

Loony for Uni

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It was the day of the big seventh-grade field trip to the sea urchin farm and Janelle was very excited. She had been looking forward to this day since the first day of school. This was because the students were going to learn about the seafood industry, a subject Janelle particularly likes. Madison, Janelle's sister, was not excited at all. She hated the idea of sea urchins and wanted nothing to do with them.

"Sea urchin looks gross when it is served! My mom orders it when we eat Japanese food," said Madison to everyone on the bus.

"How do you know you don't like it if you haven't even tried it?" asked Janelle, "Mom said it is considered a delicacy in Japan."

When the class arrived at the farm, Ms. Lee, Janelle's teacher said, "Okay, students, this is our guide, Ms. Sunny; she'll be teaching us about sea urchins today." Janelle and the other students followed Ms. Sunny to a tank full of sea urchins.

Ms. Sunny began, "These purple ones are the most common here at our farm. We also raise red, white, blue, pink and black California urchin. Most of our sea urchins are sold to Japanese restaurants. They make uni, a raw Japanese sea urchin dish, out of it. Urchins are harvested in countries all around the world; however, California has become a leading harvester in recent years. Much of the harvest finds its way overseas to eager Asian customers or to Asian supermarkets here."

Madison rolled her eyes, "Big deal."

Then, Ms. Sunny brought the class into a processing plant, where they crowded close to look through a window. They saw people who were taking the exoskeletons off the urchins. "Uni tastes light, sweet, and somewhat briny. It is very creamy," Ms. Sunny explained. "The meat is fragile and crumbles easily. Uni is a very good source of protein, fiber, Vitamin C and Vitamin A."

"What are those leaves inside the tanks?" asked Janelle.

"Kelp, which is what they would eat in the wild. Some other sea urchin farms make substitute food, thinking it will make the urchin taste better. We believe the reason our uni is so good is because they eat all natural kelp," said Mr. Sunny.

"How do sea urchins eat?" asked Janelle.

"Their mouths are on the bottom of their body," replied Ms. Sunny. "So, they move around, scraping algae off the rocks. In the wild, they get together in large groups to eat all the kelp in their paths. If there are too many and they eat too much, it is harmful to the environment. At that point, the sunflower sea star and sheephead fish would bring the urchin population down. The

sunflower star could consume an entire group in one sitting, leaving only a pile of urchin skeletons. Sea urchins are also beneficial though.”

After the tour, Ms. Sunny offered each of the students a sample of uni. They all sampled a piece, except Madison.

“Madison, come try a piece of uni! It’s really good,” said Janelle.

“It doesn’t look like it. It looks gross!” said Madison, disgusted.

Ms. Sunny walked over and told Madison, “You know, when I was a little girl, I hated the idea of eating uni; I didn’t try it. After I learned about uni, just like you did today, I tried some and loved it.”

“Really?” said Madison. “Well, maybe I will try a teeny bite.”

“Yay, Madison! You’re going to love it!” cheered Janelle.

Madison tried it and Janelle was right! It actually tasted good! Just like Ms. Sunny, she learned all about sea urchins, finally tried uni and loved it!

That experience was an awesome field trip. Now, not only Janelle was crazy about eating uni; Madison was too! Then, all of a sudden, Janelle had the best idea ever! She would become a sea urchin farmer and spend her days raising and selling sea urchins. She would persuade and educate people, like Madison, to try one of California’s best specialty dishes, uni.