

Teaching Guide

Food: A Multi-cultural Feast

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Summary

It's a short and often tragic step from despising the foods a people eat to despising the people themselves.

Why do your students eat ham but not hamster? Why do supermarkets sell food for cats but not cats for food? Why do other cultures eat "gross outs" such as sheep's eyeballs, monkey brains, dog, snakes, and insects? Are such weird habits proof that these cultures are "backward"? Understand the answers to these questions and you are well on your way toward multi-cultural understanding.

This video is based on the idea that even the most intolerant, biased, and foreign-fearing among us already has a multi-cultural stomach. And, we all know that the stomach is the shortest way to the heart.

The video examines the multi-cultural origins of many foods we take for granted:

- ◆ Sauerkraut is Chinese. Chinese? Yes, it's a long story going back to the building of the Great Wall.

- ◆ Chocolate is from Central America and spent most of its life as a drink, not a treat to eat.
- ◆ Not too many years ago yogurt was a food eaten only by "health nuts" and Bulgarians.
- ◆ "Banana" is an Americanized version of a Spanish word for a West African name for a fruit that may have first been eaten in Southern Asia or India. The first banana enter the United States via Cuba around 1804.
- ◆ Few knew many Germans came to the U.S. to escape a potato famine. They brought many of today's popular potato foods with them.
- ◆ Pizza is from Italy, but has a connection to Central America. It has a lot to do with the city of Naples, but not much with the leaning tower.
- ◆ Cookies and doughnuts came to us from the Dutch. Americans, however, invented the hole in the doughnut.
- ◆ Many of our most common "ethnic foods" are not ethnic at all. Chili isn't Mexican, you won't find Chop Suey in China, and spaghetti and meatballs is uniquely American. Chow mein and French toast are more "ethnic slurs" than ethnic recipes.
- ◆ Some of our eating habits are viewed as strange by other cultures. Many cultures do not drink the fluid produced by cow's mammary glands. Europeans look askance on our habit of eating corn on the cob .

Activities

1. If your parents were born in this country: Find some food or recipe in your household that can be traced to another country. Report on its history and who is most responsible for it. Construct a sort of “family tree” for the food tracing its origins as far back as you can.
2. If your parents were born in a different country: Find some food that your parents have “discovered” since coming to this country. Ask them about a food they used to enjoy but no longer eat because it is not easily available.
3. You’ve seen in the video that as people immigrate they take their food with them. The foods and recipes undergo changes in the new land, but they survive and often spread to become an accepted part of the culture. Compare how food becomes part of a culture to how the people themselves are integrated into the new culture. How do food and people behave in similar ways? How do they differ?
4. Imagine that you live in a country where “foreign foods” are forbidden. Grocery stores and restaurants are not allowed to sell foods that originated in other countries. This “down with foreign foods” movement took hold as a form of patriotism. How would such laws change your eating habits?
5. How many different ethnic cuisines are represented by restaurants in your town or metro area? Make it a point to try one that is new to you.

6. If your school is like most, you have students from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Consider conducting a “Taste of the World Food Fair.” Many schools have already conducted such an event as a way to raise multi-cultural awareness, understand each other, and sometimes raise money as well.

7. The middle pages of this teaching guide contain a grid showing a variety of foods with interesting histories. Assign each student a food to research and prepare a short written or verbal report. Find out who first ate the food, how it came to this country, how it has changed in the past decades, and give a brief history of its use.

The foods have been carefully selected so that each has a fascinating story to tell. The scholarship and research on the history of food is extensive. Food is an excellent topic for cross-disciplinary and multicultural study.

Photocopy the two page spread and cut the grid into small cards to distribute to your students. This will insure each student has a different food. You might want to allow trading foods in order to increase motivation. Alternate method of assigning foods: Post the grid and have students initial the food they wish to research.

Research can be done in an encyclopedia, or by using the books listed in the bibliography in this guide. You can also find information by searching on food names in Internet search engines. Encourage students to dig for information and use an encyclopedia only as a start to their research.

Corn	Chili Con Carne	Ice Cream	Turkey	Hot Dogs
Chow Mein	Soft Drinks	Cereal for Breakfast	Coffee	Sugar
Potatoes	Tomatoes	Peanuts	Strawberries	Hamburgers
Chocolate	Milk	Sweet Potatoes	Bananas	Frozen Foods
Pizza	Margarine	Spaghetti	Apples	Apple Pie
Butter	White Bread	Tea	Watermelons	Chewing Gum
Insects as Food	Horsemeat	Salsa	Salt	Pepper
Citrus Fruits	Maize	Wild Rice	Rice	Cheese
Wheat	Graham Crackers	Sauerkraut	Catsup/ Ketchup	Sandwich

Food for Thought

To the orthodox Muslim our use of pork is revolting, and to the orthodox Hindu, the thought of eating beef is almost as horrifying as the thought of eating human flesh is to us. To many peoples a crisply roasted grasshopper is more palatable than a raw oyster. Some East African people find eggs nauseating, and Chinese students newly arrived in this country have sometimes become ill at seeing people drinking milk.”

—Ina Corinne Brown in **Understanding Other Cultures**

“I have found a perfect definition of human nature as distinguished from the animal. Benjamin Franklin said, Man was a ‘tool-making animal’, which is very well; for no animal but man makes a thing. But this applies to very few of the species. My definition of Man is, a ‘Cooking Animal’. The beasts have memory, judgement, and all the facilities and passions of our mind, in a certain degree; but no beast is a cook.”

—Samuel Johnson

“Exactly who you eat with may vary from country to country, but one global generalization we can make is that giving and exchanging food is fundamental to any sort of human relationship in any society, whether in Britain, India or Vanuatu. The English term companion” comes from a Roman word meaning ‘one who breaks bread with another’ (*com* = with, *panis* = bread).

Jeremy MacClancy, **Consuming Culture: Why You Eat What You Eat**

Before 1492, from one end of Europe to the other people ate much the same food.. By 1600, Europe and The Americas ...had exchanged the fundamental ingredients and ideas of their cuisines. The exchange of foodstuffs began as a deliberate policy of the Spanish crown. Old World crops and livestock were introduced to Mexico and Peru to support a civilized (that is, Spanish) way of life for the colonists, and New World exotica were sent to Spain as novelties and for agricultural exploitation. But once tomatoes had taken root in Italy, once cattle provided beef and gave milk to Mexico, then local cooks put these wonderful new foods to use. And the world changed.

Raymond Sokolov, in **Why We Eat What We Eat**.

Ask Europeans or Americans why they don't eat insects, and you can count on the answer: 'Insects are disgusting, and full of germs.....I think we have the whole thing backward. Therejection of insects as food has little to do with insects as disease carriers or their association with dirt and filth. The reason we don't eat them is not that they are dirty and loathsome; rather, they are dirty and loathsome because we don't eat them.

Marvin Harris in **Good to Eat: Riddles of Food & Culture**

In western Europe until about the middle of the 19th century the mainstays, and in some places nearly the exclusive items in the diet, were various forms of cereal, mainly bread, supplemented now and then by salted meat. Milk, fruit, and vegetables were frills eaten for novelty by those who could afford them... In the 1830's and 40's there was a widespread suspicion that fresh fruits and vegetables were dangerous to health, especially to children.

Daniel Boorstin in **The Americans**

Ethnic Food Dictionary

CHILI PEPPERS - Columbus sought the Orient as a source of valuable spices. Black peppers were worth their weight in gold back in Europe. He didn't find pepper in the Caribbean, but he did discover spicy chilies. In the hopes of creating a valuable market, he called them chili peppers even though chilies and peppers are not related. His wishful thinking misnaming stuck.

MILK — Americans certainly didn't invent milk, but they did take drinking it to new heights. Milk producing animals are not native to the Americas, they were imported by the Spaniards and English. At first, European settlers drank mainly goat milk. Before modern pasteurization milk was risky to drink because it spoiled quickly. Contaminated milk was common and caused an illness known as "milk poisoning." Abraham Lincoln's mother died from "milk poison."

Gail Borden invented condensed milk before pasteurization. Gail saw that immigrant babies suffered on transatlantic crossings when the cows on board could not give milk. Condensed milk was flavored with sugar and cooked under vacuum to remove 60% of the water — it was standard issue for Civil War troops.

BEER — Beer was popular in 18th century America. Everyone (even kids) drank it, and even with breakfast. We might consider their drinking habits scandalous. But remember, soft drinks were not yet invented, water supplies were often unsafe, and milk could not be preserved for any length of time. Alcoholic beverages were important because they could be stored over time.

CORN — Corn was cultivated in pre-historic Mexico, learned by American Indians, and passed on to European settlers. Corn was commonly eaten as a grain, like in corn bread or tortillas. In fact, the phrase “corn on the cob” didn’t enter our language until 1876.

In much of the world “corn” is a general term for the most commonly grown grain. Our word “corny” refers to this meaning. Today, more corn is grown to feed animals than people.

TURKEY — No one knows for sure why this bird is named after a Middle Eastern country. In spite of nice stories about the first Thanksgiving and turkeys, our domesticated turkey was an import from England. The pilgrims did eat fowl, but it was nothing like our “butterballs.”

In France, a Turkey is a *dinde* which translates as “from India.” Our domesticated turkey very likely has Eastern roots. The origins of the turkey is murky.

EGG FOO YUNG — Scrambled eggs and Chinese vegetables. A Chinese-American dish not found in China. The name has no meaning.

Chop suey and chow mein are also dishes “invented” in the U.S. with names that are not Chinese.

CHEESE — The basic technique in cheese making is to mix milk with rennet, the stomach lining of a slaughtered calf. The rennet curdles the milk, leaving the whey on top to be drawn off. The curds are pressed into a mold or aged for flavor. Cheese is an ancient food, well known among Medieval monks.

Why was cheese invented? It was a clever way to preserve milk without refrigeration. Cheese is to milk what ham and bacon is to pork meat.

Ethnic Food Dictionary

Consuming Culture: Why You Eat What You Eat
by Jeremy MacClancy (1992, NY, Henry Holt and
Company)

The Dictionary of American Food and Drink by John
F. Mariani (1994, NY, William Morrow and Company)

Eating in America: A History by Waverley Root and
Richard de Rochemont (1976, NY, Ecco Press)

Food and Drink in America by Richard J. Hooker
(1981, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Company)

Food in History by Reay Tannahill (1988, NY, Crown
Publishers)

The Food Book by James Trager (1970, NY, Grossman
Publishers)

History of Food by Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat
(1987. Bordas. English translation, Blackwell
Publishers, Cambridge, MA, 1992)

**On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the
Kitchen** by Harold McGee (1984, NY, Charles
Scribner's Sons)

**Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the
American Diet** by Harvey Levenstein (1988, NY,
Oxford University Press)

Why We Eat What We Eat by Raymond Sokolov
(1991, NY, Simon and Schuster)