening journal with information about gardens from previous years. The goal was to help her remember what varieties did best and what should be changed for coming years. She says she records all the statistics about the first tomato each season, but just lists varieties and amounts by season's end. The family harvested 50 pounds of tomatoes in July, and 302 in August. She writes that country people rarely get a chance to experience excess, and that she does not look back at a single tomato with regret. She spent the month processing tomatoes to the point that there was never an empty sink and pots were constantly bubbling on the stove.

There were other foods to can, dehydrate, and freeze over the course of August as well. Green beans were picked almost every day and they had several methods of preserving them for their favorite recipes. Barbara writes at length about canning, including safe practices. She depended on the water bath method instead of pressuring for the tomato-based products, including pasta sauce. Barbara also talks about the convenience of those canned tomatoes, beans, and other vegetables for the coming winter.

Anyone who thought canning was an extreme measure had other options. For example, tomatoes could be grown or bought from a farmer's market in season, and frozen whole with the skins on. They can be removed from the freezer, a few at a time, for winter soups. A person who has tomatoes in the summer can also make large batches of fresh pasta sauce and freeze the results in bags large enough for a family meal. While that would not technically be “fresh” in January, it did not travel so it would still be local.

Barbara then writes about a local initiative called the Appalachian Harvest, which is a name brand that touts food grown exclusively in the region. She says it gave small farmers an outlet, though it was not always easy, and gave grocery stores a local option for their customers. The group organized every aspect of their marketing, including manning a local packaging house.

Steven presents information about the Federal Farm Bill, including the negatives. He says it morphed into “corporate welfare” that did little to help the actual farmers (Location 3628).

Barbara writes about the tendency to divide the United States according to urban and rural. She says her friends felt she lived far from “everything,” but she wanted a definition of “everything.” She had identified more fully with a rural lifestyle, even when she lived in urban areas.

The book moves to political thoughts, including that it seems reasonable for farmers, as a whole, to be conservative, and that they might be expected to vote for conservative political candidates. She said the country's political parties actually seemed to barely differentiate between conservative and liberal decisions.

Camille's sidebar in this chapter is about the work of August and how it affected her. She said that most adults, including her role models, are forced to push themselves to reach goals and expectations. While she said preserving tomatoes is hard work, she felt that doing that work gave her time to think in a way she was often denied. She cited the process as a welcome pause, and concluded with several recipes and a meal plan.

Chapter 14 is titled, “You Can't Run Away on Harvest Day, September.” Barbara and Steven woke on the day they were to butcher chickens and turkeys. Barbara writes that they dreaded what was to come, but knew it was unavoidable in their lifestyle choices. They had a surplus of male chickens and turkeys and needed to get them processed.

Some people prefer to avoid thinking about the fact that their meat was once an animal that wound up dead, mainly because people are so highly programmed that killing is wrong. If a person chooses a vegetarian lifestyle, Barbara says they still had to consider that thousands of animals, including birds, are killed by the farmer who used chemicals on the crops, or through the plowing and cultivation process. Barbara and her family chose to raise fowl so they could control the animals' lives up to harvest day, including what they ate and their quality of life. One reason for killing the roosters is that they will begin aggressively fighting when they become sexually mature.

Barbara cites a friend and neighbor, Kristy Zahnke, who raised sheep. Kristy said it was difficult to slaughter a lamb she had raised, but that it was a necessary part of life. She took the attitude that it was better to appreciate each day of life than to constantly look forward to - and dread - death. She hosted volunteers from an environmental organization and said many vegans ate meat raised at Kristy's farm because of the things she did right for the animals, the people, and the environment.

Barbara takes offense to those who promote vegetarianism by declaring that all animals are raised in cruel conditions, which is not true of many small farmers. Barbara says she is raising heirloom animals as one step toward “phasing out” feed lot facilities where animals stand in excrement. But she also points out that some places depend on meat because the conditions – including hot regions with limited rainfall – can support a herd of goats better than a vegetable crop.

Barbara writes about the process, including that the rooster flapped its wings after its head was severed, and that the beak made what appeared to be gasping motions, but that both were reflex actions. There were several children there and they were obviously curious about the process, including the internal organs. One of the children put on an impromptu “comedy show” with severed turkey heads, which Barbara admitted lightened the mood for the adults.

Camille wraps up the chapter with a sidebar titled, “Carnivory.” She talks about seeing cows in a huge feedlot and declaring she would never eat another piece of meat, and her parents' decision to join her in that promise, which they kept until wholesome, humane choices were available. She also writes about the difference in nutritional value between the animals raised in crowded feedlots or cages compared to those “grass fed” in natural pasture settings.

Chapter 15 is titled, “Where Fish Wears Crowns, September.” Barbara and Steven went on a vacation to Italy. They were always interested in attitudes about food and visited a farm where guests were invited to spent time helping with the farm chores or just observing. Barbara said she was on vacation and did not volunteer to help, but with her limited ability to converse in a foreign language, did learn some things and returned home with new seeds and some new ideas.

Steven's sidebar begins the history of “Victory Gardens,” which were implemented to help people fill the shortfall when many farmers joined the war effort during World War II. He goes on to talk about modern initiatives to create and promote urban gardens. He says the residents of Havana, Cuba, got 80% of their produce from the city's urban gardens. He concludes by saying the urban gardens can help filter air, recycle waste, and utilize rainfall.

Analysis

Barbara made the point that animals die during the course of business as farmers raise grain. Tractors run over animals and nests while thousands of birds and butterflies are killed by chemicals. The point is obvious: Choosing a vegan lifestyle does not eliminate the killing of animals, but should be one page in a larger set of food choices. Barbara said she personally agreed with the main principles of a vegetarian lifestyle, except that she eats meat if she knows the animal has “lived a pleasant, uncrowded life outdoors, on bountiful pasture, with good water nearby and trees for shade” (Location 3903).

Barbara also talks about the unrealistic ideas some people had, including a starlet who dreamed of creating a “safe haven” where chickens and cows could live out their lives. Barbara points out that the chickens would lay eggs and more chickens would hatch unless someone was constantly picking up eggs, and that domesticated animals have to be fed and cared for, or else they will die. Barbara goes on to say the problem is that most people never encounter farm animals, and therefore cannot really understand the necessities of farm life.

Barbara admits that their day of harvesting chickens and turkeys was grim in many ways, but they invited friends to help and shared a meal of local food, including a pair of roasted chickens – to celebrate the end of the odious chore. An important part of their ability to get through the situation was their tendency toward dark humor. For example, they put the chickens to be butchered in a special holding pen the day before. They referred to that pen as “death row." (Location 3860)

Vocabulary

minutiae, oenophile, insipid, sanctimony, numinous, apartheid, euphemistic, progenitors, predation, mantras, mayhem, impunity, consternation, purported, premise

Chapters 16-18

Summary

Chapter 16 is titled “Smashing Pumpkins, October.” Barbara expresses her belief that people have forgotten that a pumpkin is actually a food that can be eaten. She was happy to see a food section filled with pumpkin recipes, but angry when each began with canned pumpkin. Her family had one get-together before Thanksgiving and another on the appropriate day. She and her father faced the daunting task of trying to cut a hole in the top of a Queensland Blue pumpkin so she could scoop out the seeds and cook the pumpkin whole. Her plan was to make pumpkin soup and to use the pumpkin as a tureen. Barbara cautions the cook who plans a similar showcase event to be careful not to scrape too much of the flesh from inside the pumpkin and not to over bake it. Her creation collapsed when she placed it on the table, but the soup mainly ran into the crockery dish she had used for baking it.

Steven includes a sidebar titled, “Trading Fair and Square.” He talks about fair trade organizations that seek to fight corporate exploitation of farmers in favor of small farmers who are doing their best to use traditional growing methods, such as using leaf litter fertilizer instead of chemicals. Steven sought out one of these organizations when he chose where to purchase his coffee. He offers websites including www.transfairuse.org as a resource for those who wanted to make similar choices.

With fall's arrival, Barbara and her family wondered what they would do next. They moved on next to the root crops, mainly potatoes. Barbara's family planted an array, including Peruvian Blues and Yukon Golds. By October's arrival, they had put all their potatoes, carrots, and sweet potatoes into the root cellar with the onions and beets. They had also harvested several varieties of garlic. In addition, there were a few crops that continued to produce until frost, including tomatoes, egg plants, basil, and the peppers.

Camille presents readers with information about potatoes, including that dietitians alternately applaud or disapprove potatoes. She concludes with ways to use root vegetables any time of the year, including early potatoes, and a menu plan.

Chapter 17 it titled, “Celebration Days, November-December.” While most of the family's food production was shutting down for the winter, Lily's chickens began laying. She had deliberately chosen breeds that would lay during the cold winter months so that her egg production would continue year around. Lily and Barbara had a discussion about Lily's chicken business. They came up with a price of $2.50 a dozen for eggs, which would let Lily make an acceptable profit while giving her customers an acceptable price.

Barbara suddenly discovered that Lily planned to sell eggs to the customers and that she would be willing to sell them to Barbara at the same price. Barbara said she wanted to encourage Lily in her effort but also wanted to teach her about the realities of a

business. They calculated how much Barbara had put into getting the chickens to this point and Lily was disheartened until they came to an agreement. Lily would pay only half the start-up cost, and would deduct $2.50 from what she owed Barbara for each dozen eggs the family consumed.

Barbara writes about the true meaning of Thanksgiving – the thankful people who ate from the food they had raised over the past season. She said modern celebrations are more about “pageantry” because most people have not literally raised their own food. Barbara's family celebrated their second Thanksgiving with more focus on meat than their first, which was more focused on vegetables for their vegetarian guests.

December brought snow. Barbara touches on Christmas, saying the family is a mixed bag when it came to spiritual beliefs, but that they did not celebrate the holiday “that commands its faithful to buy stuff nobody needs” (Location 4998). While the family continued to consume the food they had grown and bought from local farmers, they faced other problem areas. They had trouble buying locally-grown and ground flour, so bought a brand from Vermont. They had also fallen in love with some wines during their Italy trip, but continued their commitment for all-local meats and produce.

Steven's sidebar is about making bread. He made a lot of the family's bread using a bread machine, and he said it was easy to impress people but really took a minimum amount of work.

The family celebrated often during those months. Barbara said her mind naturally went back to the person who taught her to make a specific dish each time she made that food. She hoped to be building memories with her own daughters.

Camille's sidebar is titled “Food Fright.” She warns against letting food become a reward, such as a candy bar for good grades, but says some of her best memories involved meals. She says it is possible to turn an ordinary meal into a special occasion. She wraps up with recipes, including a simple corn pudding.

In Chapter 18, “What Do You Eat in January?” Barbara talks about her hatred of food columnists that present recipes for items that are clearly out of season, such as basil in January. Barbara says a person looking for healthy options has to forget the idea that only fresh food could be healthy. She cites all the food they had preserved from the previous growing season. She talked about the “broccoli and greens” that had been in the freezer for a few months, saying they were nutritionally and aesthetically fine for salads and other dishes. Those foods were still healthy options and made the basis for their meals. Barbara admitted she was “lucky” that her daughters liked steamed soybeans and did not beg for Twinkies, but said there were “about 20 million mothers in Japan” who have kids of similar inclinations, meaning it was not a “bolt out of the blue” (Location 5300).

Barbara also addresses the value of what they had done. She said other families made trips to the beach while her family was putting up vegetables and tending the garden. She states that this is a lifestyle, not a disaster preparedness exercise. She also points

out that not every minute of the process was been easy, and that she had been overworked but had ultimately returned to the kitchen, even when dirty dishes awaited, because it was a comforting routine for her.

Barbara addresses the financial side of her family's lifestyle. She says they had harvested $4,410 worth of chickens, turkeys, and produce over the season. There were “value-added” items, including the preserved foods waiting in jars and Lily's continuing egg production. In addition, they saved more money by eating mostly at home. She gave a total yearly income value of $7,500 to their “second job.” Their total grocery bill was “a fraction” of the previous year. She counts that a side benefit, saying the real goal was to “exercise some control over which economy we would support” (Location 5378).

Another point Barbara makes is that she, Steven, and Camille had not maximized their earning power through producing their own food. They could all have picked up more work and would have earned more money, but she says the ultimate outcome of that is that the extra work would have been “drudgery,” while she looked forward to breaking up her time away from her writing by spending it in the garden or the kitchen. She acknowledges that some people would think the amount of work is not worth the result. However, Barbara states that they are wrong in that assessment.

Barbara goes on to say that the question of the chapter, “What do you eat in January,” is not really rhetorical. Looking at all the food they had stored, the answer is “everything.”

Camille's sidebar was a story of a visiting friend named Kate who visited the family in Kentucky. Kate asked for bananas at the grocery store. Camille's mother refused, then told Kate about their choices. Camille said Kate has grown up to become “passionate about farming and eating organic food” (Location 5429), and that the moment in the grocery store was a changing point in her life. Camille concluded her section with recipes for winter favorites, including Vegetarian Chili and Butternut Bean Soup, and a suggested menu for a week in winter.

Analysis

Lily's egg production “business” was a learning experience for Lily, but it was also a learning experience for Barbara. She was pretty much shocked when she discovered the Lily planned to charge her mother for the eggs the family used. She said she “balked” at Lily's plan but pushed her to consider other aspects of this “business” endeavor. The compromise seemed fair to Barbara, even though she still paid half the start-up costs and was buying eggs from Lily, even though Lily would eat some of those eggs. Lily was in fourth grade at this point and Barbara said she was the only one in the family with an entrepreneurial mindset. She wanted to Lily to face the realities, but did not want to completely discourage her.

Barbara mentioned that her daughters were willing to eat healthy food, such as endamame, instead of Twinkies. She never offered advice about how to change

children's attitudes other than Camille's story that her mother had continually offered asparagus until Camille discovered it was delicious.

An important part of Barbara's plan was to harvest and preserve local foods when those foods were in season. That meant a lot of work, even if they bought the foods at the local farmers market, but Barbara says it felt like she was “paying up front” for convenience food that would last over the winter. She points out the mindset people have about “healthy” food and the tendency to equate that only with “fresh” food. By her reasoning, food that she canned, froze, or dehydrated at home from local markets when those foods were in season were healthier options than the food she could purchase on the produce aisle at the local grocery store during the winter months.

Vocabulary

purported, premise, evocative, impunity, consternation, kitsch, capriciously, olfactory, cohort, comestible, credo, resinous, nemesis, omnipresent, recidivism, larder, cachet

Chapters 19 and 20

Summary

Chapter 19 is titled, “Hungry Month, February-March." Barbara discusses the rigors of winter. February literally translates in some languages to “the hungry month.” She says people of centuries past were dependent on the previous growing season for the food to get through February and into the next growing season. While her family would not have been desperate even if their own garden produced nothing, they were now more aware of the seasons.

During this season in Barbara's life, one of her turkey hens began to look droopy. She feared a contagious disease and quarantined the bird, which immediately perked her up. Barbara repeated the process until she decided to let the bird roam into the pasture where Steven was working. There, the bird sidled up to Steven in an openly suggestive way and Barbara realized the hen, which she named Lolita, was coming into sexual maturity. She was then faced with the problem of what to do next. Turkeys in commercial growing operations are reproduced artificially. Barbara had trouble finding any information about encouraging turkeys to mate naturally.

Barbara says that January, known as the “hungry month,” is nothing compared to March when the first shoots have yet to show through. She says most people do not look at March that way because spring has arrived or is very near, but there are still no fresh food options for a few more weeks. As they faced that time, they still had zucchini in the freezer, but their stores were dwindling down to almost nothing.

Barbara cites a local program aimed at teaching grade school children about gardening. Locally, a woman named Deni was in charge of the project. Deni created age-appropriate garden plans for each grade in the elementary school. For example, second graders planted plants that would attract pollinators, in keeping with their upcoming science lessons. Lily's class was planting a “Colonial garden” to enhance their study of Virginia history.

Deni was certain that gardening taught children more than how to raise produce. Chief on her list of positives was that gardening taught children respect “for themselves, for others, and the environment” (Location 5663). Deni also believed children learned about the connections between food and the land.

Barbara says the ultimate failure was for a parent to raise a child who was helpless to take care of himself. Barbara says there is a lot more focus on grades than practical skills. Barbara said she was proud of the fact that the students in her area would have a lesson in growing their own produce by the time they finished elementary school.

The first turkeys mated. The remaining turkey hens began to show signs of sexual maturity. They laid eggs but none seem inclined to sit on nests. Barbara had to change

her nest box layout to accommodate their habits. She considered an incubator but really wanted the turkeys to complete the reproduction process on their own. She especially wanted a turkey hen to care for her newly-hatched chicks, taking Barbara's influence out of the equation as much as possible. Finally, the hen she called Lolita settled down to sit on a clutch of eggs.

In her sidebar, Camille talks about moving out to start college a few months into the family's year-long project. She said the food choices at college were horrible and she longed for the better food she had eaten at home. She says her college education “may or may not” end with a good job, but that her farm education will be valuable throughout her life.

In Chapter 20, “Time Begins,” Barbara anxiously awaited the day the turkeys were due to hatch, but the day came and went without any signs of life. She, Steven, and Lily went on an overnight trip for a speaking engagement and a quick visit with Camille, but Barbara woke her family as early as possible the next morning to hurry home. There, she rushed to the turkey coop and found the hen named Lolita was still sitting on her nest, but Barbara heard peeping from the next box and saw a little head, still damp from the egg, peer out.

Barbara talks about how their attitudes had changed over the previous years. She mentions a time a vendor warned that there could be worms in the corn. Lily immediately recognized that they would be chicken food. Camille had pointed out once that they would someday eat the turkey that had raided the garden and eaten tomatoes. Barbara notes that the public had suddenly begun to talk more about local food and food-related issues than the previous year. She also said the family was not counting down the days until their year was over, because they were really not going to make many changes when the year ended.

Barbara writes that homemade pasta tastes better, but they would usually buy it for the sake of convenience, but that other facets of their lives hav changed for good, such as making their own bread, cheese, and yogurt. Barbara's friend Joan visited. She was making a documentary about global climate change and wanted to know how to reach that perfect middle ground of making people care without making them feel the situation was hopeless. Barbara said she did not have an answer. She says she was certain that doing nothing was not an option, because the children of the next generation would pay for that.

Barbara also pointed out that people tended to dismiss small steps when it came to conservation, though every small step mattered. Steven echoed that thought, saying local food and doing one's own cooking in lieu of packaged meals were two of many opportunities to do a small part.

Analysis

One of the recurring pieces of advice is that small steps matter. Barbara talks about the question posed by her friend, Joan, about how to make her audience care enough to do something without making them feel so overwhelmed that they gave up altogether. Barbara does not have an answer for that, but she does address the idea with her own readers. She points out the scenario of a man who has experienced a heart attack. If that man begins exercising three days a week, people will approve of his new choices and no one will tell him that he is not doing anything right unless he exercises excessively. Barbara says the same holds true for people who want to make a difference to the environment. She points out that small steps add up to making a difference.

Barbara says she plans to make some changes for the next growing season, including planting more flowers instead of focusing so much on vegetables. She also plans to allow herself the luxury of buying occasional items from other regions, including wine. Part of the family's plan was to eliminate the packaged foods that were merely more convenient than their homemade counterparts. For example, they made their own pasta, buying wheat from the nearest source they could find. At the end of the year, she notes that the homemade pasta tastes better, but that they will opt for the convenience of ready-made pasta in the future. That prompts a question about their true dedication to the cause, and whether at least part of their choices were prompted by their need to complete the year for the book Barbara was writing. It's left to the reader to decide.

Barbara writes at length about the mating process for turkeys and the fact that she wanted to raise the heritage breed so that her birds could complete the reproduction cycle on their own without any major human interference. That was why she opted not to buy an incubator. She wanted the net generation of turkeys to be raised by a turkey mother rather than by a human. She succeeded on that front, making her fowl project a success.

Vocabulary

contagions, husbandry, audacious, emblematic, nattered, sensate, quantifiable, trenchant, maw, caprice, trivial, coveting, arbitrary, quantifiable, consumption, parameters, audacious, constitution

Important People

Barbara Kingsolver

Barbara is a writer, wife, and mother who had a life in Tucson, Arizona, while her family owned property in the Appalachian region where they spent part of each summer. There came a point in time when Barbara was worried about the situation in Tucson and decided that her family, with no real ties to the area, was just one more family putting a strain on the local resources, including water. The family moved to the farm and one of Barbara's plans was for them to spend a year buying as much locally-grown food as possible, and to only eat what was available and in season.

A main part of this plan was to grow and produce food on their farm. That included fruits, vegetables, and meat. They also scoured local farmers markets for fresh, local offerings, and sought out regional sources for everything they could find. The exceptions were the few things that could not be produced locally, including coffee. For those things, Barbara and her family looked for smaller labels dedicated to sustainable, organic farming.

When the experiment began, Barbara feared the family would feel deprived and would eagerly await the day they could return to their previous buying and eating habits. The opposite happened. Each member of the family found they enjoyed cooking and eating together as a family, and relished the fresh, local food that became their everyday choices.

Barbara kept a journal and found that the family had saved some money in the process. They raised a garden, and kept chickens and turkeys for eggs and meat. She willingly put aside extra work to spend time in her garden. She notes that some people pointed out that all the canning and processing represented a lot of work. While Barbara agrees, she feels a huge sense of accomplishment and said it was well worth the year.

At the beginning of the next spring, when the experiment was officially over, Barbara and her youngest daughter began sprouting seedlings for their garden and prepared for another year of fresh produce. She does admit that they will expand their buying slightly with the seafood that had been unavailable over the course of their year and some other choice purchases, but feels their lives have changed for the better.

Camille Kingsolver

Camille is Barbara's daughter by a previous marriage. She contributes several sections to the book, including recipes and tips on seasonal menus.

Camille worked alongside her mother during their year of the experiment to eat as much locally-grown food as possible. She helped with preserving food and creating menus, and did some of the cooking. As the experiment began, she thought it would be difficult

to give up the fruit she loved so much. Instead, she found that she was thrilled when the local, in-season choices were so much tastier than their supermarket counterparts.

Camille went away to college when the family was five months into the experiment, and her perspective is important because she had the opportunity to drop all her newly-acquired eating habits once she was away from her mother's home. She did not, but found herself paying attention to the food available to her as a young college student. She eventually located small restaurants that depended on local food, and she began buying most of her food from there. She enjoyed returning home, partly because of the food and partly because of the strong family connections that had been forged.

Camille points out that most people of her generation are far removed from the agricultural lifestyle. They do not think about where their food comes from or even realize that it tastes better if it is fresh and organic. She seems to believe that it is mainly because they have not been given the information to make informed decisions. She touts how a brief visit to Camille's family farm changed her friend's, Kate, life.

Steven L. Hopp

Barbara's husband, Steven authors sections of the book which appear mainly as sidebars. He seems dedicated to making the farm and their food experiment a success, and he gives a lot of information about groups and resources related to the topics being discussed in each chapter. His writing is much more impersonal, making him less a part of the story and more a part of the research.

Lily

Lily is the daughter of Barbara and Steven, and the youngest of the family. She had always been interested in agriculture and was compliant about the family's decision to move to the Appalachian region to live and work on a farm. Her main contribution to the project was her chickens. She was in third grade when they made the move and she began a business of raising chickens for egg production in order to save money to buy a horse.

Elsie and David

Elsie and David are Amish farmers in Ohio who invited Barbara and her family to their farm for a visit. They operate a dairy farm with the help of their grown children, and are well-versed on best farming practices. Though they are Amish, their community embraces technology that is helpful without damaging their overall way of life, including milking machines that eliminate lifting heavy buckets of milk and make it possible for youngsters and women to be more involved in the family business.

Ricki Carroll

Ricki Carroll is the “queen of cheese” and founder of the New England Cheesemaking Supply. She invited Barbara and some friends to one of her workshops and taught them all how to make cheese. Barbara says the process for soft cheese is much easier than she had expected, and that her family began to routinely made mozzarella cheese without even looking at a recipe.

Tod Murphy and Pam Van Deursen

Tod Murphy and Pam Van Deursen are owners of the Farmers Diner. Barbara's family stopped there during a vacation trip and discovered that all the food was locally-grown and produced, including the hamburger meat. Lily had never eaten a hamburger in a restaurant until that day.

Kristy Zahnke

Kristy Zahnke owns and operates a sheep farm near Barbara's farm. She feels that people tend to focus too much on future death than on living their days to the fullest. She admits that it is difficult to harvest sheep that she has raised from tiny lambs, but treats it as a necessary part of her life on the farm. She says some people change their minds about eating meat when they witness the humane and environmentally-friendly way she operates her farm.

Kate

Kate was a friend of Camille's who visited the family at their farm. She asked for bananas and Barbara explained to her that they would not buy them because of the environmental cost of transporting the fruit thousands of miles while there was an abundance of local fruit available right in their backyards. Kate grew up to become environmentally aware and passionate about farming.

Deni

Deni was a local "green-thumbed angel" who oversaw a project that introduced local children to gardening. She created age-appropriate garden plans designed to enhance other subjects.

Objects/Places

The Farm

Barbara Kingsolver and her family – including her husband Steven and daughters Camille and Lily – moved to a farm in the Appalachian region of the United States. The farm was situated between two mountains with a spring-fed creek at the bottom. There was a small area of land suitable for actual row crop farming, but they utilized it to the fullest. The farm included a coop for chickens and turkeys, fruit trees, and the house. There was evidence of their work over the previous summers spent on the farm, including an asparagus bed.

Farmers Markets

For Barbara's family, farmers markets provided an outlet for locally-grown produce that supplemented their diets during their year-long experiment. Both Barbara and Steven tout the successes of farmers markets as a means of getting local produce into the hands of local buyers.

Bourbon Red Turkeys

This is the breed Barbara chose for raising turkeys on their farm. She picked it because it is a heritage breed that can reproduce on its own, unlike the Broad Breasted White turkey, which makes up most of the commercially-bred turkeys for sale in stores. Barbara's family butchered and ate some of them, but kept some and one hen hatched out chicks as the book comes to a close.

Tucson, Arizona

Tucson is where the author lived with her husband and two daughters for years, until they moved to their farm. The city represents the ultimate in food consumption and the author worries about the city's use of water and resources, especially considering the lack of resources and the fact that water from underground is not renewing itself as fast as it is being used. Tucson is very much the opposite of their farm in the Appalachian region.

Asparagus

For Barbara, asparagus represents the first crop of the growing season and the arrival of spring. She meticulously created asparagus beds at every house she'd lived in for years, even when she was renting and knew she would not be there to enjoy the harvest.

Morel Mushrooms

Morel mushrooms are a wild variety that symbolizes the food that is available without any effort other than finding it. They grew abundantly for a few days each spring in a former goat enclosure called “Old Charley's Lot.” The goat was named Old Charley, prompting the name of the lot. It was basically the only place on the farm where the mushrooms grew.

Farmers Diner

Barbara and her family visited the Farmers Diner on their vacation trip. The diner's owners focused on locally-grown and produced food, including beef for their hamburgers. Barbara said their visit was the first time during Lily's life that they had eaten a hamburger at a restaurant.

Harvest Day

Harvest day in Chapter 14 referrs to the day when the family killed roosters and male turkeys for the meat. There was a dark humor associated with the day, including jokes about “dead chicken walking.” The family hated the process but accepted it as a part of farm life and as necessary for keeping their flocks healthy. They also approved of their way of raising the animals, which was vital in their personal goals.

Bananas

One of Camille's friends, Kate, asked for bananas during a shopping trip, and Barbara explained their goal of eating only locally produced food. Bananas were never local in their area but they had lots of other fruit choices, including blackberries. That made Kate think through the process and change her attitude, prompting her to focus on environmental issues as an adult.

February

Barbara said some languages translate February as the "hungry month" because the new growing season has not begun and the previous season is in the distant past. In Barbara's family's experience, they still had plenty of produce in the freezer and in jars to see them through the remaining winter until the spring crops began.

Themes

The Family's Food Choices

There were many dimensions to the food choices Barbara and her family made, especially during their year-long experience of focusing on locally-grown food. Their goals were to make choices that reflected their personal goals in life, which included doing right by their neighbors and making as little negative impact on the planet as possible.

A major point in their year-long experiment was the cost of producing food. They did not consider the bottom line a major factor in that cost, but had other criteria with a major factor being the amount of fossil fuels it took to produce and transport the item. The exact dollar figures were not important in their decisions, but they sought to make informed decisions about the overall cost in comparison to food available locally. Transportation was one of the simplest costs to consider. Bananas had to be transported great distances to reach their local grocery store, which made the family stop buying bananas altogether. Convenience foods, such as prepackaged meals, required shipment of multiple ingredients to the packaging plant, with the final product them shipped to their local store. The family also eliminated those.

The cost to the farmer was another of the family's considerations. They knew that major corporations often went into a poor region, usually a country other than America, with the sole intention of getting everything they could regardless of the costs to the local environment or the farmers. The farmers in those cases were treated poorly and earned subsistence wages. Some people argue that buying those products ensure that the farmer at least earns something, but Barbara and Steven point out organizations seeking to help those farmers create a better way of life for themselves, mainly by sustainable agricultural practices for themselves. Barbara's family did allow themselves a small number of “luxury” items, including hot chocolate and coffee. They sought out free trade options, which ensured that the farmer was treated fairly.

One of their changes was their decision to not eat meat processed from commercial feedlots. Camille made that decision for them on the day that she first saw one of those lots. In some families, a preteen who declared they would never again eat meat would have prompted some level of scorn. The relationship between Camille and her family was such that they agreed with her, and took on that commitment from that point. Instead, they sought out local farmers who produced meat in humane conditions without adding hormones and antibiotics.

In-season food was another major point of Barbara's family's decision making. With this mindset, the family looked for food currently in season and available in large quantities. Tomatoes and squash were two high-yielding vegetables on their farm and they canned that food for later use. Their cherries became ripe on the day before they were leaving on vacation, and they rushed to freeze the fruit. If they had simply left without

addressing that harvest, they would have missed out on gallons of cherries that were theirs for the taking.

Finally, the family raised their own crops without the use of herbicides and pesticides, and purchased local food from farmers who felt the same. They eliminated the impact on the environment and ensured that they were not introducing carcinogens and other chemicals from their food.

The Importance of Small Farms

Barbara and her husband own a small farm in the Appalachias, and originally had preconceived notions of how they wanted to operate that farm. They also had specific goals in mind when they made their move. They planned to raise a large garden and to buy local, organic, and small-farm foods as much as possible. They planned to make their small farm support the bulk of their needs for a full year.

This theme is addressed farther in Chapter 13. The conglomerates sometimes move into underdeveloped countries where they “take out the good stuff, ship it to the population centers, make a fortune, and leave behind a mess.” (Location 3696) The point is that some people argued that buying those products were a way to support the poor farmers and laborers in those areas, but Barbara countered, saying there were better ways to help those farmers without exploiting them. She cited organizations that provided starter stock and seeds, and taught the farmers how to utilize them to feed their families and made a profitable farm.

In another chapter, Barbara wrote about regulations related to milk. She cited a Virginia law that was written in very obscure language so that it was difficult to fully understand what the lawmakers intended. She said that one way to read it was that it would be illegal for anyone to make cheese in their own homes for their own consumption. She said it “takes imagination to see how some of these rules affect consumer safety.” She went on to talk about poultry, which typically has a “much higher threat to human health in terms of pathogen load,” but which the government did not regulate to the same extreme. She said the first explanation to come to mind was that the milk rules could be an effort to pacify industry lobbyists. (Location 2399)

Small farmers made better use of their land, according to Steven and Barbara. They raised more produce per acre than their corporate counterparts, while making a smaller carbon footprint. They also offered locally-grown, organic food to local buyers who were unable or unwilling to raise their own produce. Those small farms made fresh produce available to people who would otherwise have no access.

The small farms were also more likely to produce true organic food, avoiding pesticides and herbicides in their process. While some corporate farmers did meet the guidelines to be certified “organic,” many of them managed to skirt the intentions of the regulations while obeying the letter of the law. This meant their organic product was of a lower

quality than the small farmer who truly cared about raising quality produce in the most natural way possible.

Another example of this theme was that local farms kept money moving through the local economy. A person who bought produce from the area farmers at the farmers market would see that money circulating locally, much more than the person who spent those same dollars at a chain grocery store purchasing from distant markets.

Trends

All three of the writers talked about trends and the ways they affect the everyday lives and decisions of people. A major point in this theme is organics, including government regulations and consumer attitudes.

Barbara and her family visited David and Elsie on their farm in Ohio. David and Elsie are Amish farmers who put a high importance on family and their sustainable lifestyle. They have some conveniences, including a milking machine, but limit those to things that have a positive impact on their overall lifestyle.

David was the editor of a farming magazine about sustainable living. Barbara's family met David and Elsie when David was asked to speak to a group of dairy farmers in Barbara's area about the need for sustainable farming. Many of those farmers lived on farms that had been in business for decades and were facing issues that literally led to their possible ends. The farms had endured through a period of time when the USDA had literally insisted that every dairy farm operate at full capacity. The government regulations overseeing their operations forced them to be as big as they could be, with as many animals as possible and producing as much milk as possible. Those same farmers were facing crises because of their farming methods, and turned to David to teach them about sustainable dairy farming.

That trend toward bigger was not limited to dairy farms. Barbara talked about packaging increasingly large sizes of soft drinks and convenience food as a means of meeting consumer demand and of increasing sales for fast food and convenience food. The result was a spike in obesity and an increase in disease related to being overweight. She said people - including the government - were beginning to see that those choices were not healthy. Today's reader will see another step in that trend. In the years since the book was published, some restaurants, including fast food, post calorie information on their menus.

Organic food is discussed several times throughout the book and Camille talks about it in one of her sidebar sections. She says she loves the smell of organic food stores, which only exist because consumers have indicated adequate demand for those businesses. Organic once meant that a product met the complete requirements for being labeled as such. She points out that current trends are changing that, so that some foods have changed their labels to indicate “organic ingredients” are used in that product. She compares the phrase organic to the tendency to overuse a specific word

or phrase, with a meaning that changed over time with changing trends and perceptions.

All three writers also discuss chemicals. DDT was a highly-effective and overused chemical until its effects on humans prompted a government ban. David points out the chemicals that are being used by farmers have the negative effect of creating weeds that are resistant to herbicides and diseases that are resistant to antibiotics.

Barbara talks about another trend in the form of reviving heritage breeds of plants and animals. Some people work toward saving endangered wild animals from extinction, but Barbara points out that the best way to save heritage breeds is to reintroduce them to local farms, saving seeds for future use and encouraging natural reproduction in animals. The focus on heritage breeds has prompted groups to organize themselves with a goal of recruiting people who want to share seeds and animal breeds, all in the hope that those will not be lost to the next generation.

Attitudes

When Barbara's family prepared for their first trip to the grocery store after they began their experiment, she found them all focusing on what they could not have. She writes that that required a change in attitude and urged them all – including herself – to instead focus on what they did have.

Their new endeavor forced them to change their attitude about meal planning. Instead of deciding on what to eat, then going in search of the ingredients, the family began to focus on what was in season and available at that time. They took those ingredients and sought ways to use them. For example, when lots of tomatoes were ripening in the garden, they included tomatoes in many of their meals and canned them for the winter ahead.

The reader should keep in mind that Barbara's family already made many healthy, local choices, and had hens and small garden plots long before their move to the farm. This means their changes were not as dramatic as some families would face if they were looking to make the same choices.

Another example of this theme is seen in the agricultural attitudes of different regions. As the family packed up and headed out of Arizona, they stopped at a convenience store to buy fuel and snacks for the first leg of the trip. There had been very little rain in recent months but a cloud covered the sun for a moment while they were inside the store. The clerk was upset, saying she was going to be off work the following day and wanted to wash her car. When they arrived at their new home in the Appalachian region, a young girl was their waitress at the cafe where they had dinner their first night home. It began to rain and she expressed gratitude for the rain along with a concern that it would rain too hard, damaging crops and land. Barbara points out that the girl at the convenience store in Arizona had no idea how badly the area needed rain, but the girl at the cafe was fully aware that the farmers needed the rain.

Another example along the same vein is evident when Lily missed a morning of school to accept delivery of her baby chicks. Both she and Barbara felt it was important for Lily to help get them settled into their new home on the day of arrival, but Barbara took her to school after the chicks were safely at home. Barbara did not know what to expect when she took Lily to school but they explained it to the secretary, including Lily's statement that she was busy starting her new egg business. The secretary marked the absence as “Excused, Agriculture.” The fact that the school had a ready-made determination for that situation indicated that they placed high importance on agriculture as a whole. That would probably not be the case in urban schools. Even if the option was there, few students would likely ever miss because of agricultural situations, and the secretary would probably not be aware it existed.

The Importance of Family

Barbara and Steven have a mixed family, including Camille, Barbara's daughter from a previous marriage, and their daughter together, Lily. Barbara does not reveal a lot about their lives prior to their one-year experiment, but it seems that they were close before that began. Even before they moved to the farm, they talked about their desire to make better food choices as a family. They had a limited idea about how they would actually put that plan into practical application, but agreed to the concept as a family. It would likely have failed if not for the full cooperation of the family.

One of Barbara's main points is that cooking and eating a meal together everyday meant that the family had time to reconnect and unwind. She notes that every family faces busy schedules and has to make time to have dinner together if they want it to happen. Barbara's family's food was an important part of that time and they often made changes to recipes and experimented with new food, partly as a way to use local produce that was in season, but also as a way to spend time together. In this way, cooking became a family-shared hobby that gave them something in common.

Getting children on board with a lifestyle change like this would be a concern to most families, but Barbara raised her children to have an open mind about food. Camille writes about the fact that her mother always offered her fresh asparagus in the spring, but that Camille always refused to do anything more than touching a stalk to her tongue. In later years, she eventually tried it and found that it was delicious. Camille writes about her childish desire to continue to refuse, simply on principle, but that she could not hold out against how much she liked asparagus.

This theme was also seen in the lives of other people Barbara's family knew, with David and Elsie being one of the main examples. David and Elsie are Amish and operate a farm that includes a dairy operation. Their children have remained an important part of their lives as they work the farm. Barabara's family witnessed David and Elsie's family sharing meals and spending time together as part of their daily lives. David pointed out that the Amish do not refuse to consider mechanical additions to the farm but consider each with the possibility of what it would mean to their lifestyle. They do not use cars, for example, but depended on horses for transportation. That means their communities

remained small and tight-knit out of necessity. But they did allow mechanical milking machines. Milking by hand was grueling work, including the need to lift heavy pails of milk, which meant the children and women could be of limited help. The milking machines eliminated that part of the job, which allowed more family members to take part in a vital part of the farm's success.

Another example of this theme is in the history of Barbara's farm. The farm was first home to a couple who had several children. The children mostly remained in the area and they came to a decision to sell the farm. Steven bought it and knew little about the property until the family members began to tell stories. With that, they learned about the farm, what had been grown in the past, and knew more about how to maximize their land. The writers talk about the fact that chemicals can remain in the dirt for years, which means a farmer who knows nothing about his land may be unintentionally introducing chemicals to his crop. The tendency for families to farm the same piece of land for generations is largely a thing of the past, and vital information is lost with that trend.

Styles

Structure

The book is divided into 20 chapters that vary slightly in length. The hardcopy version includes sidebars written by Barbara's husband, Steven, and her daughter, Camille. Each chapter is titled with a catchy phrase or words that convey at least some idea of what to expect from that chapter. Many of the chapters also include references to a specific month along their year-long experience. For example, Chapter 16 is titled “Smashing Pumpkins: October.” That chapter covers Barbara's thoughts and ideas about October, and focuses on the use of the fall crops – including pumpkins.

The book is presented in chronological order, which is appropriate for the story line. The author begins with their trip from Tucson, Arizona, to their farm in Kentucky. The experiment began several months later, in late March, when the asparagus began to grow. Barbara then takes the reader through milestones along the way, including the excess produce of fall and “the Hungry Month” of February (Chapter 19).

Steven and Camille's additions to the book appear as inserts in most e-reader versions of the book. These are titled to give an indication of what to expect. For example, Chapter 14 focused on the family's day spent slaughtering the chickens and turkeys that had been raised for that purpose. Steven's sidebar in that chapter is titled “Really, We're Not Mad” and focuses on the commercial slaughtering of animals, including those with diseases such as mad cow disease. Camille's addition to that chapter is titled “Carnivory.” As is the case with all her sections, the opening is about her personal thoughts on eating meat, including her first sighting of a commercial stock yard. The section continues with recipes for veggie frittata and turkey sausage.

Perspective

The book is written in first person from the perspectives of Barbara and Camille. Steven also contributes the book, but his writing is more analytical and he seems to purposely avoid first person references. Camille's writing is limited more to recipes and menus, but she does add some first-person stories, which usually tend to agree with Barbara's. In addition, the reader should remember that Barbara includes families and friends in the writing and Steven includes addresses for websites supporting his claims. There is also a list of references. Some readers may find this gives the perspective more weight and believability.

Barbara and her family already had some strong opinions about food, conservation, and sustainable living, even before they moved to their farm and began their year-long experiment. They had given up meat because of the conditions animals faced prior to being slaughtered and had focused on local, organic, and home grown food when possible. This means that their journey to this experiment was not as arduous as some

readers first imagine. Their preconceived ideas may have effected their writing, but it is left up to the reader to determine the level or importance of that impact.

Barbara grew up in a region where tobacco was a mainstay crop and she admits that she had trouble facing questions related to that industry. She said that tobacco harmed health and introduced carcinogens that cost lives, but countered, saying it also created an industry where farmers fed their families and supported local economies. While she admits to being on the fence about the ethics of tobacco farming, her tone seems to support the farmers' right to continue growing that crop. She does, however, argue about the health problems associated with overeating and with unhealthy eating, citing obesity rates and the diabetes, heart disease, and other issues that plague those who are overweight. She also cites the damage people have done to the environment through use of pesticides, herbicides, and fuel. The two stands seem to contradict each other and it is left to the reader to decide whether she remains an honest, viable perspective.

The perspective is limited to what Barbara, Camille, and Steven experience and what they believe to be true. They do give some dissenting views, but always counter those with facts of their own or discount them as outright ridiculous. As is always the case with first person perspectives, the writers give only the information they choose, which means the reader may have unanswered questions.

Tone

The overall tone of the book is one of hope and inspiration. The writers are not at all objective in their approach, but obviously hope to sway the reader to their way of thinking. An important aspect of the tone is that writers Barbara and Steven address the possibility that some people think the situation is hopeless, which means they chose to do nothing positive. Both insisted that a small step in the right direction is better than nothing, and that all the small steps people make can end up making bigger changes.

Barbara and a friend discussed the problem of making people care without making them give up home. The friend was working on a film and wanted to be sure people really understood that her issue was real, but she did not want to drive them to the point that they were overwhelmed and felt incapable of making an impact. Barbara and Steven each express similar feelings, and each gave ways to make small changes that can add up to making a difference.

Some readers may find unfamiliar words throughout the book, especially those words related to food. For example, Barbara talks about “vegetal” issues. Some dictionaries do not even include that word, but others recognize it. The word is an overall concept or anything related to vegetables. Other words are more widely recognized though some readers may not immediately understand the meaning, such as “Oenophile" (a person who understands and loves wine). In some cases, it almost seems the author is using larger, less common words when others would do. It's left to the reader to decide.

It should be noted that Barbara speaks of her effort to educate rather than to preach or try to force others into thinking as her family did. She seems to seek a neutral tone of inspiration though both she and Steven sometimes launch into passages that could be termed tirades. It is obvious what they feel most passionately about, though each insist that they want to provide information so that readers can make informed decisions.

Quotes

If every U.S. Citizen ate just one meal a week (any meal) composed of locally and organically raised meats and produce, we would reduce our country's oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil every week. That's not gallons, but barrels. Small changes in buying habits can make big differences."
-- Steven L. Hopp (chapter 1 paragraph 16)

Importance: One of the repeated mantras of the book is that people can make small changes that will add up to a major impact on the use of fossil fuels and the exploitation of farmers who work for oversized corporations. In this passage, Steven talks about the amount of fuel it takes for transporting and refrigerating food that is shipped long distances.

We only knew, somewhat abstractly, we were going to spend a year integrating our food choices with our family values, which include both 'love your neighbor' and 'try not to wreck every blooming thing on the planet while you're here.
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 2 paragraph 2)

Importance: Barbara's family did not fully define what their year-long experience would be, only that they wanted to make a difference and they wanted to have that focus on their food choices. Their attitudes of care and conservation were at the heart of those choices.

To recover an intuitive sense of what will be in season throughout the year, picture a season of foods unfolding as if from one single plant. Take a minute to study this creation – an imaginary plant that bears over the course of one growing season a cornucopia of all the different vegetable products we harvest."
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 4 paragraph 4)

Importance: Barbara calls this imaginary plant a "vegetannual." She takes the reader through the stages of a typical garden from her region, beginning with shoots in spring and moving on to green fruits that ripen, then to hard fruits like nuts, then to bulbs, tubers, and roots.

The secretary said without blinking, 'Oh, okay, farming,' and entered the code for 'Excused, Agriculture.' Just another day at our elementary school, where education come in many boxes."
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 6 paragraph 9)

Importance: This is one of many times Barbara writes about the different attitudes in rural areas compared with urban areas. Lily had missed school that morning in order to pick up her chickens from the post office and get them settled into their new home.

Buying your goods from local businesses rather than national chains generates about three times as much money for your local economy."

-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 10 paragraph 5)

Importance: Barbara goes on to write that most people make their choice based solely on price, and find that the prices at the store are lower than at a farmers market. This economic impact on the local economy is one of many reasons Barbara urges people to make the change to eating locally-grown food.

If you ask a person from Italy, India, Mexico, Japan, or Sweden what food the United States has exported to them, they will all give the same answer, and it starts with a Mc. And it must be said, they're swallowing it. Processed food consumption is on the rise worldwide, proportional to growing affluence."
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 11 paragraph 4)

Importance: In this section, Barbara writes about the countries that are famous for specific types of food, such as pasta from Italy. She counters that with the idea that Americans do not really have a specific kind of food, but have become known for fast food.

I think of canning as fast food, paid for in time up front."
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 13 paragraph 16)

Importance: Barbara and her family canned lots of food over the first summer of their project. Over the coming winter, they ate most of that food and Barbara notes that lots of it was like "fast food" in the form of pasta and similar dishes. She considers that to be as easy as the packaged meals from the stores, but without causing the same carbon footprint.

Killing is a culturally loaded term, the most of us inextricably tied up with some version of a command that begins, 'Thou shalt not.'"
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 14 paragraph 5)

Importance: Barbara focuses on the "harvesting" of chickens and turkeys. She talks about the inhumane conditions and health risks associated with commercially-grown meat and says that knowledge made her more determined that her animals would have a good life up to the moment of their deaths.

Doesn't anybody remember how to take a big old knife, whack open a pumpkin, scrape out the seeds, and bake it? We can carve a face onto it, but we can't draw and quarter it?
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 16 paragraph 9)

Importance: Barbara considers the fact that people no longer really know how to cook a pumpkin to get the fleshy part that recipes called for. Instead, recipes all call for canned pumpkin. This is one of many examples of how people have become dependent on processed foods, not just fast food.

Praise the harvest. We made it through one more turn of the seasons. In modern times it's mostly pageantry, of course, this rejoicing over harvest and having made it to winter's doorstep with enough food.
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 17 paragraph 19)

Importance: Barbara discusses the reason for Thanksgiving and the abundance of food that goes with that celebration. In past centuries, the celebration was a way to give thanks that there was literally enough food to get through the winter. In modern times, the celebration had become “pageantry” because there was always food available at a local grocery store.

Healthier eating generally begins with taking one or two giant steps back from the processed-food aisle. Thus, the ubiquitous foodie presumptions about fresh-is-good, frozen-is-bad, and salads every day.
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 19 paragraph 19)

Importance: Barbara focuses on what her family ate during the winter months when there was no local farmers market with fresh produce and their own garden was buried under snow. She dismisses the idea that everything has to be fresh in order to be healthy. They had canned, frozen, and dried the food that was in season during the summer and now relied on that food for their meals.

In our case, the heirloom turkeys are not just large birds but symbols of a precarious hold on a vanishing honesty. The chickens are secondary protagonists, the tomatoes are allegorical. The zucchini may be just zucchini.
-- Barbara Kingsolver (chapter 20 paragraph 5)

Importance: Barbara uses the literary terms to give another definition on their food experiment. The definition of turkeys as symbols refers to the fact that the typical commercial turkey cannot even reproduce on its own, and cannot physically sustain its own life to physical maturity. The chickens as the main characters of their story indicate that they are important both for meat and eggs, and are more basic than the chickens. The tomatoes as allegorical likely refers to their many uses. The final sentence is typical of Babara's humor. The family was overrun with zucchini that year and found every method possible to use it up, including in cookies.

Topics for Discussion

Describe the experiment Barbara and her family began after their move to the farm.

The reader can use this question to talk about the family's decision to eat locally grown, organic food, as much as possible, foregoing items that were produced far away and shipped to their local grocery stores as well as processed food and fast food. They also stopped buying meat from those sources. They raised their own produce, fruit, and meat, and bought from local producers whenever possible.

What did Barbara expect her family to do when the year of their experiment was officially over? What really happened? What would your family do?

Barbara did not really have expectations but seemed surprised to discover that the anniversary of their official beginning came and went without much notice. The question should provoke thoughts of Barbara's reaction, which was rather anticlimactic in some ways, to what they would expect of their own families at the end of a full year.

Describe the roles of Lily and Camille in the experiment. How did Barbara ensure their cooperation and participation?

Lily was in third grade when the experiment began and Camille was in her final year of high school, preparing for college. Theoretically, Barbara could have simply forced the girls into the experiment but they would likely have rebelled. The reader should consider the girls' roles - raising chickens and helping with the garden, food storage, and cooking. Through encouraging the girls to be part of the experiment, Barbara ensured that they would be open to the ideas, and she imparted life-long changes to their thoughts about food.

Why did Barbara always plant asparagus at each place she lived? What did asparagus symbolize in her life?

Barbara saw asparagus as the first herald of spring and that more fresh produce would soon be available. This question should prompt discussions of her dedication to growing

something, even when she knew she might not reap the harvests. She wanted to leave something for the next person, which indicated her sustainable mindset.

What did Barbara and Steven learn during their trip to Italy?

One of their main focuses was on the food of the various places they visited, including the agricultural bed and breakfast places. The reader should discuss the various vegetables, wines, and dishes they encountered, and how that impacted their future meals. They also learned about true Italian dining, including several courses, and used that at least sometimes when they entertained friends.

Describe some of the vegetables Barbara and her family harvested from their own garden, and what they did with them.

Some of the more notable harvests included tomatoes and squash. They canned a lot of the tomatoes and came up with new recipes or altered old ones to accommodate the produce that was in season. The reader could also talk about green beans, pumpkins, and the food they purchased at the farmer's markets.

According to Barbara, what were the main advantages of eating locally grown produce in season?

The reader should talk mainly about price and taste. Barbara talked about the excellent taste of fresh, local produce from small farming operations compared to produce that had been harvested miles away and shipped to the grocery stores. She also talked about the cost, saying they had saved money over the previous year's groceries.

Why did Barbara choose heritage turkeys instead of the popular white breeds typical of commercial growers?

Barbara's choice was a heritage breed leftover from years earlier when turkeys were meant to live on the open range and to reproduce on their own. Barbara described the commercial breeds, including the large, white turkeys that were unable to reproduce on their own and bread only for size, unable to hold up their own weight very far into adulthood.

What opinions does Barbara express about commercially-raised meat? What alternative did the family choose?

The reader should talk about the cruel conditions animals faced in feed lots and slaughter houses. They also worried about the hormones, antibiotics, and unnatural diets producers used to get the animals to slaughter size quickly with low cost. The family decided that they would not eat meat at all for several years, but then opted for meat they raised themselves or that was raised by local farmers in humane conditions without antibiotics or hormones.

What was the difference between the attitude of the girl in the Tucson convenience store and the girl in the restaurant in the Appalachian region? What does Barbara say that indicated about the two girls?

The girl in the convenience store was upset that there were clouds that indicated the possibility of rain. Despite the fact that the area desperately needed rain, the girl didn't want rain to ruin her day off. The girl in the restaurant was pleased that it was raining because she knew the farmers needed it. The reader should talk about the different attitudes, affected by what was important to the girls' families.