

Lesson 2.6: Native Food Experiences

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Time Frame: 1-2 class periods

Materials:

- Al Jazeera Native Foods [video](#)
- Native Food Experiences [Notetaker](#)

In this lesson, students read Pomo perspectives on both traditional Indigenous foods and settler/ introduced foods. Students explore some of the values and cultural norms surrounding food, and consider ways the relationship between the environment, food, and community.

Teacher Background:

The excerpts included in this lesson come directly from the **Pomo community** in Sonoma County, California.

It is common for Tribal communities to participate in recordings for university, government, and other cultural preservation projects. While these recordings can come in handy and can even fill in the cultural knowledge gaps for younger generations, they can also be problematic. While not always the case, early transcriptions of recordings have been altered to fit the lens of the researcher, and sometimes stories are changed dramatically from their original content in order to fit the needs or desires of the recorder.

In addition, it is problematic that, for decades, anthropologists, researchers, and cultural collectors recorded, photographed, and documented Tribal histories and cultures for posterity's sake, all the while standing by as the American government systematically dismantled many Native communities. Documented perspectives can come to feel more like artifacts that were collected for the Western lens than to uplift the Native community itself.

Problematizing and exploring possible solutions to these types of practices are now penetrating the field of anthropology and are leading to shifts in the way culture is observed in the future.

This is why, when possible, it is important for educators to integrate texts written by Native people, about Native people, into their lessons. Texts written by Native people may be more commonly found beginning in the latter part of the 20th century into the present.

“**Enough for All: Foods of My Dry Creek Pomo and Bodega Miwuk People,**” by Katherine Rose Smith, is written by a Dry Creek Pomo woman, for example. Katherine describes her family traditions and values surrounding food. The benefit of sharing texts that are written entirely from the Native perspective is that the Native community has control over what cultural information is shared, and how it is shared.

“**Kashaya Pomo Memories of Food**” includes excerpts from Essie Parrish, as told to an anthropologist in the mid-20th century. Essie Parrish was a Kashaya Pomo religious leader and a renowned basket weaver who worked hard to protect and teach her cultural traditions. Essie Parrish is featured in a wide variety of short films documenting traditions around acorn preparation and basket weaving.

ENGAGE

Provide students with the **Native Food Experiences Notetaker**.

Guide students to **Source #1**.

Show the 20 minute **Al Jazeera [video](#)**. The video follows a young journalist as he travels across the U.S., visiting Native restaurants and trying Native foods for the first time.

EXPLORE

Guide students to **Source #2**.

Remind students that when settlers seized control of the land now known as the United States, the Native peoples living in those regions were unfamiliar with any food that was not Indigenous to the Americas.

In many ways, introduced foods do have negative health outcomes for Native (and other) people. White bread, for example, is processed and is high in sugar. In addition to being unhealthy for the human body, introducing European strains of wheat (what white bread is made from) into the Indigenous landscape results in the new wheat plants competing with Indigenous plants that historically produce healthy Traditional foods for Native people.

As a class, in pairs, or in groups, ask students to read the excerpts and complete the analysis questions.

The remaining sources are stories of when Pomo people first encountered introduced foods.

EXPLAIN

Depending on the geographic location of the tribe, communities had access to a different variety of food. Tribal communities living on the coasts, for example, would have had more access to food that comes from the ocean, while tribes that lived in regions with very hot, dry climates would have had an easier time growing vegetables like beans and squash.

In addition, tribes had complex trade networks that allowed them to trade their local food sources and materials for foods that did not grow naturally in their region. In California, for example, acorns and acorn flour were a major trade item, as tribes living in desert or mountainous regions would have had less access to oak trees.

Even so, the geographic size of North, Central, and South America is very large, and so it is not necessarily the case that Indigenous peoples across the neighboring continents were familiar with foods from other Indigenous communities.

ELABORATE

Direct students to **Sources #3, 4, & 5** of the **Native Food Experiences Notetaker**.

Students explore some of the traditional values around food in one Pomo family during the 20th century.

EVALUATE

Review the questions from the **Native Food Experiences Notetaker**, exploring Pomo values around food, the environment, and the community.

VOCABULARY

Indigenous: Produced, growing, living, or occurring Natively or naturally in a particular region or environment

Indigenous Foods: Locally grown food that is originally from the area and has been eaten by Native people for thousands of years. Food is grown with no chemicals or pesticides; food is grown in just the right amount.

Settler/introduced Foods: Foods that come from other countries or from outside the local ecosystem. Foods are sometimes healthy and sometimes damaging to health. Sometimes these plants can harm the local ecosystem.

Processed Foods: Foods that have been altered or changed from their original form. They often have added flavors, or artificial substances added, and might taste different than their original form

Whole Foods: Foods that have very little, or no processing/have not been changed from their original form. Foods that do not have additives, or any artificial substances added.

STANDARDS

Common Core:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2

Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

CA Indian Essential Understandings:

Essential Understanding 2: California Indian identity is individual and the range of Tribal identity from assimilated to traditional is unique to each individual. The diversity of identity means there is no standard or cookie cutter appearance or behavior. There is no generic American Indian, in California, or in the United States.

Essential Understanding 3: Tribal traditional beliefs and practices, including links to spirituality, are practiced in communities where the culture, traditions and languages are vibrant parts of daily life. Additionally, each tribe has an oral history that predates contact with non-Indians.

Essential Understanding 4: California Indian peoples' histories and cultures have been and continue to be impacted by foreign, state, and federal policies. Policies developed during the Mission Period, the Gold Rush Allotment, the Boarding School Period, termination policies, and self-determination policies are integral parts of the history of tribes in California.

Essential Understanding 5: Land and place are unique and inextricably tied to Tribal cultures.

RESOURCES

- [Food in California Indian Culture](#) by Ira Jacknis
- [Enough for All](#) by Katherine Rose Smith
- [Tending the Wild](#) by Kat Anderson
- [Al Jazeera Video](#)