

Class Activity Lesson Plan Template

Name of Activity: The "Mountain Maryland" Heritage Plate

By: Corey Weitzel

Purpose: To analyze how the distinct geography and agricultural traditions of Western and Northwest Maryland (Appalachian terroir) create specific "food tourism" draws while practicing sustainable sourcing.

Background Agricultural Connections: Western Maryland's agriculture is defined by its topography. While the Hagerstown Valley (Northwest) is famous for its limestone-rich soil perfect for stone fruits (peaches/apples) and dairy, the higher elevations of Western Maryland specialize in maple syrup, buckwheat, and ramps. Sustainable practices here, such as riparian buffers (a vegetated area—comprising trees, shrubs, and grasses—situated along the bank of a stream, river, lake, or wetland) to protect the Potomac watershed, these are essential for maintaining the regional "flavor" that tourists seek.

Grade levels: 9th – 12th Grade

Lesson Length: 90 Minutes

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** three key agricultural products unique to Northwest/Western Maryland (e.g., maple, heirloom apples, trout).
- **Evaluate** how "Pick-Your-Own" orchards and farm-to-table stops in the Cumberland Valley contribute to the local economy.
- **Execute** a recipe using sustainable "Maryland Highlands" ingredients.

Materials and Equipment Needed:

- Ingredients: Local maple syrup (Garrett Co.), apples (Washington Co. orchards), or freshwater trout.
- Kitchen Tech: Immersion blenders, cast iron skillet
- "Maryland Buy Local" seasonal calendar.

Teacher Preparation:

1. **Sourcing:** Contact a local producer from the *Maryland Department of Agriculture's* directory (specifically looking for Western MD farms).
2. **Mapping:** Create a "Food Trail" map layout of I-70/I-68 for students to visualize tourism flow.

Activities and Procedures:

Phase	Activity Description
The "Terroir" Talk (15 mins)	Cumberland Valley vs. The Plateau: Discuss why a peach grows well in Smithsburg but a maple tree produces better syrup in Oakland. Explain how the climate dictates the menu for tourists.
Sustainability Spotlight (15 mins)	Protecting the Watershed: Briefing on how Western MD farmers use cover crops to prevent runoff into the Antietam Creek and Potomac River, ensuring the "clean" image tourists expect.
The "Food Trail" Lab (50 mins)	The Appalachian Bistro: Students prepare a dish reflecting the region. Option A: Maple-glazed trout with roasted root vegetables. Option B: Smithsburg Apple Galette with honey-lavender drizzle.
Marketing the Plate (10 mins)	The Pitch: Students write a "menu blurb" for a tourism brochure that highlights the specific farm their ingredients "came from" and why it's sustainable.

References/Resources:

- *Maryland Highlands Maple Festival archives.*

- *Maryland Department of Agriculture*: "Maryland Taste" program.
- *University of Maryland Extension*: Western Maryland Pasture-Based Agriculture reports.

Grading of Lesson Plan Activity

Appropriate Purpose, Background Agricultural Connections and Learning Objectives points	10
Description of Materials and Equipment Needed and Teacher Preparation points	5
Description of Activities and Procedures points	20

Student Rubric: The Mountain Maryland Heritage Plate

Student Name(s): _____

Selected Hero Ingredient: (e.g., Smithsburg Apples, Garrett Co. Maple, Western MD Trout)

Criteria	Exceptional (5 pts)	Proficient (3-4 pts)	Developing (1-2 pts)
Agricultural Advocacy	Student clearly identifies the specific farm/orchard origin and explains the sustainable practice used to grow it (e.g., "no-till," "IPM").	Student identifies the regional origin but has a vague explanation of the agricultural process.	Student knows the ingredient is "local" but cannot explain the agricultural context.

Culinary Technique	Dish is executed with high skill; textures are correct, and the "hero" ingredient is the star of the plate.	Dish is well-executed, but the local ingredient is slightly overshadowed by secondary flavors.	Technical errors in cooking (overcooked/undercooked) or the local ingredient is lost.
Regional Identity	The dish strongly represents Western/NW Maryland heritage (e.g., using buckwheat or stone fruit).	The dish uses local ingredients but feels "generic" or not specific to the Maryland Highlands.	The dish has no discernible connection to Maryland's specific geography.
Sustainability & Waste	Minimal food waste; scraps are composted or repurposed (e.g., apple peels used for a garnish/syrup).	Moderate food waste; student followed basic kitchen cleanup but missed repurposing opportunities.	High food waste; no consideration given to the "full use" of the agricultural product.
The "Tourism Pitch"	Student provides a compelling verbal or written "story" that would make a tourist want to travel to see this farm.	Student provides a basic description of the dish without a strong "travel" hook.	Student provides only the name of the dish with no context.