

Cultural Identities and Food

Unit 1: Welcome Back to the Kitchen

Duration: 90 minutes, two days

Standards:

National Standards for FCS

8.1.2 Explain the roles, duties, and functions of individuals engaged in food production and services careers.

CT Career and Technical Education Performance Standards

A.1 Explain the roles, duties, and functions of individuals engaged in food production and service careers.

Description:

Students will explore the historical and social significance of culinary practices, including who typically prepares meals in different cultures and the roles food plays in celebrations and daily life.

Objectives:

- Analyze the challenges faced by chefs from underrepresented backgrounds, as well as their successes and resilience in the culinary industry.
 - Reflect on preconceived notions of “American” cooking and cuisine, identifying how these ideas are shaped by culture and history.
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Vocabulary:

- “Black” or “African American” - refer to people having *ancestors who were once enslaved* in what is now the United States. For example, many Black people in the U.S. have ancestors who were abusively forced to work for free on plantations. It can also refer to people who’ve emigrated to the U.S. from Africa, who is now a U.S. citizen, and whose *ancestors were NOT ever enslaved* in what is now the United States. For example, an Indigenous Nigerian woman can be African American.

Materials:

- Digital board/projector
- Ingredients and kitchen equipment for chosen recipe

Recipe:

- Teacher's choice

Procedure:

Day 1:

1. Discuss with students the idea of "American" cuisine. Have them come up with and share ideas about what might make a dish "American," and record their responses on the board.
2. Watch the following videos, leaving time for deep discussion about the themes and impacts:
 - a. ["High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America - Season 1, Episode 2: Our Founding Chefs" video](#) (video is about 48 minutes in total. Watch half and finish the other half in another class.) If Netflix is unavailable, view portions of this interview here: [High on the Hog \(African American Food is American Food\)](#)
 - b. ["Meet The Latino Chef Who Conquered The Culinary Scene On His Terms" | NBC News video](#)
 - c. ["Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander chefs speak on hate"](#)
3. Engage students in the following questions:
 - a. What connections do you feel to what was discussed in the video(s)?
 - b. What are your preconceived notions about "American" cooking and cuisine?
 - c. What do you know about how other cultures contributed and continue to contribute to modern-day cooking in the United States?
 - d. Why were some populations' (African American, Native American, Latina/Latino/Latinx, women's, etc.) histories erased or minimized in the culinary world?
 - e. How can we as culinary professionals ensure that as many cultures, backgrounds, and experiences are included as possible in food systems?
4. Have students write or draw a reflection about the video(s) and submit at the end of class.

Day 2:

1. If time allows, watch the second half of the "High on the Hog" episode and use the following questions to guide your discussion:
 - a. Why were some populations' histories erased or minimized in the culinary world?
 - b. How can we as culinary professionals ensure that as many cultures, backgrounds, and experiences are included as possible in food systems?
 - c. What role does food play in celebrations and daily life in different cultures?
2. Introduce a recipe inspired by the videos (e.g. cornbread with African American roots, empanadas from Latin American cuisine, or dumplings inspired by Asian traditions).

3. Divide students into small groups and provide guidance on preparing the dish. Encourage students to discuss the cultural significance of the recipe as they cook.
4. Have students taste the dishes and share their thoughts on the flavors, techniques, and cultural connections.
5. Ask students to reflect on who typically prepares meals in different cultures and how this role shapes the significance of food.

Assessment(s):

- Formative assessment: Students will watch culturally relevant video(s) and discuss the themes and impacts.
- Summative assessment: Students write or draw a reflection about the video(s) watched.

Resources:

- ["High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America - Season 1, Episode 2: Our Founding Chefs" video](#)
- [!\[\]\(511a36c244659513b679df9c639945de_img.jpg\) High on the Hog \(African American Food is American Food\)](#)
- ["Meet The Latino Chef Who Conquered The Culinary Scene On His Terms" video](#)
- ["Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander chefs speak on hate" video](#)

Extensions:

- Research and present about a specific chef from a neglected population - African American, Native American, Alaska Native, Indigenous Norwegian, Chinese American, LGBTQIA+, women, etc.
- Create a class cookbook featuring recipes from diverse cultural traditions, along with reflections on their historical and social significance.