

Botany of Desire: Movie Questions

1. What is co-evolution?
2. What is artificial selection?
3. How is the human's role in the garden like or unlike the bee's?
4. Do you think we stand apart from nature? How or how not?

Apple

1. How did early Americans consume apples? When and why did that change? How were notions of the apple's healthfulness popularized?
2. Why do apple seeds contain cyanide?
3. What role does sweetness play in co-evolution?
4. What was "The Great Apple Rush?"
5. Explain the statement that "the practice of growing a dwindling handful of cloned varieties in vast orchards has rendered [the apple] less fit as a plant." How does co-evolution cease in grafted trees? What do apple growers do about this? What solution does the movie propose?

Tulip

1. Give some examples of the visual, olfactory, and tactile devices that flowers employ to get the attention of animals.
2. Why would flowers, even those that possess both male and female organs, go to great lengths to avoid pollinating themselves? How does this relate to our social taboos against incest?
3. Why does the film claim that the flower industry creates an entirely useless commodity?

Cannabis

1. How do plants encourage animals to seek or avoid them, such as bitter-tasting compounds, or an abundance of sugar? Why is it more advantageous for a plant's poison to repel than to kill?
2. How have animals counter-evolved in response?
3. What is THC? How does it work? What reasons do botanists offer for why cannabis produces it?
4. What is anandamide? What possible explanations does the movie give for its existence?
5. How long has cannabis been co-evolving with humans? What are the two "paths" Pollan describes for this co-evolution?

6. What is the difference between hemp and cannabis? How does our legal system distinguish between them?

Potato

1. What is genetic modification?

2. Pollan observes that “companies that have developed [GMOs] give contradictory answers. The industry simultaneously... [says] the new plants are novel enough to be patented, yet not so novel as to warrant a label telling us what we’re eating” Can both be true?

3. Why does the movie say monoculture is industrial agriculture’s greatest strength and its greatest weakness? Why do they say monoculture is in crisis?

4. What is saved seed? What is hybrid seed? How is each different from genetically modified seed? Which must be purchased? What is the outcome of collecting and replanting each? How long has each existed? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? (Research question: How much of our food supply comes from each?)