



ACTIVITY THREE

FOOD TRADITIONS

The story of food is embedded in the stories of who we are and is part of our history.

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Students explore ways in which food nourishes families and communities by learning about one another's family food traditions.





FOOD TRADITIONS

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What can we learn about our culture and one another through the foods we eat?

BACKGROUND

Food is much more than a tool for survival; it is also a source of pleasure, comfort, and security. And, while it nourishes our bodies, it can also nourish our families and our communities.

Food is one of the most important and persistent aspects of tradition and culture. Throughout the world, food is used to celebrate holidays, rituals, and family gatherings. For special occasions—and even for daily meals—our culture often determines what, when, and how we eat. These traditions connect us to our history, our locale, and to one another.

Food cultures also represent the wisdom gained and shared through thousands of years of experimentation and observation. For example, the grains and beans found in many food traditions have been determined to provide the perfect combination of amino acids our bodies need.

Although it may seem that kids today only eat pizza or hamburgers, your students are likely to represent a tremendous diversity of food traditions. Be sure to set the stage for an open and accepting classroom environment so that students will feel comfortable talking about their family food traditions.

MATERIALS

Copies of Family Food Tradition Interview student page

Blank paper and colored markers

ESTIMATED TIME

One 50-minute class period



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VOCABULARY

culture, tradition, identity

PREPARATION

Make copies of the student page.

ACTIVITY

1. Read the following quote by author Michael Pollan from *Nourish*: “There is a lot of cultural wisdom in food. And indeed, that’s how we knew what to eat for all this time. We didn’t have scientists. We didn’t have industry, you know, hawking products at us. We had food culture.” Ask students what they think Pollan meant by this.
2. Explain to students that they will be conducting interviews to learn more about the different food cultures and traditions represented by the class. Give students copies of the Family Food Tradition Interview and have them read over the questions. Ask whether there are any other questions they would like to add.
3. Ask students for their ideas about how to be a good interviewer and a good interviewee (speaker). Read together the descriptions of these roles on the student page.
4. Divide the class into groups of three to interview one another. Group members will take turns being the interviewer, the speaker, and the recorder. Allow about 10 minutes for each role, and then have them switch.
5. After everyone has been interviewed, give each group a blank piece of paper and markers. Have groups create a Venn diagram showing specific ways their food traditions are all the same and ways that they differ. Ask volunteers to share a few observations from their Venn diagrams. Discuss whether and how much food traditions influence what people eat.
6. Read another quote by Michael Pollan from the *Nourish* DVD: “Food is not just fuel. Food is about family, food is about community, food is about identity. And we nourish all those things when we eat well.” After



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defining the three terms “family,” “community,” and “identity,” have students give examples from their interviews of how food nourishes these three things.

ASSESSMENT

Read again Michael Pollan’s quote from step 1. Ask students to write a paragraph about what Pollan’s quote means to them, using examples from their interviews.

EXTENSIONS

- Use the book *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats*, by Peter Menzel and Faith D’Aluisio, to study and compare food traditions in other countries. How and why do different cultures come to value particular foods? How are food traditions influenced by place? By economic opportunity?
- Challenge students to look in their kitchens or at the grocery store for foods that come from other countries. Have them map their findings by taking a digital photo of each food to print out and place on a world map posted on the bulletin board, or create a set of placemarks in Google Maps.
- Invite an elder to class for students to interview about how American diets have changed in the last 50 to 75 years. They might ask, for example:

When you were younger, what did you typically eat for breakfast? Lunch? Dinner?

Where did your food come from?

Did you grow any of it yourself?

Did your family do anything to save or preserve food from one season to another?

- Build class community by making and eating a snack together. You might ask students to bring in pieces of fruit for a fruit salad, vegetables for a soup, or dried fruits and nuts for a trail mix, being aware of any food allergies. Have students prepare the ingredients and make the snack.

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FAMILY FOOD TRADITION INTERVIEW

Interviewer _____

Speaker _____

Recorder _____

Date _____

1. What are some special foods your family eats for holidays?
2. What food traditions does your family have for birthdays or other celebrations?
3. Does your family have any rituals, rules, or patterns for regular meals? What are they?
4. How are the foods your family eats different from the foods your friends' families eat?
5. What is your favorite family dish? Why?
6. Do any of your family's foods or traditions have family stories connected to them? What are they?
7. Are any of the foods linked to your family's cultural or ethnic heritage? Which ones?

ROLES

INTERVIEWER

- Maintain good eye contact during the interview.
- Give the speaker time to think about and answer each question thoroughly.
- Be respectful, and do not interrupt while the speaker is talking.
- Follow the questions on the sheet, but you may also ask follow-up questions to expand on them.

SPEAKER

- Listen carefully to the questions.
- Answer each question as thoroughly and honestly as you can.

RECORDER

- Record the speaker's responses. You may summarize, but be sure to include important details.
- Be respectful, and do not interrupt during the interview.
- After the interview is complete, have the speaker check that what you wrote is accurate.