



Lesson 4: Comparing Popcorn and Sorghum

Grade Level: 1st Grade

Time: 60 minutes

Subjects: ELA, Science

Overview: This lesson is Lesson 4 of 5 in the *Celebrate Wheat* unit within the *Growing Readers* micro-curriculum, based on a series of books written by Kansas author Dan Yunk. Lesson 4 serves as a hands-on literacy lesson focused on comparing and tasting popped sorghum and popcorn to deepen students' understanding of how Kansas crops become food. Students build on prior knowledge of seed comparison from Lesson 3 while engaging in structured discussion, sensory observation, and opinion writing. First graders are expected to write structured opinion pieces that introduce the topic, state an opinion, supply a reason, and provide closure. This lesson also introduces explicit instruction in consonant digraphs, building phonics knowledge through vocabulary words drawn directly from the lesson content. Connections to *The Soil Neighborhood* are carried forward as students are reminded that the crops they are tasting today began as seeds planted in Kansas soil.

Skillset: Activating and connecting prior knowledge across units, comparing and contrasting, sensory observation, descriptive language, oral language development, vocabulary acquisition, consonant digraph instruction (wh, ch, th), phonics and word analysis, structured opinion writing with topic/opinion/reason/closure, sentence conventions, reading terminology, and agricultural awareness across Kansas crops.

Kansas Academic Standards

Kansas ELA Standards

W.1.1 Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.

W.1.10 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing.

W.1.10.a Correctly produce upper- and lowercase letters.

W.1.10.d Use personal, possessive, and indefinite pronouns (e.g., I, me, my).

W.1.11 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

W.1.11.a Capitalize dates and names of people.

W.1.11.b Use end punctuation for sentences.

W.1.11.c Use commas in dates and to separate single words in a series.

W.1.11.d Use conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns (e.g., floss rule) and for frequently-occurring irregular words.

RF.1.1.b Have an understanding of important reading terminology (e.g., word(s), letter(s), beginning of sentence, top of the page, bottom of the page).

RF.1.3 Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding and encoding words.

RF.1.3.a Know the phoneme-grapheme correspondences for common consonant digraphs (e.g., sh, ch, wh, th, gh).

Science Standards

1-LS1-1 Use materials to design a solution to a human problem by mimicking how plants and/or animals use their external parts to help them survive, grow, and meet their needs.

1-LS3-1 Make observations to construct an evidence-based account that young plants and animals are like, but not exactly like, their parents.

National Agriculture Literacy Outcomes

Plants and Animals for Food, Fiber, and Energy

T2.K-2.a Describe how plants are grown and used for food.

T2.K-2.d Identify examples of food and fiber products that come from plants and animals.

T5.K-2.a Identify the ways farmers use land to grow crops and raise animals.

Objectives

Science Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Observe and describe similarities and differences between popcorn and popped sorghum using their senses.
- Identify corn and sorghum as crops grown by Kansas farmers for food.
- Explain that crops grow in fields and provide food for people and animals.
- Observe and describe how corn and sorghum are alike but not the same.

English Language Arts Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Write an opinion piece that introduces the topic, states an opinion, supplies at least one reason, and provides a sense of closure.
- Apply correct and consistent use of the pronoun “I” in opinion writing.
- Demonstrate correct capitalization of the first word of a sentence and appropriate end punctuation.
- Write words with common spelling patterns encountered in this lesson using conventional spelling.
- Identify and produce consonant digraphs (wh, ch, th) in key lesson vocabulary words.
- Incorporate commas to separate words in a series in oral and written language.
- Demonstrate understanding of reading terminology, including word, letter, beginning of sentence, and ending punctuation.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion in discussion and writing.

Materials Needed

- Small bowls of popped sorghum (one per student)
- Small bowls of popcorn (one per student)
- Small bowls of unpopped popcorn kernels (one per group)
- Small bowls of unpopped sorghum kernels (one per group)
- Chart paper
- Markers
- T-chart labeled “Popped Sorghum” and “Popcorn.”
- Student opinion writing paper, provided below (one per student)
- Pencils and crayons
- Sentence frames displayed on chart paper
- Simple map of Kansas
- Hand wipes or paper towels
- Sticky notes (one per student, for class opinion graph), optional

Lesson Procedures

1. Activating Prior Knowledge
 - a. Explain to students: *"Yesterday, we were seed scientists. We examined wheat, corn, soybeans, sorghum, and sunflowers. We learned that Kansas farmers grow many different crops."*
 - b. Ask students:
 - *"What crops did we study yesterday?"*
 - *"Which seed was the smallest?"*
 - *"What crop can be made into syrup?"*
 - *"What crop grows tall like wheat?"*
 - c. Hold up sorghum seeds and popcorn kernels and explain: *"One of the seeds we studied yesterday was sorghum. Today we are going to see what happens when sorghum is heated. Just like corn pops into popcorn, sorghum can pop too!"*
 - d. Bridge to the text and soil: *"In our book Celebrate Wheat, we learned that wheat is a crop that Kansas farmers grow in fields that becomes food. Corn and sorghum are also crops grown in Kansas. And just like wheat, they start as tiny seeds planted in the soil — the same kind of healthy Kansas soil we learned about in The Soil Neighborhood. Farmers grow these crops to feed people and animals."*
 - e. Explain to students: *"Today, we are going to compare popped sorghum and popcorn. We will look closely at them, feel them, and even taste them. We will talk about how they are the same and how they are different. After we compare them, you will decide which one you like best and write a structured opinion — stating what you think, why you think it, and a closing thought."*
2. Observation & Compare/Contrast (Hands-On Investigation)
 - a. Distribute a small sample of popped sorghum and popcorn to each student.
You may choose to have students observe before tasting.
 - b. Explain expectations: *"Scientists and writers look closely before they talk and write. Today, we are going to observe carefully. We use our eyes and hands first. We will taste in just a moment."*
 - c. Hold up popcorn and ask:
 - *"What do you notice about the size?"*
 - *"What color is it?"*
 - *"Is it smooth or bumpy?"*
 - d. Hold up the popped sorghum and ask:
 - *"How does this one look?"*
 - *"Is it bigger or smaller than the popcorn?"*
 - *"Do they look the same or different?"*
 - e. Create a T-chart on chart paper labeled: Popped Sorghum | Popcorn.
 - f. Record student responses using simple descriptive words.
 - g. Model complete sentence responses:
 - *"Popcorn is bigger."*
 - *"Sorghum is smaller."*
 - *"Both are white."*
 - h. Encourage students to repeat sentences chorally.
 - i. Introduce comparison vocabulary on chart paper: *same, different, both, bigger, smaller*
 - j. Explain to students: *"When we compare, we tell how things are the same. When we contrast, we tell how they are different."*

- k. Have students practice using sentence stems:
 - *"Both are..."*
 - *"Popcorn is..."*
 - *"Sorghum is..."*
- 3. Tasting & Sensory Description
 - a. Explain expectations: *"Now you may taste both the sorghum and the popcorn. Take one small bite at a time and chew carefully."*
 - b. After tasting, prompt descriptive language:
 - *"How does it taste?"*
 - *"Is it salty, plain, crunchy, or soft?"*
 - *"Does one have more flavor?"*
 - *"Which one feels lighter in your mouth?"*
 - c. Add tasting words to the T-chart.
 - d. Encourage complete sentence responses using sentence stems:
 - *"I notice that..."*
 - *"I think..."*
 - *"Both taste..."*
 - *"Popcorn tastes..."*
 - *"Sorghum tastes..."*
 - e. Reinforce academic language: *"We are comparing using our senses. We are noticing similarities and differences."*
- 4. Vocabulary & Digraph Instruction
 - a. Explain to students: *"Before we write today, we are going to look closely at some of our vocabulary words. Some of these words have a special spelling pattern called a consonant digraph. A digraph is when two letters work together to make one new sound that is different from either letter alone."*
 - b. Introduce the digraph wh using wheat: *"The word wheat starts with w and h together. When w and h are side by side, they make the /wh/ sound — like in wheat, where, and when. Say wheat. What two letters make the first sound?"*
 - c. Introduce the digraph ch using crunch/crunchy: *"The word crunchy ends with ch. When c and h are together, they make the /ch/ sound — like in crunch, chew, and chip. Say crunchy. Where do you hear the /ch/ sound — at the beginning or the end?"*
 - d. Introduce the digraph th: *"Here is one more: listen to these words: the, that, think, and both. When t and h work together, they make the /th/ sound. Put your tongue gently between your teeth and blow — that is how we make the /th/ sound. Say the. Say think. Say both. You use 'th' words every single day in your writing."*
 - e. Write wh, ch, and th on chart paper. Have students say each digraph sound together.
 - f. Ask students to generate additional words for each digraph:
 - *"wh — What other words start with wh?" (when, where, white, why)*
 - *"ch — What words have the ch sound?" (chair, chip, much, each)*
 - *"th — What words have the th sound?" (the, that, think, both, with, teeth)*
 - g. Revisit key vocabulary from the T-chart: *"When we talk, we hear sounds. When we write, we use letters — and sometimes two letters together — to show those sounds. Knowing digraphs helps us read and spell better. Notice that 'th' appears in words we use every day in our writing — the, that, and both. Watch for it as you write your opinion today!"*

- h. Explain using commas to students: *"We observed several things about our foods today. Let's practice writing them in a list. When we write three or more words in a row, we use commas to separate them. For example (Write this sentence on the board): Popcorn is big, white, and crunchy. Count the commas with me. 'Now you try: tell me three words that describe popped sorghum, and I will write them with commas."*
5. Introducing Opinion Writing
- Gather students where they can clearly see the chart paper or board.
 - Explain to students: *"Today, you are going to write your opinion. An opinion is what you think or feel about something. But in first grade, a strong opinion doesn't just tell what you think — it also tells why."*
 - Clarify: *"An opinion is not right or wrong. It is what you like or prefer. Two people can have different opinions, and both be valid."*
 - Teach the parts of an opinion: *"A well-written opinion has four parts. First, you introduce the topic — what are you writing about? Second, you state your opinion — what do you think or prefer? Third, you give a reason — why do you think that? Fourth, you write a closing — a sentence that wraps up your thinking."*
 - Model the difference between fact and opinion: *"If I say, 'Popcorn is white,' that is a fact because it is something we can see and verify. If I say, 'Popcorn is the best snack,' that is an opinion because it tells what I think or prefer. Someone else might like something different and disagree, and that is okay. Different people can have different opinions, and those opinions can all be valid."*
 - Ask students:
 - "Can two people have different opinions?"*
 - "Is an opinion right or wrong?"*
 - Model oral opinion statements with all four parts: *"Today we tasted popcorn and sorghum. (topic) I prefer popcorn. (opinion) I like it because it is crunchy. (reason) Popcorn is a great snack!" (closing)*
 - Pair students and have them share with a partner using the four-part structure:
 - "What are we writing about?" (topic)*
 - "What is your opinion?"*
 - "Why do you think that?" (reason)*
 - "How will you close your writing?"*
6. Shared Writing & Print Concepts
- Explain to students: *"Writers follow rules so the reader can understand what they wrote. I am going to write a model opinion, and I want you to help me."*
 - On chart paper, write and model a four-part opinion: *"Today I tasted two Kansas crops. I like popcorn best. I like it because it is big and crunchy. Both snacks come from Kansas farms!"*
 - Point to and name each part:
 - Topic sentence: "Today I tasted two Kansas crops."*
 - Opinion: "I like popcorn best."*
 - Reason: "I like it because it is big and crunchy."*
 - Closing: "Both snacks come from Kansas farms!"*
 - Model explicitly while pointing to each feature:
 - Capital letter at the start of each sentence*
 - Pronoun I always capitalized*
 - Spaces between words*

- *End punctuation on each sentence*
 - *Comma in series: “big and crunchy” — ask: where would a comma go if we had three describing words?*
- e. Ask students:
- *“Which sentence is the topic?”*
 - *“Which sentence tells the opinion?”*
 - *“Where is the reason?”*
 - *“How does the writer close?”*
 - *“Can you find a digraph in any of these words?”*
7. Student Writing Component
- Gather students in a place where they can clearly see the model opinion and sentence frames before beginning.
- a. Explain to students: *“Now it is your turn. You are going to write a structured opinion about whether you prefer popcorn or popped sorghum. Remember the four parts: introduce your topic, state your opinion, give a reason, and write a closing.”*
 - b. Display sentence frames as a reference — not for copying, but to support independent writing:
 - *“Today I tasted ____ and ____.” (topic)*
 - *“I prefer ____.” or “I like ____ best.” (opinion)*
 - *“I like it because ____.” (reason)*
 - *“Both snacks ____.” or “____ is a great Kansas crop!” (closing)*
 - c. Prompt students: *“Before you write, say your opinion out loud. Tell your neighbor your four parts. Then write independently.”*
 - d. Provide draw-and-write directions: *“First, draw both foods on your paper. Circle the one you prefer. Then write your four-part opinion below your drawing.”*
 - e. As students write, circulate and explicitly support:
 - *Four-part opinion structure (topic, opinion, reason, closing)*
 - *Correct use of the pronoun ‘I’*
 - *Capital letter at the start of each sentence*
 - *End punctuation on each sentence*
 - *Conventional spelling and digraph application*
 - *Comma in a series where applicable*
 - f. Ask students:
 - *“What is your opinion?”*
 - *“What is your reason?”*
 - *“How are you going to close your writing?”*
 - *“Can you read your opinion back to me?”*
- Differentiation note: For students who need additional support, allow use of sentence frames as a scaffold at the teacher's discretion. For students ready for a challenge, prompt them to supply two reasons or to include a comma-in-a-series sentence describing both foods (e.g., “Popcorn is big, white, and crunchy.”).
8. Discussion & Reflection
- a. Gather students with their completed opinion papers.
 - b. Invite volunteers to share their opinion pieces. Prompt them to read all four parts.
 - c. Ask students:
 - *“What is your opinion?”*
 - *“What reason did you give?”*

- *“Did anyone have a different opinion? Does that make either opinion wrong?”*
 - d. Encourage students to point to each word as they read.
 - e. Revisit comparison language:
 - *“How are popcorn and sorghum the same?”*
 - *“How are popcorn and sorghum different?”*
 - f. Encourage students to respond using comparison stems:
 - *“Both are...”*
 - *“Popcorn is...”*
 - *“Sorghum is...”*
 - g. Reinforce literacy concepts: *“Today, we compared two crops grown by Kansas farmers. We used our senses to observe. We used descriptive words to compare. Then we wrote our opinion using all four parts — topic, opinion, reason, and closing.”*
 - h. Ask students:
 - *“What does every sentence start with?”*
 - *“What goes at the end of a sentence?”*
 - *“What is a digraph? Can you name one we learned today? Can you find a th word in our opinion sentences?”*
9. Kansas Connection
- a. Display a simple map of Kansas.
 - b. Explain to students: *“We live in Kansas, and Kansas is a farming state. Farmers in Kansas grow many crops.”*
 - c. Ask students: *“What crops did we learn about in Lesson 3?”* (wheat, corn, soybeans, sorghum, sunflowers)
 - d. Explain to students: *“Some of the corn grown in Kansas becomes popcorn. Some of the sorghum grown in Kansas can be popped just like the sorghum you tasted today. Farmers grow these crops so people and animals have food.”*
 - e. Kansas Connection:
 Kansas Connection — Teacher Script: *“Every bite you took today — whether you chose the popcorn or the popped sorghum — started in a Kansas field. Corn and sorghum are two of the crops that Kansas farmers plant and harvest every year, and they both start exactly the same way our glove seeds did: as tiny seeds pushed into the soil. If you live in the country or your family has land, you may have seen tall corn or sorghum stalks growing in the summer, or watched a combine move through the rows at harvest time. If you live in town, you might know corn best as popcorn at the movies or frozen corn at dinner — and now you know that a Kansas farmer grew that too. No matter where you live in Kansas, the food on your table has a field behind it, and a farmer who worked hard to grow it. That is something worth knowing.”*
 - f. Ask students:
 - *“Have you seen corn or sorghum fields when you are driving?”*
 - *“Do you know someone who works on a farm or ranch that grows sorghum?”*
 - *“Have you ever eaten sorghum at home?”*

Assessment: Student understanding is assessed through ongoing formative and observational measures embedded throughout the lesson, including teacher observations of

compare-and-contrast discussions, sensory observations and tasting activities, participation in digraph instruction, and the application of foundational literacy skills during shared and independent opinion writing. The teacher should note whether students include all four parts of an opinion (topic, opinion, reason, closing), use the pronoun I correctly, apply capitalization and end punctuation consistently, and demonstrate knowledge of consonant digraphs in reading and writing. Students who make unprompted connections to seeds, soil, or prior lessons demonstrate meaningful cross-unit learning transfer and should be noted.

Supplemental Activities: Class Opinion Graph & Sentence Gallery: After students complete their opinion papers, create a simple class pictograph on chart paper with two columns — one labeled “Popcorn” and one labeled “Popped Sorghum.” Each student places a sticky note or writes their name in the column matching their opinion. The class reads the graph together, counting and comparing using the language of the lesson: “More students liked popcorn,” or “Both got the same number.” This activity extends the compare-and-contrast work into data and graphing while giving students an authentic reason to use comparison vocabulary one more time. Following the graph, display student opinion papers for a brief gallery walk. Students move around the room, read each other’s opinion sentences, and notice similarities and differences in what their classmates chose. The gallery walk reinforces left-to-right tracking, gives writing a genuine audience, and brings the compare-and-contrast thread full circle — from seeds in Lesson 3, to popped crops in this lesson, to the class’s own opinions about Kansas agriculture.

Author: Kelsy Sproul, Literacy Specialist, 2026 KFAC Teacher of the Year, KFAC Curriculum Advisory Council, Former Elementary Teacher. Edited by Marissa Cook, KFAC intern, Kansas State University Secondary Education.

Name: _____

Date: _____

My Opinion: Popcorn or Popped Sorghum?

Part 1: Draw both foods and circle the one you like better.

Part 2: Write your opinion.

A strong opinion has four parts: (1) introduce the topic, (2) state your opinion, (3) give a reason, (4) write a closing.

Topic	Today I tasted ____ and ____. _____.
Opinion	I prefer ____ . / I like ____ best. _____.
Reason	I like it because ____. _____.
Closing	Both snacks ____ . / ____ is a great Kansas crop! _____.

Digraph Reminder: wh (wheat) ch (crunchy) th (both, think, the)

Commas in a series: Popcorn is big, white, and crunchy. (Use commas to separate three or more words!)