

Practice with Hints

Use the Notes column to take notes and use SALSA™ strategies. There are a few hints to get you started.

A Death-Defying Dinner

Every culture has certain foods that might seem unusual to people from other cultures. In the United States, some people think that pig skin, deep-fried and puffed, makes a delicious snack otherwise known as pork rinds. Other people can't understand why someone would make a pigskin into anything but a football. In France, the **truffle**, a sort of smelly mushroom that grows underground, is a prized ingredient. Some truffles sell for thousands of dollars per pound.

Skim Why is **truffle** in bold?

But some delicacies are not just unusual, they're downright dangerous. In Japan, one of the greatest delicacies is **fugu**, a very special kind of fish. It has been eaten there for hundreds, maybe even thousands of years. Every night, at fancy restaurants and at home, the Japanese eat fugu. But they are dicing with death. Each fugu fish contains poison, sometimes enough to kill 30 people!

Ask Why would anyone want to eat such a dangerous food?

Puffy and Poisonous

The fugu fish is also known as the **puffer fish**, because it can use water to puff itself into a huge ball. This is meant to scare away predators, but the puffer fish also has a second line of defense. It contains an incurable poison called **tetrodotoxin** in its eyes, liver and other organs. In its purest form, as little as 1 milligram of the toxin can paralyze a person. The victim loses his ability to move or even breathe. Half of the people poisoned by tetrodotoxin die within a day. So why would anyone take such a risk?

Look Look here for facts about the puffer fish.

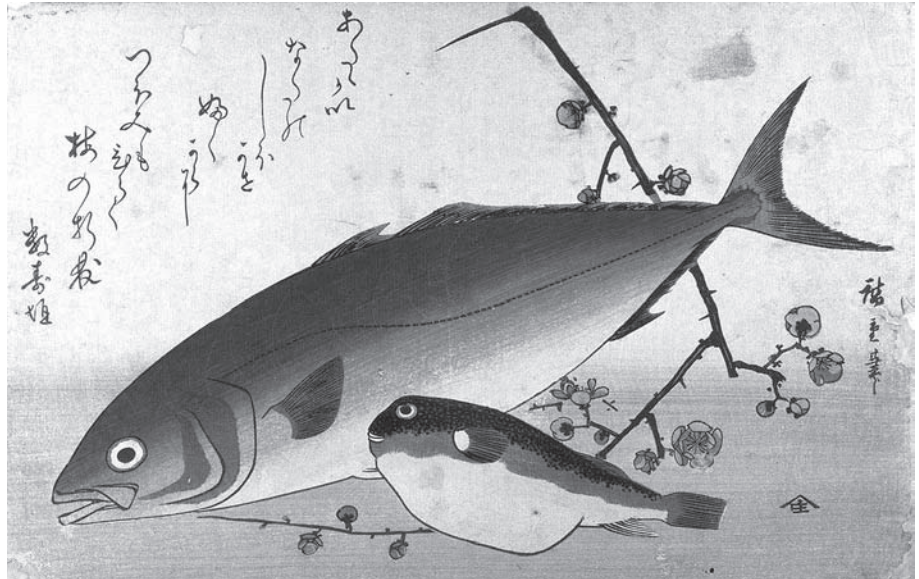
Solve How big is a milligram? Use *What You Know*. What things are measured in milligrams?

A Fishing License

If half of the people who ate fugu died, people wouldn't be so eager to eat it. When they buy fugu in a restaurant or supermarket, there are some safety nets. It is *almost* certain that the chef will have cut out all the poisonous parts.

Notes

In the past, so many people died from eating fugu that in 1958, Japan passed a new law. It said that chefs had to get a fugu license before they could serve the dangerous dish. Chefs must learn to cut out parts of the fugu fish with the precision of a surgeon. At the end of their training, they take a written exam. They also have to prepare and eat their own fugu fish. For them, getting their license really is a matter of life and death!



Yellowtail and puffer fish, by Ando Hiroshige
Courtesy of Connecticut College, Wetmore Print Collection

Asemble How does this section help tie the passage together?

The Delicious Taste of Danger

Some who have tried fugu say it tastes amazingly good. But others claim that it is surprisingly tasteless. Why is there such a difference? Perhaps for some people, danger is the best spice. They savor the thrill of doing something so brave. Ordering fugu is a little like skydiving.

Even though eating fugu is much safer than it used to be, there are still a few poisonings every year. In 1975, one of Japan's most famous actors died hours after eating fugu. But the customers keep on ordering the poisonous puffer. Because it is so much more widely available, it may be more popular now than ever.

Solve What is a proverb?

A famous Japanese proverb says: "Those who eat fugu soup are stupid. Those who don't eat fugu soup are also stupid." No matter which side you fall on, it's easy to see that a meal might taste wonderful when you know it could be your last!