LESSON 2

Seasonal, Local Food

The story of food includes where it's grown, and when.

GRADE	TIME	FINAL PRODUCT
Grades 4–5	**Two class periods, 45 min each**	**Seasonal Food Wheel, shared in small groups**

BIG IDEA

Foods have seasons. When we eat food that's in season and grown nearby, we get fresher food, support local farms, and use less energy moving food around.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why does it matter when and where our food is grown?

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Eat with the seasons.

Across two class periods, students learn that foods have seasons, and that eating in-season, locally grown food has real benefits for taste, freshness, farmers, and the planet.

Day 1 opens with a sensory tasting of a local in-season food, builds vocabulary, and introduces the color-coded Seasonal Food Wheel. Students begin filling it in for their region. Day 2 finishes the Wheels, then students walk a small-group gallery to compare what's in season near them.

The lesson closes with a discussion of trade-offs: local food is fresher and uses less fuel, but isn't always available. Students take their finished Wheels home to share with families.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Four subjects, one lesson.

SCIENCE (NGSS)

What students do

Obtain and combine information about ways individual communities use science ideas to protect Earth's resources and environment.

Three-dimensional emphasis. SEP: Analyzing and Interpreting Data. CCC: Patterns.

5-ESS3-1

ELA (CCSS)

What students do

Interpret information from a seasonal calendar and a regional map. Write informative descriptions of seasonal foods. Engage in collaborative discussions about food choices.

RI.4.7 RI.5.7 W.4.2 W.5.2 SL.4.1 SL.5.1

SOCIAL STUDIES (C3)

What students do

Explain how environment and climate influence what people eat. Explain how human use of natural resources varies by place. Compare benefits and trade-offs of local and distant food.

D2.Geo.4.3-5 D2.Geo.8.3-5 D2.Eco.1.3-5

HEALTH (NHES)

What students do

Identify how seasonal eating affects nutrition. Analyze influences on food choices. Practice self-management of healthy food choices.

NHES 1 NHES 2 NHES 7

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

What to know before you teach.

One important part of the story of food is how far it travels and when it was harvested. In the past, most people grew or gathered food close to home. Today, much of our food travels long distances (sometimes across countries or continents) before reaching our plates.

When fruits and vegetables travel a long way, they're often picked before they're ripe so they can survive the journey. They may be less flavorful, less nutritious, and use more fuel and packaging to reach us. Eating locally grown foods in season can support nearby farmers, reduce transportation pollution, and provide fresher, tastier food.

But eating only local foods isn't always possible, and that's okay. In many regions, the seasonal variety is limited, and a balanced diet may include foods grown elsewhere.

VOCABULARY

Words to grow on.

Introduce the four core terms on Day 1 before the Seasonal Food Wheel.



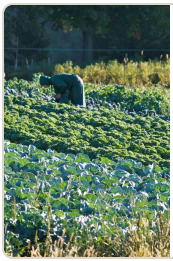
in season

Ripe and ready to harvest nearby, in the months when a food naturally grows.



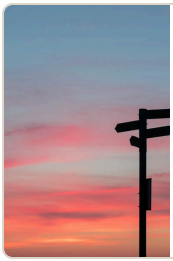
local food

Food grown and produced close to where it is eaten, usually within the same region.



foodshed

The area where food is grown and produced to feed the people who live there, like a watershed but for food.



trade-off

Choosing one thing means giving something else up.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

What you'll print and cue up.

MATERIALS

- ☐ **Small samples of a local in-season food**: apple wedges, carrot slices, sugar snap peas, or whatever is in season locally; toothpicks and napkins. Enough for every student to taste.

PREPARATION

- ☐ Prepare small tasting samples of a local in-season food (enough for every student). Wash and slice into bite-size pieces the morning of. Toothpicks and napkins on hand.

- [ ] **Two food items for the comparison**: one currently in season locally (can be the tasting food), one from far away (a banana or out-of-season berry works well).
- [ ] **Visual glossary slides**: one per term.
- [ ] Seasonal produce website(s) for your state or region.
- [ ] **Seasonal Food Wheel student pages**: printable PDF, 2 pages per student.
- [ ] Paper brad fasteners: 1 per student, for assembling the Wheel.
- [ ] **Optional**: Nourish short film, *In Season* (Multiple Voices, 2 min): Farmer Nigel Walker, Dr. Nadine Burke, and others explain why eating seasonally is good for your body and the planet.
- [ ] Scissors, glue, colored markers: 1 set per pair.

- [ ] Bring two food items for a side-by-side comparison: one in season locally (can be the tasting food), one shipped from far away. If nothing is currently in season where you live, use a stored local food (potato, onion, stored apple).
- [ ] Locate websites that offer “seasonal food calendars” or “seasonal produce” for your state or region.
- [ ] Print the Seasonal Food Wheel student pages (2 pages per student) on lightweight cardstock if available.
- [ ] Decide whether students will work individually or in pairs on the Wheel. Pairs work well for grade 4; many grade 5 students prefer to make their own.

DAY 1

What's in season near us?

45 minutes

1 Sensory taste opener

7 MIN

TEACHER

- Set up: students wash hands. Distribute a small piece of the in-season tasting food to each student on a napkin.
- Sensory taste: invite students to smell, taste, and notice the food. **"What does it taste like? What does it remind you of?"**
- Pair share: one word to describe the taste, plus a guess about where this food might have come from and what time of year it's around.
- Whole-class capture: invite 2–3 students to share. Capture words on the board (fresh, sweet, crunchy, spring, local).
- Bridge: today we learn what **"in season"** means and start mapping our own seasonal foods.

STUDENTS

Taste the food and notice how it tastes and smells.

Guess where it came from and what season it grows in.

Share your guess with a partner, then the class.

2 What does "in season" mean?

8 MIN

TEACHER

- Hold up your two comparison foods. Ask which is grown nearby and which traveled far.
- Reveal each food's story: where it likely came from and what time of year it's in season locally.
- Project the vocabulary slides. Walk through the four core terms.

STUDENTS

Guess which food is local and which traveled far.

Learn the four core terms.

3 Introduce the Seasonal Food Wheel

5 MIN

TEACHER

- Distribute the Seasonal Food Wheel student pages (2 pages per student or pair).
- Show the color code on the Wheel: light green for spring, yellow for summer, orange for fall, and teal for winter.
- Point out the small center circle for year-round foods.
- Show how the top circle (with the cut-out wedge) sits on top of the bottom circle. Explain assembly happens on Day 2.

STUDENTS

Notice the four season colors, where each month falls, and the center circle for year-round foods.

4 Begin filling in your Wheel

20 MIN

TEACHER

- Share the website(s) with seasonal food calendars or seasonal produce for your state or region.
- Ask students to draw and label local foods in each season's color band: at least two foods per season.
- Encourage drawings + labels rather than labels alone.
- Circulate. Prompt students to think about what grows where they live and in the school garden.
- 5 min before time: ask students to add at least two foods to the year-round center circle (eggs, honey, stored apples or potatoes, herbs, etc.)

STUDENTS

Use the regional chart to find foods in season for each month.

Draw and label at least 2 foods in each season's color band.

Add at least 2 year-round foods to the center circle.

5 Closer + preview Day 2

5 MIN

TEACHER

- Ask 2–3 students to share one food they added to their Wheel that surprised them or excited them.
- Preview Day 2: tomorrow, finish coloring, assemble with a brad fastener, and share.
- Collect Wheels carefully (or have students store them in folders).

STUDENTS

Share one food on your Wheel that surprised or excited you.

Store your Wheel pages carefully.

DAY 2

Finish + share the Seasonal Food Wheel.

45 minutes

1 Finish and assemble

15 MIN

TEACHER

- Return Wheels. Ask students to complete any seasons they didn't finish on Day 1.
- After 8 min, walk through assembly together: cut the wedge from the top circle, place it on the bottom circle, and fasten the center with a brad.
- *Optional:* glue a small regional map (cut to fit) onto the back of the bottom circle.

STUDENTS

Finish drawing and labeling local foods on your Wheel.

Assemble the Wheel: cut the wedge, stack, fasten with a brad.

2 Small-group gallery

15 MIN

TEACHER

- Group students into circles of 4–5 (table groups or stand in clusters).
- Direct each student to share their Wheel for 60 sec, naming one food per season they're excited about.
- Listeners pick up one new food from each Wheel they hadn't thought of and write it on a sticky note or list.
- Time it: 5 min sharing + 10 min for slow circulation among Wheels.

STUDENTS

Share your Wheel with your group.

Walk among the Wheels and write down one new food from each.

3 Trade-offs discussion

10 MIN

TEACHER

- Lead a class discussion. Ask one or two of: What are the benefits of eating in-season, local foods? What are the trade-offs? When does it make sense to eat food from far away? Who in our community depends on local farms?
- Capture key trade-offs on the board: fresher / less variety, local farmers supported / fewer choices in winter, less fuel used / sometimes harder to find.
- Highlight: there's no one right way to eat: knowing where and when food grows supports thoughtful choices.

STUDENTS

Share one benefit and one trade-off of eating local, in-season food.

Listen to your classmates' ideas. Add to the class chart.

4 Closing + take-home

5 MIN

TEACHER

- Direct students to write their name on the back of their Wheel.
- Invite them to take their Wheels home and show them to family, and to ask one family member what season foods they remember from their own childhood.
- Close: challenge students to notice what's in season near them this week.

STUDENTS

Write your name on the back of your Wheel.

Take your Wheel home and show one family member.

Ask them: what season foods do you remember from when you were a kid?

ASSESSMENT

What understanding looks like.

Students demonstrate understanding by:

- Using vocabulary (in season, local food, foodshed, trade-off) accurately in discussion.
- Completing a Seasonal Food Wheel with at least 2 foods per season and 2 year-round foods.
- Placing foods in the correct season based on regional data.
- Identifying at least one benefit and one trade-off of eating local, in-season food.
- Participating in the small-group gallery share.

Look-fors: drawings + labels are both valid. Students may know more about foods in some seasons than others; that's part of the learning.

DIFFERENTIATION & SCAFFOLDING

Build access in.

FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

- Allow food labels on the Wheel in a student's home language alongside English.
- Pre-teach the four season names paired with the Wheel's color code (color helps anchor the season).
- Pair multilingual learners with classmates who share their home language whenever possible.

FOR STUDENTS WITH FINE MOTOR CHALLENGES

- Pre-cut the wedge on the top circle for students who would benefit.
- Provide pre-printed food sticker sheets students can paste rather than draw.
- Pair an assembler with a helper for the brad-fastener step.

FOR STUDENTS WHO FINISH EARLY

- Add a fifth season pile: foods you'd LIKE to try but haven't yet.
- Glue a small regional map to the back of the bottom circle showing where the foods are grown.

CONTEXT NOTES

Local food access varies. Some students live in neighborhoods with farmers markets and full grocery stores; others live in food deserts where local in-season food is hard to find. Don't presume access; invite the discussion. Trade-offs apply here, too.

Climate context. If your region has a long growing season, the Wheel will be full. If you teach in a colder climate (Northeast, Upper Midwest, Alaska), winter may rely heavily on stored or preserved foods (root vegetables, grains, eggs, dairy). Both are valid local food systems.

EXTENSIONS

Five ways to go further.

EXTENSION 01

Local Food Resources Mini-Book

Students work in small teams to research nearby places where their family could find local food: farmers markets, CSAs, community gardens, food co-ops, school gardens, restaurants that source local. Each team contributes one page (place name, address, what's sold, what season). Pages are assembled into a class "Where to Find Local Food" mini-book that goes home to families. Uses the Local Food Resources student page.

EXTENSION 02

150-Mile (240-Kilometer) Foodshed Map

Students use a regional map and a compass (geometry tool) to draw a 150-mile (240-kilometer) circle around their school or town. They explore what farms, towns, agricultural areas, and waterways fall inside the circle, and discuss whether that's a good way to define "local." Strong math + geography integration.

EXTENSION 03

Plan and Prepare a Seasonal Meal

Students use their Seasonal Food Wheels to plan a one-dish meal made entirely from foods in season locally. They identify the dish, list ingredients (with seasons), and write a paragraph explaining their choices. If kitchen access allows, the class prepares and tastes one of the dishes together.

EXTENSION 04

Visit a Local Farm or Farmers Market

Arrange a class visit to a local farm, farmers market, or school garden. Before the visit, students generate three questions about what grows there and when. During the visit, students interview a farmer or vendor. After, students update their Seasonal Food Wheels with anything new they learned.

EXTENSION 05

Seasonal Storytelling

Students write a short story (one page) from the point of view of a food traveling through its season: from sprouting in early spring, to growing in summer, to being harvested and eaten in fall.