



**UNIT 1:
FOOD AND CULTURE**

L.6

**FOOD AND
COMMUNITY**

Note to Teachers

The big idea framing this lesson is that food reflects and builds communities. We'll explore this idea in two ways—the use of food by religious communities and the varying notions of community implied in food events. This lesson can easily run over two class periods and a cooking lab, and is broken down into three parts – Part A, Part B and Part C: Lab. Part C, the cooking lab, systematically extends the class conversations.

Your students may be steeped in religious traditions, very unfamiliar with them, or somewhere in between. Assessing that knowledge will guide how much emphasis you place on personal experience versus research.

This lesson follows on the idea of food classification systems from lessons four and five, particularly in that scholars like anthropologist Mary Douglas tend to think of food as a symbolic language for understanding the worldview and values of a society. In other words, food norms are the language through which eaters enact their values. Thinking of food as a language invites us to seek out its vocabulary and its grammar: What makes a meal? What kinds of foods are served together and when? Why are they perceived as appropriate at some times and contexts, and as less appropriate at others?

This symbolic language of food is complex, in part because—as the discussion below notes—individuals operate within different communities based on the varied aspects of their lives and shaped by their families, schools, jobs, faith traditions, cultures, etc. Some of those communities may be larger and more inclusive, while some are drawn more narrowly.

This lesson does not presume that all students (or all people) “speak” the same language of food. Norms differ: Potato salad may be a picnic food or a holiday treat, depending on the community. Some of the communities we inhabit may shape our values, and therefore food norms, more strongly than others, and some food norms may reflect values distinct from a cultural mainstream.



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Please use this margin to notate how to best adapt this curriculum to your students.

At the same time, students who share a food system, school system, and popular culture (to mention just a few factors) also find shared vocabulary and grammar within their languages of food. A discussion of food norms will help to identify where the languages (and therefore values) of Bangladeshi-American students and Native-American students differ, but also where food norms reveal a shared language of food. The same dynamic holds true for students on different parts of a socio-economic spectrum. What they consider “fancy” may vary dramatically, but they all share the idea that some occasions warrant more considered meals than others. This lesson seeks both to bring this symbolic vocabulary and grammar to conscious conversation and to highlight the shared norms (and therefore values) that discussion of food reveals.

Goals *In this lesson, students will*

- learn what food events are and how they help to define community boundaries.
- expand their understanding of world religions and the ideas that drive them.
- appreciate how rituals reflect bonds of community and—by their recurring nature—help to reaffirm them.
- learn that norms apply to these food events, even though they we are often not consciously aware of them.

Objectives

- Students will use both personal knowledge and research about food’s role in a religious event to explore its meaning and importance.
- Students will study specific religious rituals involving food in order to understand the role they play in religious tradition and practice.
- Students will explore ordinary and special food events as a means to think about the vocabulary of norms that they will knowingly—if unconsciously—apply and to describe these events as relatively more inclusive or exclusive.

Materials

- Student handout (below)

Instructions

Food and Religious Communities (Part A)

1. Write the following prompt on the board and ask students to answer it to the best of their abilities:

Can you think of a moment when a religious community uses food in a ceremony or celebration? Describe that moment: What is the group, what is the ceremony or celebration, what food or foods are typical at the event, and what is the purpose or meaning of the event?



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Remind students that Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are the most common religious traditions, but that they may consider a ritual or celebration from any religious tradition. You might ask students to name other religious traditions with which they are acquainted to get students thinking.

Give students about 5 minutes to work on this writing prompt.

2. Distribute the accompanying handout and then ask students to work in small groups of 2-3 students.
3. Ask the members of each group to share their examples with each other, and select one that most resonates with the group.

Then, ask students to fill out the top set of boxes on the worksheet as thoroughly as possible for that one example (give them about 10 minutes).

Ideally, at least one member of the group is fairly well versed in that tradition and can serve as an “expert.” Less-familiar students should take the lead in asking questions for more information and clarification.

4. Canvass the room to get a quick sense of what events students chose: El Eid (or a nightly feast to break a Ramadan fast)? Christian communion? The Passover Seder? Others?

Once you know what occasions students have worked on, begin with the most popular and ask the groups who worked on it to share their responses to each of the boxes on the handout.

- a. Here you are aiming for a consolidated, improved response.
 - b. Ask students who worked on this event to add to their current answers and students who did not to take notes on what they hear.
 - c. Linger on the question of meaning: food in a religious celebration or ritual is often commemorative – it remembers and re-enacts something important. What is being remembered here, and why is that memory important to the religious group?
5. Take a second example that students have worked on in their small groups and go through the questions. Again, ask the group or groups who worked on the event to share their answers. Improve them where appropriate and feel free to review and emphasize important points.

All students can write these responses in their journals.

6. Once you have considered two examples in some depth, open the floor for discussion on the questions on the handout:
 - a. Do you need food for this event? What purpose does it serve?
 - b. Do these events involve groups eating together? If so, why do you think that is the case?
 - c. Based on this exercise, how might you explain the meaning of the big idea of the day: food reflects and builds communities?

With this final question, you may need to remind students that the rituals or celebrations they have considered are re-enacted regularly. What might a like-minded group of believers gain from regularly re-enacting and thereby remembering together a commemorative event?



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(Scholars stress that these types of commemorative events reaffirm the bonds of community, reminding community members of their common beliefs and relations to each other. These rituals, therefore, strengthen the group and its ideals.)

****What if none of your students, or very few, have been raised in a faith tradition? You may wish to turn this exercise into a research assignment that first builds a list of religious practices that incorporate food, then divides them among students for research and analysis.*

*Another or additional approach would be to find someone in your school community (e.g., a teacher or administrator) who does belong to a faith tradition and invite them into the class to describe that tradition. Let the initial writing prompt help to guide the conversation, but encourage students to ask follow up questions so that they have the materials to respond to the questions in #6 above. This exercise would help students build good interviewing skills, which they will need for the project that is part of the Food and Identity lesson.****

Food and Eating Events (Part B)

1. Ask students to raise their hands if they think of themselves as part of a community.
Have them name some of those communities: family, school, church/temple/mosque, sports, neighborhood, etc.
2. Ask students whether they see themselves as part of more than one community. Ask for one or two examples.
3. Remind students that their communities will change over the course of their lives and that people will move in and out of their communities.
This exercise is about the role of food in establishing and reaffirming the boundaries of communities.
4. Begin the exercise by asking students to brainstorm in their journals as many different food events that they can think of.
A “food event” is any occasion at which food is served to a group of friends and family—from an everyday family meal to a really special occasion. Give them about three minutes. Ask them to aim for the widest variety of food events they can think of.
5. Record their events on the board. Push them to create a varied list. Some possibilities: Sunday dinner, a neighborhood barbeque, a birthday party, coffee after school with a friend, a weekday family dinner, a date, brunch, a wedding, an anniversary party, a picnic in a nearby park, dinner for parent’s boss, etc.

(If students get stuck on one category and, say, simply start listing holidays, ask them for types of more everyday meals, or events when food is served between friends or more extended family.)
6. Have students turn back to their small groups (of 2-3 students) and assign each a different kind of event from the list. Include:
 - an event from the list that is formal (like a wedding)
 - an event that is informal (like a summer picnic)



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- an event that draws from a very narrowly-defined group (dinner for a boss, or date)
- an event that might invite a wide group (a birthday party)
- an event that is intimate (coffee with a friend)

7. Ask students to discuss that event, filling out the handout rubric as they go on where that eating event might take place, what food would be served, and who would be invited (approximately 10 minutes)

8. Ask each group to share what they discovered and listen carefully as you do about assumptions that may be characteristic of a particular group, or of the students as a whole.

Enjoy the wonderful descriptions they will share!

9. Then step back. What have they noticed?

What common norms do they express about appropriate food, locations or dishes? Why do you tend to avoid messy food, for example, on a first date? Why don't you use the best china at a Super Bowl party? Why would it be unusual to invite your mom's boss to breakfast on a weekday or to invite one of your friends to dinner with mom's boss?

10. How tightly or loosely do they draw community boundaries?

- Are some events more exclusive, i.e., they draw a tighter community boundary?
 - And what characteristics do these food events tend to have? (Often fancier foods, oriented around the family table, aimed at developing greater intimacy, etc.)
- Are some events more inclusive, i.e., inviting people into a community?
 - And what characteristics do these food events tend to have? (More casual foods—often eating with the hands; often in a park, backyard, living room, or family room; with acquaintances and friends or family, etc.)

11. Recognize any norms that come up and note—where you can—how students don't need to discuss those norms. They just apply them.

This is one of the interesting characteristics about food—we often work from common assumptions that we don't need to consciously discuss.

12. Draw this part of the class to a close by asking students to think about food as a language.

- Food, as many scholars see it, has parts of speech and grammar—rules about how those parts of speech are put together.
- Once we uncover some of those norms, we are beginning to study that language of food.
- We can break with the norms (have casual food at a wedding), but we all know what the norms are. We know that a Super Bowl party will have chips and that a 10th wedding anniversary dinner will be more fancy.

13. Return back, if you have time, to the central claim: food reflects and builds communities. Ask for final thoughts and questions.



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Lab: Potatoes Three Ways (Part C)

Potatoes Three Ways follows directly on this exercise. Part C asks students to consider three different dishes within the context of the communities they help to articulate.

As you begin this lab, remind students that sharing food is a way to build and maintain a community.

Students will cook three potato dishes: home fries, potato salad, and herb potatoes. These are three different dishes that lend themselves to three different types of uses (and therefore communities).

As students taste the three dishes, ask them to work in groups to discuss the following questions:

1. At what type of meal might they serve this dish?
2. Who would they invite to this meal?
3. What other foods would they serve with it?

You may wish to assign each group one dish or all three. Likewise, you may have more than one small group work on each dish.

As students share their answers, elicit responses from other students. How similar might their own answers be? What norms may be at work?



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CREAMY POTATO SALAD

5 students

This recipe should be made along side the home fries and herb potato recipe. Only 5 students will work on this one while the rest work on the other two recipes. Hard boiled eggs can be done in advance, reflected in the packing list below, but can also be done in class. If hard-boiling happens in class, just add an additional pot with lid, burner and medium bowl for the ice bath.

Equipment List

- Medium pot with lid
- Burner
- Oven mitts
- Colander
- 5 cutting boards
- 5 knives
- Large bowl
- 2 medium bowls
- Mixing spoon
- ½ cup dry measure
- 2-cup wet measure
- Tablespoon
- Teaspoon

Food Items

- 8 medium yellow potatoes, about 2 pounds
- 1 ½ cups Hellmann's mayonnaise
- 1 ½ tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons salt
- pepper
- 4 medium stalks celery
- 2 shallots
- 4 hard boiled eggs

HERB POTATOES

5 students

This recipe should be doubled and made alongside home fries and potato salad. Only 5 students should work on this recipe and rest on the other two recipes.

Equipment List

- 5 cutting boards
- 5 knives
- Straight walled skillet with lid
- Burner
- Colander
- Mixing spoon
- Tablespoon

Food Items

- 16 ounces baby potatoes, multi colored preferred
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, more if needed
- 6 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Splash of apple cider vinegar

HOME FRIES

6 students

Double this recipe for a class of 16. This recipe should be made alongside herb potatoes and potato salad. 6 students will work on this recipe while the rest work on the other two potato recipes. You can switch up how many students work on each, just adjust the number of cutting boards and knives.

Equipment List

- 6 cutting boards
- 6 knives
- Straight walled skillet with lid
- Burner
- Mixing spoon
- Medium bowl
- Colander
- Tablespoon
- ½ cup dry measuring cup
- teaspoon
- ½ teaspoon

Food Items

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ medium onion
- ½ medium pepper
- 4 medium-large red potatoes
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika



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CREAMY POTATO SALAD

Ingredients

- 8 medium yellow potatoes, about 2 pounds
- 1 ½ cups Hellmann's® Mayonnaise
- 1 ½ tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons salt
- Pepper to taste
- 4 medium stalks celery, small dice
- 2 shallots, small dice
- 4 hard boiled eggs, small dice

Directions

1. Place potatoes in a pot with enough water to cover them. Cover pot and bring to a boil, then reduce to low. Cook 20 to 25 minutes or until fork tender. Drain potatoes and let stand until cool enough to handle.
2. Once potatoes are cool, peel off skin with your hands. Then, cut potatoes in a medium dice. Set aside.
3. In a large bowl, mix mayonnaise, vinegar, mustard, salt and pepper.
4. Add celery and shallots to mayonnaise mixture and toss.
5. Add potatoes and mix well.
6. Gently stir in the eggs.
7. Enjoy right away or cover and refrigerate for about 4 hours to let flavors really blend. Store covered in refrigerator.

HERB POTATOES

Ingredients

- 16 ounces baby potatoes, multi colored preferred, quartered (cut into eighths for the larger ones, so that they are all the same size)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, more if needed
- 6 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Splash of apple cider vinegar

Directions

1. Place potatoes in a medium straight walled skillet and add water, enough to cover the potatoes by an inch. Bring up to a boil over medium high heat. Once boiling, reduce heat and simmer for about 10-15 minutes until potatoes are fork tender.
2. While the potatoes are cooking, prep the rosemary and thyme, leaves removed from stems and finely chopped.
3. When potatoes are done, drain and set aside.
4. In the same skillet, heat oil and add potatoes. Toss until potatoes are evenly covered in oil. Add both herbs and stir. Add salt and pepper to taste. Continue tossing the potatoes for a few minutes on low heat, until the herbs become fragrant, about 1-2 minutes.
5. Remove from heat, mix in a splash of apple cider vinegar and serve hot.



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HOME FRIES

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ medium onion, minced
- ½ medium pepper, finely chopped
- 4 medium-large red potatoes, skin on and cut in a small dice
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika

Directions

1. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat.
2. Add the onion and pepper and stir frequently. Cook until browned, about 8-10 minutes. Then transfer to a bowl and set aside.
3. Add the potatoes to the pan and just enough water to cover them. They should float slightly.
4. Place pan over high heat and cook until the water begins to boil, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and drain the potatoes in a colander.
5. Place the pan back on the medium burner and add the butter. When the butter foams, add the potatoes in as close to a single layer as possible.
6. Let cook without stirring for 4-5 minutes. Then carefully flip or stir to brown the potatoes on all sides. Add more butter if needed. Browning will take 10-15 minutes.
7. Once the potatoes are crisp and brown, add the onions and peppers back in. Gently stir.
8. Add the salt, pepper, and paprika. Stir to combine and remove from heat.



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Food Reflects and Builds Communities (Part A)

NAME OF RELIGIOUS GROUP	
Occasion in which food is involved and the people likely to attend	
Specific or common foods related to that event Meaning of that event?	

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Could you eliminate the food from this religious event? Why might it seem essential to the event?

2. Do these events involve groups eating together? If so, why do you think that is the case?

2. On the basis of this exercise, how might you explain the meaning of the big idea of the day: food reflects and builds communities?



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Rubric: EATING EVENT COMPARISON

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Food Reflects and Builds Communities (Part B)

TYPE OF EATING EVENT		
<p>Where would the event take place?</p> <p>Inside or outside of the home?</p> <p>At the family table or elsewhere in the house?</p>		
<p>What type of food would you likely serve?</p> <p>Would it be casual or fancy?</p> <p>Something you could eat with your hands (like a hotdog), a meal with courses, food that takes a lot of preparation, etc.?</p>		
<p>Who would you invite?</p> <p>You or your family's closest friends? Your neighbors?</p> <p>Someone you would like to get to know better?</p>		

