

INVESTIGATE BEFORE YOU EAT

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[Assignment: Think of a group of people with whom you have been associated often throughout your life; examples are parents, teachers, classmates, those who share a special activity with you. Classify these people according to some shared characteristics. Remember to select a clear, unifying principle as a basis for your classification. It is very important that you avoid obvious stereotypes in this essay.]

(1) People are classified every day by their style of dress, talk, and even the way they move. Among the many other ways of classifying people, one seldom mentioned is cooking. This is unfortunate. Watching people's cooking styles is not only amusing, but it offers insights into their personalities through their attitudes toward cooking. There are many types of cooking styles, but the ones most interesting to analyze are the Kamikazi Culinary, the Foodie, and the Pseudiachild.

(2) Kamikazi Culinary may be commonly observed around kitchens of America. Kamikazi cooks are distinguished by their hit and miss attitude toward cooking, and once they have operated in a kitchen, the place is never quite the same again. Dirty pots, pans and measuring spoons can be found in areas ranging from inside the refrigerator to the bathroom, where they were accidentally left after the cook decided to extract the escaped ingredients from his/her hair. The kitchen, including the stove, cabinets, and floor, is always redecorated in shades of flour beige to tomato sauce red, depending on the recipe being attempted and where each minor accident has occurred. The Kamikazi's erratic cooking style produces these minor accidents. In his/her hurry to "mix ingredients to a foam," he/she forgets to put the top on the blender, causing a Worcestershire sauce hurricane. Or, when attempting to carry a tin of flour across the kitchen, and having neglected to wash the grease off his/her hands, the Kamikazi drops the tin on the floor. The result is a flour atomic explosion, a mushroom cloud, and fine coat of flour everywhere.

(3) Throughout the cooking process not one person dares to risk life and limb by entering the Kamikazi's kitchen. People know that the Kamikazi Culinary would sic the Cuisinart on them, should they make a comment on the smell of the concoction or the disorganized state of the kitchen. Even the dog is aware that the scraps on the floor are inedible due to the Kamikazi's illogical substitutions, his/her use of grapefruit juice for orange juice. "They're both citric," the chef would rationalize. The misread ingredients (ranch salad dressing instead of sandwich dressing) and misunderstood measurements (one tablespoon rather than a teaspoon) also cause the resulting unidentifiable substance to be a health hazard.

(4) Unlike the Kamikazi Culinary, cooking, according to the Foodies, is a religion, not a nuclear holocaust. This religion has many laws and commandments, all leading the chef to please the great goddess Betty Crocker. One of the first laws learned is the Law of Dish Conservation. This law states that no clean dishes should be used if there are any dirty dishes that can be rinsed and used instead. This law takes up every available moment of the Foodie's time when he/she is not cooking, but the result, an impeccably clean Better Homes and Gardens kitchen, is one of the highest offerings that can be made to Betty Crocker.

(5) Another law that must be followed is the Law of Exact Measurement. This law engages the Foodie in the tedious job of measuring and remeasuring the ingredients in order to achieve the exact amount. Every granule of salt or every drop of water must be precisely calculated and taken into consideration, or the ingredients will have to be remeasured.

(6) Along with the laws comes a commandment from Betty Crocker: Foodie, thou shalt not substitute. This commandment is one of the most tedious because once a recipe is started, it is blasphemy not to complete it. If the Foodie runs out of a certain ingredient, it has to be replenished because it is against the will of Betty Crocker to alter the recipe. At the end of the cooking ritual, the finished product, due to the extreme care and precise measurements, is an exact replica of the illustration in the cooking bible. Only when such perfection is achieved can the Foodie present the food as an offering to his/her great goddess.

(7) Instead of a religious experience, cooking to the Pseudichild is an art form. This art form can be experienced only if the self is totally immersed in the process of creation. And so the Pseudichild is driven to commit to memory all recipes, shortcuts, and substitutions necessary to create masterpieces. The more devout Pseudichilds possess amazing substitution abilities. Some chefs can create a cheese souffle from just flour, water and Cheetos. This immersion of self also enables them to memorize the precise measurements of ingredients by sight or feel. In fact, Pseudichilds have their own measuring system which is done by judgments of the hand, such as a pinch (1 teaspoon), a glob (1 cup), a clump (3 cups), and a heap (more or less the entire amount of the ingredient).

(8) Once the ingredients are measured, the mixing process becomes an action of pure ecstasy to the Pseudichild. Shunning all modern appliances, the chef uses his/her hands to blend the ingredients, when creating the masterpiece. After mixing, the creation must be tested to see if it is satisfying to the palate. If not, the chef will add pepper, garlic, oregano or

his/her favorite wine, always in excess, to the piece. After the masterpiece has been prepared according to the chef's design criteria, taste, bouquet, and color, it is named. Pseudichilds name their prepared foods with long, foreign names, usually French. Often, of course, food has a more commonly known name. For example, the Pseudichild would name his/her barbequed chicken "Chicken Saute au Tomate, cooked over a Flaming Pit." A gelatin dessert would be named "Fruit Glacier with Finely Diced Papayas, Topped with Flan." Therefore, even though the food is common, people are so impressed by the fancy names invented by the Pseudichild that the food now tastes exquisite.

(9) All cooking styles are not the same. Some are more hazardous than others. If you do not take the time to study cooking styles, you may miss a part of a person's hidden personality that only emerges while cooking. But what is more important, if you do not investigate your host's cooking style, you may suffer from indigestion.