



## Lesson Plan: The Pursuit of Excellence

### OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will look at how competitions motivate participants to develop their skills and achieve excellence. Students will watch film clips related to a competition for pastry chefs in France and then compare and contrast that competition with one in the United States.

The clips used in this lesson are from the film **Kings of Pastry**, a documentary about pastry chefs who engage in a high stakes competition to be named one of the “Best Craftsmen in France” or “Meilleurs Ouvriers de France” (MOF). Please note that parts of the film are in French with English subtitles. For more information on the MOF competition, please see the [Related Resources](#) section of this lesson.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow any time during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Examine a competition in France among creative trade professionals.
- Determine whether academic skills should be valued differently than manual skills.
- Explain the role of mentors in achieving excellence.
- Compare and contrast the competition in France with one in the United States.

### GRADE LEVELS

6-12

### SUBJECT AREAS

Arts, Career and Technical Education, International Studies, Language Arts, Current Events

### MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video

### ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One 50-minute class period, plus time outside of class to complete the assigned essay

### FILM CLIPS

Clip 1: “Manual Skill Doesn’t Fall From the Sky” (length 2:28)

The clip begins at :17 with shots of France. It ends at 2:45 with people clapping.

Clip 2: "Practice Makes Perfect" (length 3:55)

The clip begins at 35:45 with Philippe driving in his car. It ends at 39:40 when Jacquy says, "I have to make a lot of changes before Monday."

## ACTIVITY

### Part 1

1. Ask students to journal for a few minutes about something that they can do well (e.g., a sport, making cookies, mathematics, photography, public speaking). Instruct them to include details about how they have developed their skills and who or what has motivated them (e.g., mentors, parents, standards, performances, personal satisfaction, money, glory, competitions, awards).
2. Invite a few students to share what they have written. Ask students to note what has driven their classmates to succeed.
3. Explain that in France, creative trade professionals, such as carpenters, florists, jewelers and pastry chefs, compete to earn a title that means they are the best in their field: "Best Craftsmen in France" or "Meilleurs Ouvriers de France." The French call a person who earns this title a MOF. Tell students that MOF candidates compete against a standard of excellence rather than against each other. Any finalists who meet the competition's high standards can earn the title of MOF. There is not one, single champion.
4. Tell students that the MOF competition for pastry chefs takes place every four years. During the time between competitions, MOF candidates dedicate significant time and money to rigorously practice for the competition. They also work with MOFs who serve as mentors and give them feedback to help them prepare. MOF candidates create collections of beautiful and tasty pastries that meet specific guidelines, as well as intricate artistic sculptures made of chocolate and sugar.
5. Show Clip 2 (length 3:55), which features some pastry chefs preparing for the MOF competition. Instruct students to watch for two intricate sugar sculptures that the chefs practice making for the competition. (The first sculpture is the abstract wedding couple shown early in the clip. The groom is wearing a top hat. The second sculpture is carried to a buffet table later in the clip.) Explain that these sculptures are very fragile and delicate. They are created by molding, pulling, blowing (like glass) and otherwise manipulating hot sugar while it cools.
6. Discuss:
  - How does preparing for the competition push the pastry chefs to develop their skills further? How has preparing for recitals, championship games, contests or other events helped students progress in their respective areas?
  - What role do the MOFs play in the development of excellence in their fields? Do students have any mentors? If so, what support do they give?
  - How can the process of developing talents influence other areas of life?

## Part 2

1. Explain that in addition to rewarding the excellence of these artisans, the MOF competition also seeks to signal that France values manual work as much as intellectual work.
2. Show students a brief video clip that depicts French President Nicolas Sarkozy presenting the MOF awards in 2008. Ask students to listen carefully to what he says in his speech. Then show Clip 1 (length 2:28).
3. Discuss this statement from President Sarkozy: “Manual skill doesn’t fall from the sky any more than an intellectual skill.”
  - How would students restate this point in their own words?
  - Do students believe that educational achievements should be valued differently than the achievements of those who work with their hands? Have any students changed their viewpoints on this question after seeing the creations of the pastry chefs in the video? Why or why not? Explain.
  - How might rewarding excellence in manual skills benefit France’s economy?
4. Ask students to choose a competition that takes place in the United States and write a comparison essay that demonstrates how it is similar to and how it differs from the MOF competition. In their essays, students should consider how the competitions motivate participants to succeed and what values of society they reflect.

## EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

- Research what career and technical education opportunities are available in your community. Have students create a website, brochure, cafeteria display table or other presentation that includes information on relevant high school classes, post-secondary training, certificate programs and so on. Then, ask the class to develop a community report card that evaluates these local career and technical education opportunities and recommend areas for improvement. Share this feedback with local leaders.
- Study contrasting ideas on how best to improve the quality of life for African Americans following the Civil War. During this time, freed slaves were struggling to find a new place in society, and there was much public debate about whether vocational training or academic education would be more helpful to them. In the early 20th century, two African-American leaders offered different philosophies on how African Americans could best improve their situations. Have students summarize and compare the ideas of Booker T. Washington (<http://northbysouth.kenyon.edu/1998/edu/home/btw.htm>) and W.E.B. Du Bois (<http://northbysouth.kenyon.edu/1998/edu/home/web.htm>). Also, read Booker T. Washington’s speech “Industrial Education for the Negro” (<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=62>) and W.E.B. Du Bois’ essay “Of the Training of Black Men” (<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1113>). Discuss potential reasons why these leaders had such divergent views. With

whom do students agree more? Why? Have students respond to this question with persuasive essays that include evidence from the readings.

- Examine how successful people handle pressure and adversity. Watch **Kings of Pastry** in its entirety and ask students to describe how Philippe Rigollet responded when his elaborate sugar sculpture collapsed during the final hours of the MOF competition. How did his reaction help him to achieve his goals? What would have happened if he had stopped competing at that point? What role did the support of colleagues, family and friends play in his success? Ask each student to use a Venn diagram to compare Rigollet's experience to that of a historic or contemporary figure who also faced significant obstacles but did not give up and ultimately succeeded (e.g., Lance Armstrong, Bethany Hamilton, Helen Keller, Condoleezza Rice, Jackie Robinson.) Invite students to share their findings with the class and explain any patterns that they notice.
- Explore other POV films with themes of perseverance and competition. *Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball* ([http://www.pbs.org/pov/kokoyakyu/lesson\\_plan.php](http://www.pbs.org/pov/kokoyakyu/lesson_plan.php)) illustrates the Japanese obsession with high school baseball and *Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador)* ([http://www.pbs.org/pov/matador/lesson\\_plan.php](http://www.pbs.org/pov/matador/lesson_plan.php)) describes the practice and commitment needed for a woman to become a matador. For each film, video, background information and educator resources are provided online.

## RESOURCES

### **Facebook. "Les Meilleurs Ouvriers de France: A Tradition of Excellence."**

[http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=456601851197](http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=456601851197)

This article posted by the French Embassy to the United States provides details about the MOF competition process. One of the featured chefs from **Kings of Pastry** explains the level of commitment and dedication required to compete.

### ***Kings of Pastry.***

<http://kingsofpastry.com/>

The official **Kings of Pastry** site includes a trailer, reviews and information about the film and filmmakers.

### **Le Cordon Bleu. "MOF. or Best Craftsman of France."**

[www.cordonbleu.edu/index.cfm?fa=NewsEventFrontMod.DisplayNewsPage&ElementID=195&SetLangID=1](http://www.cordonbleu.edu/index.cfm?fa=NewsEventFrontMod.DisplayNewsPage&ElementID=195&SetLangID=1)

This website serves as a hub for an international network of culinary arts and hospitality institutes and includes an extensive description of the MOF competition.

### **Pfeiffer, Jacquy. "The Kings of Pastry: Inside the Legendary *Meilleur Ouvrier de France, Pâtissier* Competition." *The Huffington Post*, September 13, 2010.**

[www.huffingtonpost.com/chef-jacquy-pfeiffer/kings-of-pastry-film-french-pastry-competition\\_b\\_714904.html#s139261](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chef-jacquy-pfeiffer/kings-of-pastry-film-french-pastry-competition_b_714904.html#s139261)

In this article, MOF competitor Jacquy Pfeiffer provides an insider's perspective on the competition.

**“The Q&A: Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker, Documentary Filmmakers.” *The Economist*, September 17, 2010.**

[http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2010/09/kings\\_pastry](http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2010/09/kings_pastry)

This interview with the **Kings of Pastry** filmmakers explains more about the significance of the MOF competition.

## **STANDARDS**

**These standards are drawn from Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects**

[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI\\_ELA%20Standards.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

SL, 9-10, 11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-appropriate] topics, text and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL, 9-10.4 Present information, findings and supporting evidence clearly, concisely and logically, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and task.

SL, 11-12.4 Present information, findings and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and a range of formal and informal tasks.

SL, 9-10, 11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning and evidence and to add interest.

WHST. 9-10, 11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

**These standards are drawn from “Content Knowledge,” a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning)**

<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>

Arts and Communication, Standard 4: Understands ways in which the human experience is transmitted and reflected in the arts and communication.

Behavioral Studies, Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

Family/Consumer Sciences, Standard 13: Understand important concepts and skills related to careers in food production and services.

Geography, Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Life Work, Standard 4: Studies or pursues specific job interests.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource Web site (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.