

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

**Grade 6: Lesson 19** In this lesson, students focused on finding evidence in the text to develop an understanding of how the author conveys the idea of eating sticky rice as necessary for survival.

### **A Taste of Sticky Rice, Laos' National Dish**

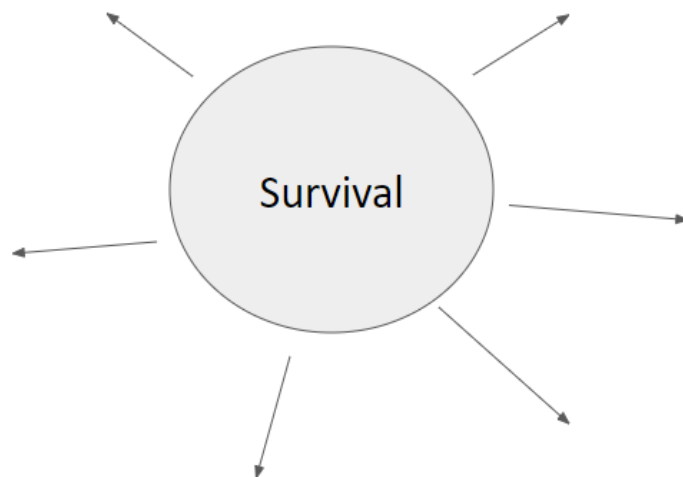
Paragraphs 13-20

- (13) But sticky rice isn't merely spiritual fuel. Because it takes longer to digest than white rice does, it sates hunger for longer periods. That's good for Laotian monks, who generally don't eat after midday. "People give us only sticky rice, which is awesome," said Sary Phonesay, a 19-year-old monk with brown eyes and a gentle smile. He was standing in the sun-dappled courtyard of a Buddhist temple in Luang Prabang, where tourists line up each morning like band groupies outside of a stadium box office to place steaming clumps of khao niaw into the monks' collection pots. When I asked why he prefers sticky rice to white rice, the monk said, "If I eat sticky rice, I'll be full longer." Laotian farmers I asked repeated variations of Sary's explanation. Agriculture, mainly subsistence rice farming, employs three out of four Laotians. Sticky rice packs well in banana leaves and is a common field-side snack.
- (14) Sticky rice grows in Laotian lowlands and uplands. Lowland farmers plant it in flooded paddies; upland farmers intercrop it on hillsides with companion crops like taro, cassava, and chili peppers. Because hillsides generally receive less-predictable supplies of water than paddies do, hillside rice fields tend to be more susceptible to drought.
- (15) Curious about hillside sticky rice, my friends and I rode an overnight bus from Luang Prabang to Luang Namtha, a one-lane town near the Laos-China border. At a Luang Namtha eco-outfitter, we asked a friendly guide to take us into the town on rented motorbikes. The passing landscape alternated between forests, rubber plantations, thatch-roof houses and cleared hillsides whose golden color reminded me of California's Santa Ynez Valley.
- (16) Soon we were hiking near a sleepy village whose sign read Khoua Soung. Farmers from the Kmhmu ethnic group were harvesting sticky rice on a distant hillside. As we approached russet-colored rice stalks, Luck praised the view: he had sketched similarly pastoral scenes in primary school, he recalled, but always from his imagination. "We're not in the lowlands anymore," said Luck, whose white headphones were playing Laotian pop music from a pocket MP3 player. "Those people have to stand up all day, and they don't have any technology to help!"
- (17) Indeed, most Kmhmu people are upland subsistence farmers, and they use decidedly low-tech production techniques. Men and women stripped sticky rice grains by hand from mature stalks, then dropped the grains into woven baskets attached to their hips. After dumping the rice into white sacks, they carried the sacks down the hill.
- (18) Rural development experts told me that many Laotian farmers wage a constant battle against food insecurity. The farmers of Khoua Soung were no exception: Because of drought and rodent infestations, they said, 16 of their village's 57 families wouldn't harvest enough sticky rice this year to meet their own needs. "In the cities, they eat sticky rice for taste," said Juelang, a quiet farmer who was drinking water from a plastic motor-oil can. "Here we eat it for survival."

(19) Over an evening bonfire in Khoua Soung — a roadside cluster of wooden stilt houses — farmers discussed survival strategies. Some were selling rubber sap and wild cardamom to Chinese traders; others were selling rice-harvesting baskets to tourists. If all else failed, said 41-year-old farmer Han Tom Keo, needy farmers would borrow sticky rice from their neighbors.

(20) The threat of hunger didn't diminish their hospitality. As stars replaced the sun in a cloudless sky, the farmers invited us into a stilt house and served us spicy jeow, pickled bamboo shoots, fresh chicken soup and steaming hunks of khao niaw. I handled my sticky rice carefully, conscious of how much elbow grease had gone into each grain. We ate and chatted, and ate some more, until about 8 p.m. Afterward we were so full that we went directly to bed. Lying under a mosquito net in the head villager's drafty stilt house, I listened for sounds of evening activity. Silence. The farmers were sleeping, and for good reason: There was more sticky rice to harvest, starting at daybreak.

**Web for Notes:**



**Independent Practice:**

Write a paragraph response that answers the question, how does the author convey the idea that eating sticky rice is necessary for survival?

You are encouraged to use your notes from today's lesson. Try to use quotations and paraphrased details to support your response.

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