

Food Stories: Are You What You Eat?

World Geography

Overview

This lesson uses the cultural element of food to help us understand our own cultures and cultural biases when presented with unfamiliar foods. This lesson includes a case study on the origins of hummus as a product of the geography of the region and also as a cultural expression. Students are asked to collect information from several thematic maps and discuss the connections between food origins and geographical regions. Students will be asked to summarize how food reflects the story of a person or region's culture.

Driving Questions

- How does food tell the story of a person?
- How does food tell the story of a place?
- How does food, as a symbol of culture, reflect the geography of a region?

Supporting (Case Study) Questions

- Why is food an element of culture?
- Why do cultures in the Middle East include hummus as a traditional food?
- How do maps help us understand the relationship between cultural foods and the geography of an area?
- How does your personal experience affect your acceptance of unfamiliar foods?

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to explain that the food eaten in a region tells a story of that place.
- Students will be able to use information from reading maps to connect ingredients of traditional foods to the geographic conditions necessary to grow those products.
- Students will be able to acknowledge their own cultural biases when it comes to unfamiliar foods, showing that their experiences affect their cultural perceptions.

Enduring Understandings

- The food we eat has a story. There's a reason we eat the foods we do.



- If we know more about an unfamiliar food, we can decrease our biases against it.
- We can read maps to understand more about the world.
- The more experiences we have, the more we understand why things are the way they are.

Content Expectations/Standards

Michigan Grade 6 Social Studies Standards

- G1.2.1 Apply the skills of geographic inquiry (asking geographic questions, acquiring geographic information, organizing geographic information, analyzing geographic information, and answering geographic questions) to analyze a geographic problem or issue.
- G1.2.3 Use, interpret, and create maps and graphs representing population characteristics, natural features, and land use of the region under study.
- G1.3.2 Explain the different ways in which places are connected and how those connections demonstrate interdependence and accessibility.
- G2.2.1 Describe the human characteristics of the region under study, including languages, religions, economic system, governmental system, cultural traditions.
- G2.2.3 Explain how culture and experience influence people’s perceptions of places and regions.
- G2.2.5 Generalize about how human and natural factors have influenced how people make a living and perform other activities in a place.
- G4.1.1 Define culture and describe examples of cultural change through diffusion, including what has diffused, why and where it has spread, and positive and negative consequences of the change.
- G4.1.4 Explain how culture influences the daily lives of people.

Common Core Literacy Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Key Concepts

- cultural perceptions
- applying map literacy skills

Teacher Preparation and Instructional Resources

- Teachers should use this lesson following the introduction of culture and examples of culture. Important background knowledge for students includes climate zones, landforms, bodies of water, and land use. This lesson assumes those geographic lessons have been completed.
- This lesson was designed for a face-to-face traditional classroom setting. However, with minor modifications, this lesson can be applied to virtual classrooms as needed.
- This lesson requires students to access the internet from individual computers. Alternatively, students will need access to an atlas with world or regional thematic maps and copies of the static “Origins of Crops” world map.

- Teachers will need to be able to project images onto a screen viewed by the whole class. Handouts can be assigned via Google Classroom or printed and distributed. Teachers should have access to a whiteboard or chart paper to record information from class discussions.
- Discussions and small group work are important to reaching the learning goals of this lesson. Consider using an online discussion board such as Padlet when meeting virtually.

Lesson Sequence

Opening

1. Begin with a Think-Pair-Share activity for students to think about a special meal or family favorite food. Discuss with a partner. Then share the examples out as a large group.
 - a. As students share, bring attention to patterns of celebrations, holidays, or everyday norms. Begin to sort these themes on a whiteboard or chart paper.
 - b. Describe your own traditional family favorite food, how to make it, and show an image of it to the class. Tell the story of how this connects to your family and its cultural significance.
2. From previous lessons about defining culture, remind students that food is a telling element of a person's or region's culture.
3. Ask students if they believe that the food they eat tells a story of who they are. Distribute blank paper or use an online discussion board (such as [Padlet](#)) for students to respond to this prompt: In 1825, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, a French "foodie," said, "*Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es*" which means, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are." Do you think he was right? What makes you say that?
 - a. Have students reflect on this question, then share in small groups. Be sure to be part of these discussions to monitor for misconceptions or areas to add to future discussions.
 - b. Be sure that students understand that the food we eat has a story to tell. It tells us about our family's history and about the geography of the area where our ancestors first began to eat that food.
4. Have students complete [Handout 1](#) "Family Food."
 - a. This can be assigned as homework if students want to involve their family or family recipes from home.
 - b. This can also become an extended visual activity by having students create a classroom display with photos, printed images, or drawings of their foods, sharing them with the class as they add their own to the display.

Guided Inquiry

5. Project the [National Geographic website](#) and share the link with students and have them view it on their individual computers:
 - a. Distribute [Handout 2](#). Students will choose ten of the twenty-seven images to analyze by writing their first impressions then comparing and contrasting the image to their own food culture.
 - b. This handout serves the purpose of showing a diverse array of world food cultures; many are likely images that are unfamiliar to students who have limited multicultural experience. The main focus is to have students see the similarities between their own food culture and those shown in the images. For example, the woman in Qatar is making crepes in a way likely unfamiliar to students, but she is using Nutella, which is something most students have seen or eaten.

- c. This handout also serves to have students practice finding the human characteristics of place. What makes this situation unique? What makes this situation universal?
6. Transition to the geography and history of food by projecting the "[What's for Dinner?](#)" slideshow on a classroom screen or share with students.
7. Distribute [Handout 3](#) for students to take notes on the foods as you proceed through the slideshow "What's for Dinner?" and use the interactive map "[Origin of Crops.](#)"
8. As an introduction, show one image at a time and have students quickly discuss in small groups what they think the food is, what the ingredients are, and what country or region the food is from.
9. Some students may already know; this is an important discussion point.
 - a. How does this person know? What schema do they have and how is it related to their personal culture? Is it because they eat it regularly in their family? Their grandparents make it on holidays? They've seen it in a specialty store or restaurant? Or their family culture is to watch a lot of Food Network TV?
10. Display and share the map "Origins of Crops" for use in this discussion. The focus should be based on the relationship between the food, the region, and the geography of the area. Allow groups to work together and/or guide the completion of the handout as a large group.
 - a. slide one: dolmas - this is typically minced meat, rice, and spices rolled into grape leaves and steamed (associated with Mediterranean regions)
 - b. slide two: poke bowl - typically raw ahi tuna with vegetables and a soy-based sauce (originated in Hawaii)
 - c. slide three: shrimp and grits - grits are made from ground corn (typical dish in Southeastern United States)
 - d. slide four: cherry pie (or replace image with food common to your region)
11. *Optional Discussion:* How did rice become part of a classic Mediterranean dish? Why put avocados in a Hawaiian poke bowl? How did Traverse City become famous for a fruit originally from Turkey?
 - a. Briefly discuss the idea of trade and cultural diffusion. When people move from place to place (no matter the reason), they bring goods and ideas with them. If I knew how to grow wheat and grind it into flour and I go to a place that has never done this before, will I shrug and only eat what they have or will I teach others how to grow and grind wheat? If I want to plant trees as a food crop, it makes sense that I would choose to live in a place where that tree will grow. Sometimes the food around us tells us what to eat, sometimes the places where people move will change what people eat.
 - b. This, of course, might require a quick summary of the Silk Road, Columbian Exchange, and colonization. These are big topics, so a brief introduction to the concepts of movement and trade is only needed here.

Collaborative Inquiry

12. Let's take a closer look at one food in particular: hummus (or *hummous*)
 - a. Discussion: Who has eaten hummus before? Who likes it? Who knows what the ingredients are? (chickpeas, garlic, tahini, lemon, olive oil, salt)
 - b. [How do you say "chickpea" in Arabic?](#) It's "*hummus*"! (This is a good opportunity to practice saying "hummus" correctly; it's "hum~moss, not "hum-miss.")
13. Count off the class from one to six.
 - a. Assign each number an ingredient from the hummus recipe. The 1's are chickpeas, the 2's are garlic, etc.)

- b. Distribute [Handout 4](#). This handout guides the students to use several online maps to collect information about the origin of their assigned ingredient, the geography, and climate of that region where it originated.
 - c. Students will also look at cultural similarities of countries in that region.
 - d. Support individual students as needed; some may struggle with the inferences required, making connections, or navigating the websites.
14. Once information has been collected, regroup students so there is at least one person for each of the six ingredients. Have these small groups share their notes with each other to look for patterns.

Reflection and Conclusion

15. Distribute [Handout 5](#) for an opportunity to reflect on their group discussions and make conclusions about food and culture.
16. Come back together for a large group discussion. Use the following prompts, assigning one to each table group (use some prompts twice). Groups will huddle together to discuss, then choose someone to share out to the large group, allowing individuals from other groups to respond as needed.
- a. What is a conclusion we can make about hummus?
 - b. What place in the world is often associated with hummus? Why there?
 - c. Does it “belong” to a certain country? a religion? a language? Or is it geographically regional?
 - d. If your family has eaten hummus for generations, what might it hint about your family’s culture or heritage?
17. The food we eat can send a message to others about ourselves. It can bond us with people who share our culture. It can be used to teach others about our culture. We communicate with it - when we share it, when we look at how it is eaten, when we look at the ingredients, when we tell the stories that are told when we eat certain foods, when we want to remember people and places. So, do we have evidence to show that we are what we eat?

Assessment Ideas

18. Students’ responses to the reflection prompts on Handout 5 produce evidence of understanding the learning objectives.
19. Students can recreate the collaborative inquiry for the list of ingredients from their family food and complete it individually.
20. Students can create maps which show the origins of food and how/when that food dispersed to other places.
21. You can challenge students to eat unfamiliar food and reflect on that experience.

Extension Options and Additional Resources

- Deepen this lesson to include the history of the region, such as trading systems along the Silk Road, Columbian Exchange, colonization, and globalization.
- Use this lesson to discuss the cultural similarities and differences between Israel and Palestine, specifically through foods like hummus and falafel. This article, [“Food for Thought: How Cooking Triumphs Over Division in Israel and Palestine”](#) is a good resource, along with this book, [“Divine Food: Israeli and Palestinian Food Culture and Recipes”](#)

- Expand this lesson from food to other elements of culture, such as music and instruments, folk tales, religions, or languages spoken.
- Look at how food is related to social structures in this lesson from Teaching Tolerance, “[Food History and Class](#).”
- Use this activity about the elements of culture as a preview to this lesson, “[Elements of Culture: The Culture Wheel](#)”

Sources

- Image: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/libapps/accounts/87904/images/food.jpg>
- Handout 1: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Jak2ykUZPhOgXUdIVk4CM28yu7e8lNn_H_jrvja2Nb8/edit?usp=sharing
- Handout 2: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jjHYgRADRJuxaFmDrYQVGqNjbO7b3BLEqnD_jQQqVJs/edit?usp=sharing
- Handout 3: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MZ6S2usdLTRLPEUrFZ6-t2E_3o6uc0HxXGFo966FCw4/edit?usp=sharing
- Handout 4: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fQxvhruSMN9XbpMW_lo-ENDZjOajF379WRBCL3nnFXU/edit?usp=sharing
- Handout 5: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xfoBLWW5rJdyPLzQP-hbQ1_eYX5s3HXTBg_pTeh1iO-w/edit?usp=sharing
- Padlet online discussion board: <https://padlet.com>
- National Geographic “Explore authentic food cultures around the world” photo slideshow: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/lists/food-and-drink/your-shot-photos-food-culture-around-world/>
- International Center for Tropical Agriculture interactive map “Origin of Crops”: <https://blog.ciat.cgiar.org/origin-of-crops/> (static map: https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/75665/PRINT_origin-species-world-map-v9_hires_poster%20EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
- Language Drops Visual Dictionary: <https://blog.ciat.cgiar.org/origin-of-crops/>
- National Geographic Interactive MapMaker: <https://mapmaker.nationalgeographic.org/>
- Climate Types for Kids: <https://www.climatetypesforkids.com/>
- World Interactive Map: <https://www.mapsofworld.com/world-map-viewer.html>
- Suze Olbrich, Amuse, “Food for Thought: How Cooking Triumphs Over Division in Israel and Palestine”: https://amuse.vice.com/en_us/article/qvqavm/israel-palestine-food
- David Haliva, *Divine Food: Israeli and Palestinian Food Culture and Recipes* <https://www.amazon.com/Divine-Food-Israeli-Palestinian-Culture/dp/3899556429>
- Teaching Tolerance, “Food History and Class”: <https://www.tolerance.org/learning-plan/food-history-and-class-0>

Handout 1 - Family Food

Think about the following questions to help you figure out what food you'll use for this assignment:

- What food dish would you bring in for a show-and-tell?
- What food best represents your family's culture?
- What is your family's favorite food to share with other people?
- What food is often served at your house for a celebration or a holiday?

Your family food:

Go online and find a recipe (as close as you can) and paste it below. Or, take a photo from a cookbook or hand-written recipe and insert it below. Be sure to include a title, list of ingredients, how to prepare it, and a photograph of the food.

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? Consider these questions, and write a paragraph that explains why you chose this food for this assignment.

Handout 2 - National Geographic: Food Culture Around the World

[This slideshow](#) is a collection of images from photographers around the world. Each photograph features food - the sale of food, the production of food, the sharing of food. Use the chart below to capture your reactions to **ten** of the images, looking for both similarities and differences to the way you interact with food in your daily life. (You can add more rows if you'd like to choose more than ten of the slides.)

slide #	First impression?	Compare to your foods (What is familiar? What is new? What is confusing?)

Handout 3

Slideshow: [What's For Dinner?](#)

Map: [Origin of Crops](#)

slide	#1	#2	#3	#4
Name of the food				
What does the map show about the origins of these ingredients?				
What do we know already about the geography and climate of that area?				
What might you be able to figure out about someone's culture if you saw them eating this?				
When have you eaten this? Did you like it? OR Would you like to try it if you never have before?				

Handout 4 - The Geography and Culture of Hummus

What is your assigned ingredient?

According to the Origins of Crops [map](#), what region(s) is this ingredient from?

Use this [interactive physical features map](#) to record the landforms and bodies of water in that region and your thoughts about how these features might affect producing that ingredient.

	list the names of the features in that region	How do you think those features affect the production of that ingredient?
landforms		
bodies of water		

Use [this interactive climate map](#) to record the climate zone(s) included in that region and a brief description of that zone.

climate zone name(s)	describe that climate zone (temperature and precipitation patterns)

What region of the world do you think is connected with hummus? Name a few countries in that region. You can use this [world map](#) to help you list country names.

What else do those countries have in common? Use this [interactive world map](#) and click on some of those countries and see if they all speak the same language or practice the same religion.

Handout 5 - Reflection

After discussing the results of all six ingredients with your classmates, use the space below to **reflect on the geography and cultural elements associated with hummus**. Your reflection should do the work of a paragraph so that you make a statement and support it with examples and explanation.

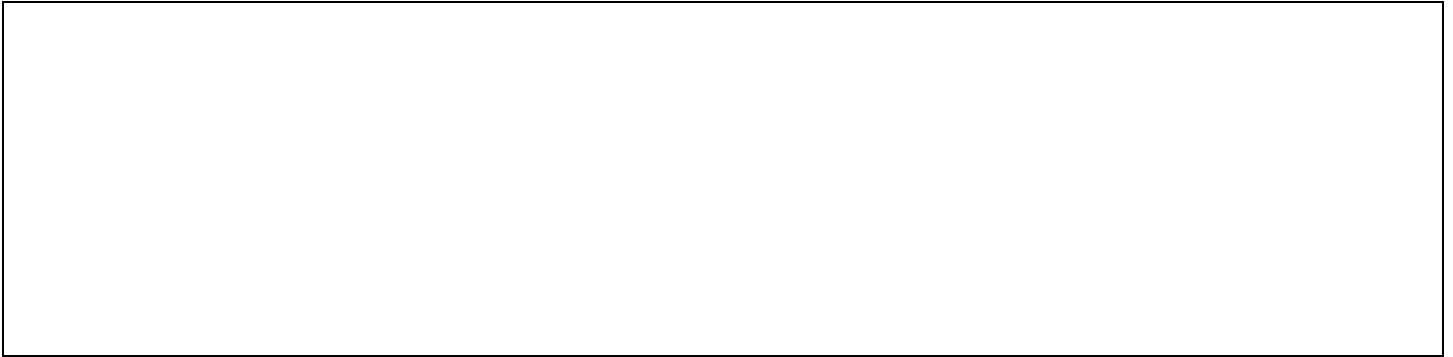
Consider these prompts in your reflection:

- What makes sense about all the origins of all the hummus ingredients?
- What surprised you during the discussion?
- What is still confusing?
- If hummus is part of someone's food culture, what conclusion could you maybe make about them? What do you think might be the story of their family's culture?

The next time you come across an unfamiliar food, what do you think your reaction to it will be?

What steps can you take to become more familiar with that food and other cultures?

Think back to Handout 1 about your own Family Food. What do you think that food means about your family's culture? What story does it tell about you and your family? Is your family connected somehow to the origins of this food?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their response to the questions above.