



MAINE MUSEUM OF  
INNOVATION  
LEARNING +  
LABOR

# You are what you eat? Cultural Identity and Food

Teacher's Guide and Worksheets

# You are what you eat?

Grades K-12

**Time:** 1-2, 50-60 min. class period(s)

## Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify foods associated with personal, family, or cultural traditions.
- Recognize how food reflects cultural, geographic, and familial influences.
- Communicate the meaning and significance behind a traditional or favorite dish.
- Develop an appreciation for the cultural diversity within their classroom and beyond.

## Materials Needed

- Pencil
- Paper
- Copy of read aloud book. Recommended reading list below.

## Pre-reading/Preparation

It is suggested that students be familiar with the Immigration portion of our website but it is not required for this lesson.

## Instruction, Teacher Modeling, Guided Practice

This lesson can be adapted for diverse ages and skill levels. Differentiation suggestions will be provided for each step.

1. **Pair and Share:** Start by having students reflect on a favorite food or special meal associated with holidays or celebrations (e.g., birthday cake, Thanksgiving turkey). Ask them to discuss this with a partner, and then have pairs share with the whole group. Record responses on a whiteboard/projection. As a class, identify patterns in celebrations, holidays, and everyday norms. Encourage students to make connections with others and ask clarifying questions about unfamiliar foods or celebrations.
2. **Food Stories:** Explain that food has narratives. Eating habits are often tied to culture, climate, and ancestral practices. Comfort foods are frequently passed down through generations. What is common locally, like lobster in Maine, might be exotic elsewhere. Immigrants often maintain cultural ties through traditional foods. Exploring other cultures' foods offers a glimpse into their stories.

\*If you are comfortable: Share a personal traditional food, how it's prepared, and its cultural significance to you/your family. Include a picture. For example, share a family recipe passed down or a tradition like a specific meal for birthdays.

## Instruction, Teacher Modeling, Guided Practice (Cont.)

### 3. Differentiation by Grade Level:

**Grades K+:** Read aloud a book from the recommended list below focusing on food traditions and culture, or share a personal favorite.

**Grades 4+:** Read one of the books below **-OR-** Present this prompt: In 1826, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin stated, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are." Discuss the meaning of this quote, student agreement or disagreement, and what can be learned about someone from their food choices.

### Suggested Read Aloud Books

The Whole World Inside Nan's Soup by Hunter Liguore

Cora Cooks Pancit by Dorina Lazo Gilmore

Thank You, Omu! by Oge Mora

Kalamata's Kitchen by Sarah Thomas

Fry Bread by Kevin Noble Maillard

Pop Pop and Me and a Recipe by Irene Smalls

Soul Food Sunday by Winsome Bingham

Bee-Bim Bop! by Linda Sue Park

Watercress by Andrea Wang

Hot, Hot Roti for Dada-ji by Farhana Zia

Too Many Tamales by Gary Soto

The Have a Good Day Cafe by Frances Park and Ginger Park

The Ugly Vegetables by Grace Lin

Let's Eat!: Mealtime Around the World by Lynne Marie

## Independent Work Time

### 1. Differentiation by Grade Level:

**Grades K-2:** Distribute and complete the attached handout as homework with guardian support.

**Grades 3-5:** Distribute and complete the attached handout in class or as homework with guardian support.

**Grades 6+:** Project this National Geographic article in the front of the room. Read aloud, review photos, and discuss captions. Encourage observations, questions, and deeper exploration. Distribute and complete the attached handout in class or as homework.

## Follow-up and Extension Activities

- **Grades K-1:** Display completed handouts, identify shared traditions, share new learnings, host a potluck lunch, and/or create a "Class Cultural Cookbook."
- **Grades 2-5:** Host a potluck lunch, create a Google slideshow recipe collection ("Class Cultural Cookbook"), and map the origins of recipes.
- **Grades 6+:** Complete the activities for grades 2-5 and extension activities. Explore Maine MILL website for local immigrant groups, research their countries of origin, and research their traditional foods.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Our Class Food Traditions

(Grades K-2)

What food do you look forward to eating every year on a special day? Birthday cake on your birthday? Turkey for Thanksgiving? Mooncakes for the Mid-Autumn Festival? Sufganiyot and latkes for Hanukkah? Tell and draw about your food.

What special day are you celebrating?

What special food do you eat on this day?

What do you like best about this food?

Draw a picture of your food below. Add lots of color and detail.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Our Class Food Traditions

(Grades 3-5)

Every family and every culture around the world has special foods they associate with celebrations. For example: turkey for Thanksgiving, mooncakes for the Mid-Autumn Festival, sufganiyot and latkes for Hanukkah, etc. Think about a food that you have at special events every year. Choose one to complete this assignment. Answer the questions below. On the back of this page include the recipe and instructions for making the celebration food, as well as a picture. You may use a recipe you already have or find one online. The picture may be one you have taken, found online or one that you draw.

\*Having trouble deciding what to pick? Think about these questions: What food is always shared at celebrations or holidays where you live? What dish would you share with your friends? What food best represents your family's culture?

What is your special celebration?

What is the food you eat at this celebration?

**Write a paragraph below that explains why you chose this food for this assignment.**

Consider the following questions: Why is this food important to your family? How does it represent you and your family? Will you make this food when you are an adult? Do you like to eat it?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Our Class Food Traditions

(Grades 3-5)

This is a recipe for:

Where did you get this recipe?:

Time it takes to make:

List of Ingredients:

Directions to make:

Picture of recipe:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Food Traditions Around the World

(Grades 6+)

Together in class we viewed [this slideshow](#) from National Geographic. Each photograph features the sale, production or sharing of food from nations around the world. Choose 5 photographs from the slide show. Fill in the chart below for each of your chosen slides.

Slide #	What do you see in this photo? Describe in detail.	Compare to your foods (What is familiar? What is new? What do you have questions about?)