

How the French Learned to Love Potatoes (VI)

Name: _____

How the Potato Came to France

Long ago, people in France did not eat potatoes. Today, that sounds strange because France is famous for fries, mashed potatoes, and many other potato dishes. But hundreds of years ago, French people thought potatoes were dangerous. Some believed they caused sickness like leprosy. Others thought they were only fit to feed animals, not people.

In the 1700s, a French man named **Antoine-Augustin Parmentier** wanted to change people's minds. Parmentier was a scientist who studied food and health. He believed potatoes were healthy and could feed many people, especially during times when crops failed. But he had a problem: how could he convince the public to try them?

Parmentier came up with a clever trick. First, he planted a large field of potatoes outside of Paris. Then he asked soldiers to **guard the field during the day**. People passing by wondered, "Why are those plants so important?" Curiosity grew. At night, when the guards left on purpose, locals sneaked into the field and stole the potatoes. Soon, people all over Paris were secretly planting and cooking them.

Parmentier also held dinners where he served potatoes in many forms—mashed, boiled, and baked. He even gave potato flowers to the French king and queen. Slowly, people began to see that potatoes were safe and delicious.

Today, French cuisine includes many famous potato dishes, from **gratin dauphinois** to **pommes frites** (French fries). Thanks to Parmentier's trick, potatoes became one of the most important foods in France. His story shows how creative ideas can change the way people think about food.

Reflection Questions

1) Why do you think Parmentier had to use trickery, to get the French people to want to eat potatoes?

2) Why might Parmentier's potato dinners with nobles have been an important part of his plan?

[illegible]

3) How did curiosity play an important role in the story?

[illegible]

How the French Learned to Love Potatoes (V2)

It's hard to imagine French cooking without potatoes—fries, soups, and creamy gratins are everywhere. But in the 1700s, French people refused to eat them. Many believed potatoes caused diseases such as leprosy. Others thought they were poisonous because they grew underground. For decades, potatoes were dismissed as animal feed, not fit for human tables.

Enter **Antoine-Augustin Parmentier**, a pharmacist and scientist who had seen potatoes eaten safely in other parts of Europe. After being a prisoner of war in Prussia, where potatoes were common, he returned to France determined to prove that the crop could fight hunger. Parmentier knew, however, that simply telling people the truth would not work. Fear and superstition were powerful. He needed a strategy to change minds.

Parmentier decided to use psychology. He planted a field of potatoes near Paris and arranged for guards to protect it during the day. The guards made the crop look valuable, almost like treasure. At night, they left the field unguarded. As he predicted, curious locals “stole” the potatoes and began growing them themselves. Instead of forcing the public to accept potatoes, Parmentier made them want the crop.

He didn't stop there. He hosted dinners for influential guests where every dish contained potatoes. He offered bouquets of potato flowers to Queen Marie Antoinette. Slowly, what had been seen as a suspicious root became a fashionable food.

The significance of this story goes beyond potatoes. It shows how **ideas can spread when people's emotions are engaged**. Parmentier didn't argue against fears directly—he made people curious, proud, and even a little sneaky. In doing so, he transformed French agriculture and cuisine.

Today, potatoes are central to French cooking and a global food source. Without Parmentier's clever tricks, history might have looked very different.

Reflection Questions (Grade 6)

1) How did Parmentier's strategy of “guarding the fields” change public opinion without using force or arguments?

2) Which do you think mattered more for changing minds: people secretly stealing potatoes, or nobles like the queen showing support? Explain your thinking.

[illegible]

4) What does this story reveal about the power of curiosity and psychology (the study of how people think, feel, and act) in changing behavior?

[illegible]