

**PAIRED TEXTS**  
two stories that share  
a topic or theme

# KILLER F



Morgan Spurlock

## ESSAY

## LIES?

Morgan Spurlock wanted to show the world the truth about fast food. And it nearly killed him.

BY KRISTIN LEWIS

**M**organ Spurlock is turning green. Slumped over in the driver's seat of his car, the remnants of his McDonald's Big Mac and fries strewn across his lap, he looks into the camera and whispers, "I feel weird." He guzzles his giant soda and burps. Before he can say "excuse me," he thrusts his head out the window and vomits. And vomits. *And vomits.*

No, he doesn't have the flu. Spurlock is making a film called *Super Size Me*. For 30 days, he is attempting to eat nothing but McDonald's food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The rules are simple: He must eat everything he orders, and if a cashier offers the "Super Size" option—which doubles the portion size for a few additional cents—he must say yes.

Why? Spurlock wants to show that fast food may be doing something truly terrible: killing us.

### Fast Food, Slow Death?

Americans love fast food. Sure, we know it's unhealthy, but that doesn't stop us from eating it. As a nation, we consume enough burgers every year to cover the island of Manhattan—three times. We spend more than 3 billion bucks a week on fast food. One in three kids eats it every day.

The cost has been high. Today, America is one of the most overweight countries in the world. In fact, health officials say that obesity—a condition in which a person is dangerously overweight—is one of the biggest health crises facing the U.S. today. It can cause all sorts of serious problems, like cancer and heart failure, and it's a leading cause of death. It's also affecting a shocking number of young people: More than 16 percent of kids ages 2 to 19 are obese.

With his documentary, Spurlock set out to prove that the fast-food industry is at least partly responsible. And he was willing to sacrifice his own health to do it.

After just seven days of eating nothing but McDonald's, Spurlock had gained 14 pounds. After two weeks, his body was freaking out. He was moody and depressed. One night, he awoke in a panic, unable to breathe. A visit to the doctor showed that his liver was damaged, and his heart was struggling. His doctor begged him to stop.

Whom do you think McDonald's is trying to attract with these decorations?



The health problems Spurlock experienced are not surprising. Fast food is disturbingly bad for you. It's loaded with sugar, fat, and chemicals with hard-to-pronounce names. French fries are soaked in enormous, gurgling vats of fat. At Burger King, a Whopper, large fries, and large soda together contain nearly four times the amount of sugar that a middle-school kid should eat in *an entire day*.

If fast food is so terrible, then why do we eat so much of it? For one thing, it's fast and cheap. It's also convenient—wherever you are, chances are you're close to a Burger King, McDonald's, or Taco Bell. The U.S. has more than 195,000 fast-food restaurants.

And let's face it: Fast food tastes pretty good too.

Still, many nutritionists say you should never eat it. *Ever*. If you must indulge, they say, you should limit it to once or twice a month at the most.

Spurlock was eating fast food three times a day.

## Who's to Blame?

Fast-food companies want you to eat their food, and they come up with some pretty clever ways to lure you into their restaurants. They spend billions on advertisements that make their food seem appealing. They use toys to entice kids—and with good reason. Studies show that developing a taste for fast food when you're young makes you more likely to eat it as an adult.

In 2003, the families of ten kids sued McDonald's. The kids were obese,



The government says that "pink slime," a cheap filler found in some ground beef, is safe, but people were so icked out by the idea of "pink slime" that McDonald's no longer uses it in its burgers. Many parents are calling for schools to get rid of it too.

and they claimed McDonald's was responsible because it did not warn them about the health risks of eating there. They lost the case, but they raised an important question about the role of fast food in our lives: Who is really to blame for the results of eating it?

By the end of Spurlock's 30-day McDonald's binge, he was in dismal shape. He had gained 25 pounds. His organs were failing. He had no energy. He couldn't focus. But it was all worth it to Spurlock. When *Super Size Me* hit theaters in 2004, it was a huge success. Viewers were shocked and grossed out to learn just what their favorite foods were doing to them. The film was nominated for an Academy Award. Health experts still celebrate it today.

Some critics, however, argued that it was unfair—that eating massive quantities of anything, whether it's tacos or carrots, is bad for you. Besides,



**5.5 MILLION**

the number of cows Americans consume every year—just at McDonald's

**157 MILLION**

the number of fast-food meals eaten each month by kids ages 6–14

**12 POUNDS**

the amount of fat Spurlock consumed during the making of *Super Size Me*



# VEGAN TEEN OPENS BAKERY

**W**hen Nia Froome was 7, she received devastating news: Her mother had breast cancer. Nia’s mom pulled through, but life in the Froome house was never the same. Determined to lead healthier lives, the entire family became vegan. Vegans don’t eat any animal products—no meat, eggs, milk, or cheese.

With such a strict diet, the Froomes had a hard time finding yummy desserts, so Nia, who loved to bake, started modifying her recipes to be

vegan-friendly. Over the years, her cookies became a family favorite.

When Nia was 17, she made a bold move and opened her own bakery in her hometown of Valley Stream, New York. She named it Mamma Nia’s Vegan Bakery.

The shop was a hit. Customers loved that Nia’s treats, in addition to being vegan, weren’t loaded with sugar and fat, yet still tasted delicious. Mamma Nia’s was so successful that Nia won first place in

the prestigious Oppenheimer Funds/NFTE National Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge. She received \$10,000 and got to meet President Barack Obama. Now, orders are pouring in from all over the state—even from non-vegans.

Experts say eating a diet full of fresh and unprocessed foods is key to a long and healthy life.

Nia’s treats make that just a little bit easier.



Nia Froome

McDonald’s has never claimed outright that its menu is healthy or that people should eat there three times a day. “The scary part is: There are people who eat this food regularly,” counters Spurlock. “So, while my experiment may have been a little extreme, it’s not that crazy.”

## Restaurants Respond

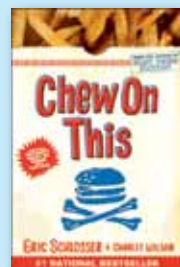
McDonald’s and other fast-food restaurants have made some changes over the past few years. Either in the store or online, many now post the nutrition content of their foods. You’ll

also find healthier options like salads, yogurt, and oatmeal on fast-food menus, though these choices cost more and are the least popular items. McDonald’s even eliminated its “Super Size” option.

It took Spurlock more than six months to lose all the weight he gained. But eventually he made a full recovery—though it’s probably going to be a long, long time before he goes anywhere near a french fry. ●

## QUICK WRITE

Are fast-food restaurants responsible for America’s obesity problem? Support your ideas with details from the article and the sidebar. Send your response to **FRIES CONTEST**. Five winners will get *Chew on This* by Eric Schlosser. See page 2 for details.



GET THIS ACTIVITY ONLINE

