

by | Judith Snyder ●●●●



KEEP 'EM READING

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Launch a widespread and ever-expanding web of inquiry using food as a general topic. On this research journey, students can search for recipes to tempt their taste buds while applying math skills. They can expand their understanding of the world by exploring foods in different countries and by learning how foods shape lives and customs in different cultures.

Pick and choose from the following research projects those that suit your students' skills. If possible, coordinate these food-topic research projects with social studies or science units in the classroom.

Meal Planning

Grades 2–5

Practice reading charts and graphs while learning about healthy meal planning. Show students the MyPlate graphic at MyPlate Kids' Place (www.choosemyplate.gov/kids). Display it for reference. With the interactive meal builder at <http://tinyurl.com/c6bclc4>, students can plan a meal by selecting from various food choices. The meal builder gives instant feedback and

allows individuals to make changes to complete the meal-planning process successfully. Students also have access to bar graphs that show their choice of servings in each food category.

Picture Books

Grades K–4

Read a picture book from the list below or from the resource list at www.librarysparks.com.

Activities for the books address ALA standards in research, communication, and personal growth.

How Did That Get in My Lunchbox? The Story of Food

by Chris Butterworth

The reader is taken through the process that specific foods (e.g., bread, cheese, etc.) go through to get from farm to lunchbox.

As a class, select one additional food and research it together to create another page for the book.

Sophie's Squash by Pat Zietlow Miller

When Sophie doesn't want to part with the squash she named Bernice,

it begins to rot. Bernice is eventually buried in autumn, and spring brings tiny new plants for Sophie.

Give each student a vegetable. Assign them to take the vegetable home, care for it, give it a name, and return it the next day. Students will then search to discover how the vegetable reproduces (e.g., seeds, eyes, runners).

Too Pickley! by Jean Reidy

This simple rhyming text says a great deal about the thoughts of picky eaters. Use this story to open a discussion about how other senses, not just taste, can influence whether or not students like a particular food.

Ask the class to identify why they don't like eating certain foods. Does it have to do with other senses besides taste? Also discuss foods they have recently tried and liked.

Students can work in groups to identify additional adjectives to describe disliked foods.

Mama Panya's Pancakes by Mary Chamberlin and Rich Chamberlin

Mama has only two coins to buy food for the evening meal, yet Adika

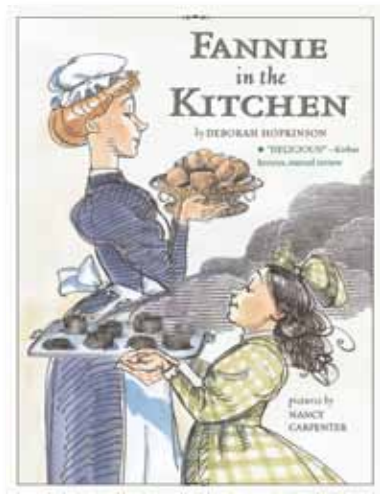
GRADES
K–5

keeps inviting more friends for dinner. Luckily everyone brings additional ingredients, so there is enough for all.

Ask students to draw a picture showing a typical meal in their family. Share pictures in small groups and discuss any rituals. Draw another picture showing changes when friends are invited. Compare the meals and discuss in small groups.

As a large group, discuss the social aspect of eating meals with others. Use book references where appropriate.

Note: You may have students who are food insecure due to poverty or who suffer from eating disorders. When engaging in discussions or activities about food, be sensitive to children's food situations, avoid putting these children on the spot, and offer alternative activities if needed.



Fannie in the Kitchen by

Deborah Hopkinson

This fun story about Fannie Farmer shares the events that led to the first US cookbook that used exact measuring and cooking instructions.

To better understand the importance of cookbooks, ask students to consider the act of cooking something new without the necessary directions or measuring tools. Divide the class into groups of four and assign them

to write a recipe for a specific dish without referring to standard kitchen measuring tools. When the task is complete, give the real recipe to each group. After comparing the recipes, discuss or write about the discrepancies and/or difficulties, and identify how a lack of tools and directions might affect the meal.

Other Suggestions

Share these fun fiction books for students interested in cooking:

- *All Four Stars* by Tara Dairman
- *The Stars of Summer* by Tara Dairman
- *Check Please* by A.J. Stern
- *Fizzy's Lunch Lab: Nelly Nitpick, Kid Food Critic* from Candlewick

Bizarre Foods

Grades 3–5

Picky eaters will find this research project particularly gross. But they will love every minute as they practice browsing skills, use text elements to find information, and develop oral speaking skills.

Collect as many books as you can find that focus on strange and disgusting foods. Bearport, Capstone, and Simon and Schuster have multiple titles.

Challenge students to discover what they think could be the most disgusting food in the world and convince other classmates to vote on their choice. Let students work in groups to browse through books to choose the most disgusting food they can find. Research needs to include the food's culture or country of origin, the nutritional value (vitamins, minerals, etc.), and the way the food is prepared and served. The group must compose a persuasive oral advertisement that includes the required research and present it to the class. Follow presentations with a vote.

Option: Students can use *Cool Creepy Food Art* by Nancy Tuminelly to get ideas for decorating creepy snacks.

Recipe Books and Indexes

Grades 4–5

Have you ever thought of using a cookbook to teach index skills? With a few quick tips, your students will practice these new skills with curious enthusiasm.

Collect enough cookbooks so you have one for each student pair. Give them time to browse through the book, looking at the pictures and main headings. Ask them to scan the table of contents and identify the main topics. Each cookbook will be organized by its own criteria; some cookbooks will be organized by general food categories, others by course headings, and so forth. Point out that the index will allow the user quickest access to find recipes.

In a fifteen-minute mini-lesson, provide a copy of a cookbook index page that contains the topic *meat* and uses indenting under the main topic for easy searching. Point this out by asking students to find the *meat* heading. Together identify

- Types of categories under the main heading
- Single page numbers and page numbers with a dash between
- *See* and *see also* references
- First and second levels of indent

Prepare a list of six or more questions to ask the class for guided practice with the index.

Ask pairs to use the cookbooks you've provided to locate and list page numbers for recipes for a meal. They will also create a grocery list of needed items. (Math option: Locate the costs of the groceries and determine the price of the meal.) Encourage students to find dishes they've never eaten.

The Original American Dishes

Grades 3–5

We often think of hot dogs and peanut butter as being “traditional” American foods. They are widely eaten in the United States, but the original American dishes were prepared and eaten by Native Americans. Corn, beans, and fresh meat were common foods among the tribes, but the geographic regions in which they lived also determined what they ate. Students can practice index skills and use of text elements to find the foods eaten by each main regional Native American group. Be sure to include the Inuit and Polynesians. Students can work in groups to research foods and to create a poster that illustrates the typical diet of various tribes. During presentations, compare and contrast the foods eaten by the various groups.

Invented in the Good Old USA

Grades 3–5

As Americans, we have become accustomed to a wide variety of foods introduced by immigrant communities. We consider spaghetti, chow mein, and burritos almost as American as apple pie (although even apple pie was imported from Europe!). Where did the foods we eat come from? What foods were invented in America?

Students can discover where and when foods were introduced or invented by reading a time line at <http://foodtimeline.org> and comparing information on at least two additional sites. Did students consider the reliability of the source? Did they find any conflicting information?

Start this research on where foods originated by posting a list of popular

foods on a large class chart. Include additional suggestions from students. Have students work in pairs or small groups to identify where they think each food came from.

Divide the foods among the student pairs or groups, and allow time for them to research where, when, how, and by whom (if possible) the food was invented. Students can present their findings orally and add the actual country of origin on the class chart. End by comparing the class chart to the students’ initial charts. Discuss differences and impressions.

Cultural Foods

Grades 4–5

Learning how to compare resources can help students with future research projects. Many school libraries have copies of Crabtree’s series *Lands, Peoples and Cultures*. Choose the Culture books from as many countries as available. Then select a database available at your school. (You may also be able to access your public library’s databases.) If available, choose the CultureGrams database and, if necessary, provide instruction in its use.

Students will compare the two sources (book and database) to identify the amount and type of information they can find about the assigned culture’s food. Use a two-column note-taking structure. Write notes from one source in the right column. On another sheet of paper, write notes from the second source, also in the right column. Students will then identify and write the main topics in the left column. Model this activity if necessary.

When finished, have students evaluate the resources using the following discussion questions:

Which source provided the most information?

Which source was easiest to use?

When would you use source 1? Source 2?

Was any information contradictory?

What would you do if it was?

Cross-Cultural Foods

Grades 2–4

Rice and bread are two almost universal foods—the staff of life in many cultures. Read a variety of picture and nonfiction books about these foods to students. End by reading *Everybody Cooks Rice* by Norah Dooley. As a group, list the cultures mentioned in the book. Using discussion or written responses, ask students to reflect on the similarities among the families shown in the book. As a class, define what constitutes *bread*, *pancakes*, and *dumplings*.

Form small groups and assign one culture to each group. Have the groups search for foods from their assigned cultures that could be categorized as bread, pancakes, and dumplings. Younger students can search online and write the name of the dish. Older students can research a recipe and write the ingredients. Compare ingredients with other groups to identify additional cultural similarities and differences.

Judith Snyder is a seasoned teacher/librarian in Colorado, as well as a professional storyteller and freelance writer. Judith is the author of the *Jump-Start Your Library* series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from *UpstartBooks* (2008), and a picture book, *What Do You See?* (2009), from *Odyssey Books*.