



Lesson 4: Comparing Popcorn and Sorghum

Grade Level: 2nd 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. Second graders are expected to write multi-reason opinion pieces that introduce the topic, state an opinion, supply two or more reasons connected by linking words such as 'because', 'and', and 'also', and provide a concluding statement. This lesson also reinforces the use of irregular past-tense verbs and the production, expansion, and rearrangement of simple and compound sentences, which are applied directly to the compare-and-contrast and opinion writing tasks. 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, multi-reason opinion writing with linking words, irregular past tense verbs, producing and expanding simple and compound sentences, sentence rearrangement, and agricultural awareness across Kansas crops.

Kansas Academic Standards

Kansas ELA Standards

W.2.1 Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., because, and, also) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.

W.2.10.d Form and use the past tense of frequently-occurring irregular verbs (e.g., told).

W.2.10.f Produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences.

Science Standards

2-LS2-1 Plan and conduct an investigation to determine if plants need sunlight and water to grow.

2-LS4-1 Make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats.

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.
- Compare observations of corn and sorghum to identify similarities and differences between the plants.

English Language Arts Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Write an opinion piece that introduces the topic, states an opinion, supplies two or more reasons connected by linking words (because, and, also), and provides a concluding statement.
- Use linking words to connect their opinion and reasons in writing.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion in discussion and in their own writing.
- Form and apply the past tense of irregular verbs (e.g., tasted, grew, told) correctly in oral and written responses.
- Produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences in the opinion paragraph.

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'
- Lined writing paper (one per student)
- Pencils and crayons
- Sentence structure anchor chart (teacher-prepared, showing opinion structure)
- Simple map of Kansas
- Hand wipes or paper towels
- Sticky notes (one per student, for class opinion graph)

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. Today, we are going to taste two of those crops and use our observations to write a strong opinion."*
 - 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. Just like wheat, they started as tiny seeds planted in that same Kansas soil we learned about in The Soil Neighborhood. Farmers grew these crops to feed people and animals.”*
Note the irregular past tense verb: grew (not growed). Point this out explicitly: “Notice I said farmers grew these crops — not growed. Grew is the past tense of grow, and it is an irregular verb. We will use past tense verbs like this in our writing today.”
 - e. Explain to students: *“Today, we are going to compare popped sorghum and popcorn. We will observe closely, taste both, and then write an opinion, not just saying which we like, but giving two or more reasons why, connected with linking words.”*
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 descriptive words.
 - g. Model complete sentence responses using the past tense where natural:
 - *“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, unlike*
 - 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... but sorghum is...”*
 - *“Unlike popcorn, 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 using the past tense naturally:
 - *“How did it taste?”*

- *“Was it salty, plain, crunchy, or soft?”*
 - *“Did one have more flavor?”*
 - *“Which one felt lighter in your mouth?”*
- c. Add tasting words to the T-chart.
- d. Encourage complete sentence responses using sentence stems with past tense:
- *“I noticed that...”*
 - *“I tasted... and I thought...”*
 - *“Both tasted...”*
 - *“Popcorn tasted... but sorghum tasted...”*
- e. Explain to students Irregular Past Tense: *“Notice how I am using the past tense when I talk about what we already did. I say I tasted, not I taste. I say it felt, not it feels. These are regular past tense verbs — we add -ed. But watch this one: I told you sorghum can pop. Told is the past tense of tell — that is irregular, we do not add -ed, we change the whole word. What is the past tense of grow? (grew) What is the past tense of tell? (told) What is the past tense of eat? (ate) You will use past tense verbs when you write your opinion today.”*
- f. Reinforce academic language: *“We are comparing using our senses. We are noticing similarities and differences.”*
4. Sentence Work — Expanding and Rearranging
- a. Explain to students: *“Before we write our opinion today, let’s practice writing stronger sentences. In second grade, we work on expanding our sentences to add more detail, and sometimes rearranging them to sound better.”*
- b. Start with a simple sentence and expand it:
- Simple: *“Popcorn is crunchy.”*
 - Expanded: *“Popcorn is big and crunchy.”*
 - Compound: *“Popcorn is big and crunchy, but sorghum is small and light.”*
- c. Try rearranging:
Original: *“I like popcorn because it is crunchy.”*
Rearranged: *“Because it is crunchy, I like popcorn.”*
- d. Ask students: *“Do both sentences mean the same thing? Which sounds better to you? Why?”*
- e. Have students practice orally: give a partner a simple sentence from the T-chart and have them expand or rearrange it.
- f. Explain to students: *“When you write your opinion today, try to write at least one compound sentence and try rearranging one sentence to see if it sounds stronger.”*
5. Introducing Multi-Reason Opinion Writing
- a. Gather students where they can clearly see the chart paper or board.
- b. Explain to students: *“Today, you are going to write your opinion. In second grade, a strong opinion does not just give one reason — it gives two or more reasons, and it connects those reasons to the opinion using linking words.”*
- c. Explain to students Linking Words: *“Linking words connect your opinion to your reasons and help your writing flow. The most common ones are: because, and, and also. Watch how I use them: I prefer popcorn because it is crunchy. I also like it because it is easy to eat. The word because tells why. The word also adds another reason. The word and can join two ideas. Use at least two of these linking words in your opinion today.”*
- d. Display linking words on chart paper:
- *because — “I like it because...”*

- *and* — “It is crunchy and light.”
 - *also* — “I also like it because...”
- e. Teach the parts of a second-grade **opinion**: “A well-written second-grade opinion has five parts. First, introduce the topic. Second, state your opinion. Third, give Reason 1 with a linking word. Fourth, give Reason 2 with a linking word. Fifth, write a concluding statement that wraps up your thinking.”
 - f. Model the difference between fact and opinion: “If I say, ‘Popcorn is white,’ that is a fact because it is something we can observe and verify. If I say, ‘Popcorn is the best snack,’ that is an opinion because it tells what I think or prefer. Different people can have different opinions, and those opinions can all be valid.”
 - g. Ask students:
 - “Can two people have different opinions?”
 - “Is an opinion right or wrong?”
 - h. Model oral opinion with all five parts and linking words:
 “Today I tasted two Kansas crops. (topic) I prefer popcorn. (opinion) I like it because it is crunchy. (reason 1 + because) I also like it because it is easy to eat. (reason 2 + also + because) Both snacks come from Kansas farms, and I am glad farmers grow them.” (concluding statement + and)
 - i. Pair students and have them share with a partner using the five-part structure before writing:
 - “What are you writing about?” (topic)
 - “What is your opinion?”
 - “What is your first reason? What linking word will you use?”
 - “What is your second reason?”
 - “How will you close your writing?”
6. Shared Writing & Sentence Work
- Explain to students: “I am going to write a model opinion on the chart. Watch how I use linking words and how I expand my sentences.”
- a. Write and model a five-part opinion on chart paper:
 “Today I tasted two Kansas crops. I prefer popcorn because it is big and crunchy. I also like popcorn because it reminds me of going to the movies. Both snacks grew in Kansas fields, and I am glad farmers work hard to grow them.”
 - b. Point to and name each part:
 - *Topic sentence*: “Today I tasted two Kansas crops.”
 - *Opinion*: embedded in the next sentence — “I prefer popcorn...”
 - *Reason 1 + linking word*: “because it is big and crunchy.”
 - *Reason 2 + linking word*: “I also like popcorn because it reminds me of going to the movies.”
 - *Concluding statement + linking word*: “Both snacks grew in Kansas fields, and I am glad farmers work hard to grow them.”
 - c. Point out grammar features explicitly:
 - *Irregular past tense*: grew (not growed), reminded (regular)
 - *Compound sentence in the conclusion*: “Both snacks grew in Kansas fields, and I am glad...”
 - *Linking words circled*: because, also, and
 - d. Ask students:
 - “Which linking words do you see? Circle them with me.”
 - “Can you find an irregular past tense verb?”
 - “Which sentence is a compound sentence? How do you know?”

- *“Can you rearrange one of these sentences? Does it still make sense?”*
7. Student Writing Component
- Gather students in a place where they can clearly see the model opinion and anchor chart before beginning.
- a. Explain to students: *“Now it is your turn. You are going to write a five-part opinion about whether you prefer popcorn or popped sorghum. Remember: introduce your topic, state your opinion, give two reasons connected with linking words, and end with a concluding statement.”*
 - b. Prompt students: *“Before you write, say your opinion out loud to a partner. Tell them your two reasons, and which linking words you will use. Then write independently.”*
 - c. Provide draw-and-write directions: *“First, draw both foods on your paper and circle the one you prefer. Then write your five-part opinion below your drawing.”*
 - d. As students write, circulate and explicitly support:
 - *Five-part opinion structure (topic, opinion, reason 1, reason 2, concluding statement)*
 - *Linking words: because, and, also*
 - *At least one compound sentence*
 - *Irregular past tense verbs used correctly (grew, told, ate)*
 - *Capital letter at the start of each sentence and end punctuation*
 - *Evidence of sentence expansion or rearrangement*
 - e. Ask students:
 - *“What is your opinion?”*
 - *“What are your two reasons?”*
 - *“Which linking words did you use?”*
 - *“Can you find a compound sentence in your writing?”*
 - *“Can you read your concluding statement to me?”*

Differentiation note: For students who need additional support, provide a paragraph frame with labeled blanks at teacher discretion (e.g., “Today I tasted _____. I prefer _____ because _____. I also like it because _____. _____”). For students ready for a challenge, prompt them to write three reasons, use all three linking words (because, and, also), and include two compound sentences.
8. Discussion & Reflection
- a. Gather students with their completed opinion pieces.
 - b. Invite volunteers to share their opinion pieces. Prompt them to read all five parts.
 - c. Ask students:
 - *“What is your opinion?”*
 - *“What two reasons did you give?”*
 - *“Which linking words did you use?”*
 - *“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 with compound sentences:
 - *“Both are... but...”*
 - *“Popcorn is... and sorghum is...”*

- *“Unlike popcorn, sorghum is...”*
- g. Reinforce literacy concepts: *“Today, we compared two crops grown by Kansas farmers. We tasted them, described them, and wrote our opinions using linking words, compound sentences, and past tense verbs. That is second-grade writing.”*
- h. Ask students:
 - *“What linking words help connect an opinion to its reasons?”*
 - *“What is the past tense of grow? Of tell? Of eat?”*
 - *“What makes a sentence compound?”*
- 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 grew these crops so people and animals have food.”*
Point out the past tense: *“Farmers grew — that is the past tense of grow. It is irregular.”*
 - 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 observation of compare-and-contrast discussions, sensory observation and tasting activities, and application of grade-level literacy skills during shared and independent opinion writing. Teacher should note whether students include all five parts of a second grade opinion (topic, opinion, reason 1, reason 2, concluding statement), use at least two linking words (because, and, also) to connect their opinion and reasons, form irregular past tense verbs correctly (grew, told, ate), produce at least one compound sentence, and demonstrate evidence of sentence expansion or rearrangement. 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: “More students liked popcorn.” or “Both got the same number.” Prompt students to express the comparison as a compound sentence: “More students chose popcorn, but sorghum also got votes.” Then display student opinion papers for a brief gallery walk. Students move around the room, read each other’s opinions, identify the linking words each writer used, and note whether their classmate gave two reasons. This extends the compare-and-contrast and sentence work from the lesson into an authentic reading and analytical task.

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