

JEWISH DIVERSITY: LEARNING ABOUT OUR FAMILIES, FRIENDS, AND COMMUNITIES THROUGH FOOD RECIPES

Lesson plan for youth

This lesson plan is part of a larger lesson entitled “Jewish Diversity and Innovation: the View from the Kitchen,” which can be found at <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/nov06/>.

Note to teacher: Bring in a range of Jewish cookbooks to class, ideally those that tell stories about the recipes, and that explore Jewish cooking from a variety of places and styles. Depending on the size of your class, three of these may be enough.

Suggestions:

- *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand to New York*, by Claudia Roden (Alfred A. Knopf, 1996)
- *A Drizzle of Honey: The Life and Recipes of Spain’s Secret Jews*, by David M. Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson (St. Martin’s Griffen, 2000)
- *Jewish Cooking in America*, by Joan Nathan (Alfred A. Knopf, 1998)
- *The Jewish Heritage Cookbook: A Fascinating Journey Through the Rich and Diverse History of the Jewish Cuisine*, by Marlena Spieler (Lorenz Books, 2002)
- *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South*, by Marcie Cohen Ferris (The University of North Carolina Press, 2005)
- *Olive Trees and Honey: A Treasury of Vegetarian Recipes from Jewish Communities Around the World*, by Gil Marks (John Wiley & Sons, 2004)

1. Explain the following information to your class:

In America, many “Jewish foods” are Ashkenazi-derived – they are foods which come from Germany, Central and Eastern Europe, and many

similar foods are also eaten by non-Jews from these areas. However, Jews also come from the Middle East, North Africa, India, and Asia. Those whose families fled the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal are called Sephardim. Those from the Middle East and North Africa are called Mizrahim. Also, today, Jews come from a variety of other places, due to conversion, intermarriage, and adoption, and foods from these places have also joined the Jewish culinary palette.

2. Discuss the following questions with your students:

- What is your favorite Jewish food?
- What is your favorite Jewish holiday food?
- What do your parents or grandparents cook for holidays?
- Do they use recipes or do they just cook from their heads?
- Have they taught you how to cook any family specialties?
- What is your family's favorite type of food? (ex. pizza, Italian, Greek, Indian, Japanese, Thai, Chinese, etc.) Do you cook these foods at home or only eat them at restaurants?
- Have you ever used any of these foods to celebrate a Jewish holiday? Can you imagine how you would fit them into the observance of a holiday in any way?

3. Model reading a recipe and story to sleuth Jewish history with the recipe highlighted for this month, *Moroccan Pumpkin Soup with Chick-peas* (which also can be found at <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/nov06/>).

(Students: see handout)

Moroccan Pumpkin Soup with Chick-peas in Massachusetts

When Batsheva Levy Salzman was a child in Morocco and then in Israel, her mother would make pumpkin soup for Sukkot. As a child, she watched her mother cook and helped her. Later, when Batsheva married an American and moved to Boston, she began cooking Moroccan for her family and friends. "My American-Jewish family

likes the pumpkin soup for Thanksgiving," she said. And so does Caraways, a gourmet shop in Wayland, Massachusetts, where she lives. Word spread about her Moroccan cooking. At a fund-raiser for Temple Shir Tikvah in Wayland, ten people paid about \$250,000 for a Moroccan feast of ten different hors d'oeuvres, baked fish, stuffed chicken, couscous, and dessert. "I cook exactly the way my mother taught me," she said. "I cook with my eyes and not for the measurement."

1 12-ounce can chick-peas

2 pounds pumpkin, or butternut or calabaza squash, peeled and cut in chunks

1 onion, peeled and quartered

½ pound stewing beef, but into 2-inch chunks

8 cups water or to cover

2 teaspoons cinnamon or to taste

2 cups chicken soup

2 tablespoons sugar or to taste

1. Drain the chick-peas and peel off the outer skin.
2. In a soup pot mix the squash, chick-peas, onion and beef and cover with the water. Simmer, covered, for 2 hours or until the meat is soft enough to eat.
3. Add the cinnamon, chicken soup, and sugar. Blend, but do not puree, all the ingredients in a food processor. Adjust the seasoning to taste. Reheat and serve. If the soup is too thick, add more water when reheating.

Ask if anyone knew there were Jews in Morocco. Talk about how Jews have been in Morocco since Roman times, and how Batsheva Levy Salzman moved from Morocco to Israel to America, bringing her recipe with her.

- 4. Invite** your students to do their own sleuthing in small groups with the cookbooks you have brought to class. Have the students break into small groups, with each group looking at a different cookbook. Each group should pick out one or two interesting recipes to present back to the class. Where did the recipe come from geographically? How might it have been modified over time and place? What's interesting about this particular recipe? What does the recipe teach us about Jewish travels– what has remained constant and what has changed as we have moved around?
- 5. Read** the following excerpt by Rabbi Angela Warnick Buchdahl together. This story shows how Jewish recipes can be adapted today to fit our multicultural lives. (Students: see handout)

One year my mother put kimchee, a spicy, pickled cabbage condiment, on our seder plate. My Korean mother thought it was a reasonable substitution since both kimchee and horseradish elicit a similar sting in the mouth, the same clearing of the nostrils. She also liked kimchee on gefilte fish and matzah. “Kimchee just like *maror*, but better,” she said. I resigned myself to the fact that we were never going to be a “normal” Jewish family.

I grew up part of the “mixed multitude” of our people: an Ashkenazi Reform Jewish father, a Korean Buddhist mother. (“Kimchee on the Seder Plate,” Rabbi Angela Warnick Buchdal, in *Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity*, ed. Karen Primack, 2003, page 115.)

- 6. Ask your students to respond** to the story. What do they think of the idea of substituting kimchee for maror? Have they ever substituted a new food for any Jewish holiday observances? If yes, is this because there is a mix of cultures in their families? Why else might they substitute foods? Can they think of other possible Passover food substitutions?

In the story, Angela Warnick Buchdahl says, “I resigned myself to the fact that we were never going to be a ‘normal’ Jewish family.” In your students’ opinion, what does a “normal” Jewish family look like? Do they think teenagers often worry about whether their families are “normal” families?

7. **Read together** this story about another American Jewish family. Does it challenge anyone’s notions of what Jewish families look like? Jews from Morocco and other places often face discrimination in the United States. (Students: see handout)

When we first arrived in America [in the 1950s], my father went to the local synagogue and met with the board of directors. After expressing shock that Jews lived in remote Morocco, they kindly advised him to return to Africa, saying, “There’s nothing for your kind here.” My father came home furious, only to find me crying. That day, my teacher had asked me loudly, in front of the class, “Is it true you eat people in Morocco?” (“The Life and Times of Ruth and the Jungle,” Ruth Knafo Setton, in *The Flying Camel*, ed. Loolwa Khazzoom, 2003, page 5.)

8. **Discuss** the following questions:

- Can you imagine this ever happening at your own synagogue or your school? Why or why not?
- Have you or a friend of yours ever had a similar experience, because of being different in any way?
- Can you think of any examples from your own lives where you have noticed Jewish diversity?
- Are there differences among your extended family in terms of Jewish practice, keeping kosher, attending synagogue, etc?

- Have you ever been told that you are not Jewish enough, or that you are too Jewish? What does that mean? How does it make you feel? Is there such a thing as a “right way” to be Jewish?
- Do you have family members who are not Jewish or are from another culture? How does the diversity in your family affect how you celebrate holidays?
- What’s complicated about Jewish diversity? What’s valuable about it?

When people talk about diversity in the United States, they often talk about diversity *between* religions, cultures, and races. In the US we don’t often realize how much diversity there is *within* our Jewish community. In fact Jews live all around the world, there are Jews of all races, and we speak many different languages. We have a culture that comes from the Jewish religion, but we are also influenced by the local culture we live in.

Student Handout

Jewish Diversity and Innovation: The View from the Kitchen

Youth texts

- 1) "Moroccan Pumpkin Soup with Chick-Peas in Massachusetts," in *Jewish Cooking in America*, by Joan Nathan, 1998, pages 128-9.

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