



Carolina Center for the  
Study of the Middle East  
and Muslim Civilizations

Duke  
UNIVERSITY

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES  
Center

CAROLINA  
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K-12

## Using Food to Unite and Understand Cultures

### Overview

This unit provides a variety of activities, with literature connections, that teachers can utilize to help students understand the diverse cultures represented in their community/city. Although the examples provided are based on African and Middle Eastern Cultures, teachers can adapt this lesson based on the cultures represented in their class. This unit will pique students' curiosity about different types of food that may not have previously been exposed to, and encourages them to have an appreciation of cultures different than their own; especially when it relates to foods. The overall objective is that students will be able to try and describe food traditions from cultures that differ than their own and respect differences amongst other cultures. Through this lesson, students will also increase understanding of the Middle East and Africa. *\*\*Although aligned to third grade standards this lesson may be adapted for grades Kindergarten - 5.*

### Essential/Compelling Question(s)

- How can food bring people together?
- What is a tradition?
  - What are some traditions that your family has regarding foods?
- What is respect and how does one show respect?
- How can we disagree respectfully?

### Grade(s)

3rd Grade

**Subject(s):** Social Studies, Global Education

### Essential Standards

- **3.C.1** Understand how diverse cultures are visible in local and regional communities.
  - **3.C.1.1** Compare languages, foods, and traditions of various groups living in local and regional communities.
  - **3.C.1.2** Exemplify how various groups show artistic expression within the local and regional communities.
  - **3.C.1.3** Use nonfiction texts to explore how cultures borrow and share from each other (foods, languages, rules, and traditions, and behaviors).

### Literacy Connections:

- *Rice and Rocks* by Sandra L. Richards
- *Cooking the East African Way* by Bertha Vining Montgomery
- *Cooking the West African Way* by Constance Nabwire and Bertha Vining Montgomery
- *Cooking the North African Way* by Mary Winget
- *J is for Jollof Rice* by Jula Moore: A story about a young girl who explores the alphabet while traveling the Liberian countryside with her father to purchase food for dinner.
- *Mama Panya's Pancakes: A Village Tale from Kenya* by Mary and Rich Chamberlin: On market day, Mama Panya's son Adika invites everyone he sees to a pancake dinner. How will she feed them all.

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*This lesson was created by Tomika Altman-Lewis as part of the Middle East and African Cultures Teacher Fellows Program. For more information about the program, please visit [ncmideast.org/meac-teacher-fellows](http://ncmideast.org/meac-teacher-fellows)*

- *The Water Princess* by Susan Verde
- *The Sandwich Swap* by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah
- *This is the Way We Eat Our Lunch: A Book About Children Around the World* by Edith Baer
- *Everybody Cooks Rice* by Norah Dooley
- *Everybody Bakes Bread* by Norah Dooley
- *Everybody Brings Noodles* by Norah Dooley

### Lesson One: *The Sandwich Swap* Literacy Activity

**Materials:** *The Sandwich Swap* by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah or the Youtube [read aloud](#), Peanut Butter (or a nut-free option due to allergies such as Pumpkin Seed or Sunflower Seed Butter), hummus, naan or pita bread, white bread, and Dabke music found on Youtube.

**Duration:** 45 minutes

**Introduction and Overview:** Students will either listen to or watch a cartoon adaptation of the story, *The Sandwich Swap*. Students will discuss what it means to be respectful, diffuse conflict, and appreciate other student's food choice. After the read-aloud students will sample hummus and pita bread and/or seed (peanut, sunflower, or pumpkin) butter and bread. Time permitting the teacher can make the butter or hummus with their class. For a culminating community building activity students will learn about the Dabke, a dance from the Middle East.

#### Procedure

##### Activity One: *The Sandwich Swap*

1. Tell students that this story was written by Queen Rania of Jordan Al Abdullah. Tell them that Jordan is a country in the Middle East. Before reading the story, ask students what they think this story will be about and to make a prediction with their shoulder partner based on the cover. Take a picture walk (walk through the pictures in the book without reading the words) and point out new vocabulary that students may not be familiar with such as hummus and pita. Stop the picture walk when you get to the food fight to build suspense. After the picture walk, ask students what do they think will happen in this story and why? Why did they make this prediction? If you choose to watch the film adaptation you can stop the story before the food fight to have a class discussion. Ask students if they have tried a new food before and didn't think they would like it? What happened? Allow them to share their thoughts with a shoulder partner. Ask students if they have tried hummus and pita before and explain that they will listen to a story where children are exposed to foods that they have never tasted/experienced before.
2. During the reading, stop reading periodically to have a discussion. Possible questions might include:
  - a. Lily and Salma were the best of friends and enjoyed doing similar things. What types of things did the friends enjoy doing?
  - b. What conflict almost destroyed their friendship?
  - c. How can simple differences/disagreements lead to disruptive results?
  - d. How could showing empathy solve the two girls' problem?
  - e. Rather than have a food fight what should the students have done?
3. After reading the story or watching the video have students discuss their thoughts and feelings about the story. Possible questions for discussions might include:
  - a. Why is it disrespectful to make fun of someone or someone's lunch?
  - b. What should you do if you disagree with someone?
  - c. How could they have solved their problems without having a food fight?

- d. How does Lily's and Salma's fight affect the entire class?
  - e. How would you feel if someone called your lunch gross or yucky?
  - f. What was the simplest/easiest way to solve the girls problem?
  - g. What could the girls have done differently?
  - h. Why is diversity important?
  - i. Imagine if everyone in our world ate the same exact things. Can you think of some foods that we eat that did not originate in America? You might have to provide students with suggestions that they think are traditionally American but are not, for example, Tacos from Mexico; Marco Polo brought pizza from China to Italy and then they added cheese and tomato sauce; hamburgers comes from Hamburg Germany; apple pie is English, doughnuts are dutch, and peanut butter comes from Canada.
  - j. Where is hummus from? The earliest mention of the spread dates back to Egypt during the 13th century. Hummus has been made in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries for hundreds of years
4. Optional Activity: Create an anchor chart where students will brainstorm ways to respect other food choices. Possible headings for the anchor chart, "Instead of gross and yucky we can say to a friend..." "What to say to a friend when they eat something you don't like?" Allow students to come up to the char and places their own ideas or to say time the teacher can write down students responses. Possible responses might be to: "Not say anything at all." "I've never tried that before, it looks interesting what is that." "My food looks different than yours, how does my food look to you." "Do you mind if I ask what you are eating?"

**Activity Two: Seed Butter and Hummus Appreciation** *\*\*Before completing this activity please get clearance from your students' parents/guardians to ensure you do not have any allergies in your class.*

1. If completing this activity on another day, remind students that, in the story *The Great Sandwich Swap* the characters Lily and Salma were the best of friends until one day they thought their friend's lunch choice was gross or yucky. Reflect back to the anchor chart where students brainstorm ways to respect food choices. Ask students if they have tried hummus and pita before and explain that they will complete an activity where they will make sandwiches similar to Lily's and Salma's in the story and remind them not to use words like "yucky" or "gross".
2. Provide small amounts of hummus, pita, peanut butter, and bread to students. Help students make mini sandwiches of their own. Besides utilizing peanut butter you can make seed butter from pumpkin or sunflower seeds. Option one is to make seed butter and hummus in your class. Option two is to provide store bought options.
  - **Extension #1:** Students can create "How-To" or Informational Books on how to make hummus or seed butter with step-by-step instructions.
  - **Extension #2:** To incorporate math the teacher can focus on customary measurements such as cups, pints, etc. The teacher can also create an anchor chart where students can graph whether or not they liked the foods. Possible questions for the graph might be: Have you tried hummus and pita before? Do you think you would like hummus and pita? Which do you prefer hummus, pita, bread, or seed butter? Then the class can discuss the data.

**Activity Three: Community Building: Learn the Dabke**

1. Dabke dance is a traditional Lebanese dance that combines circle and line dancing that is performed at weddings and other large happy occasions. Explain to students that the dance originated in the Levant (an area in the Middle East that includes the historic areas of Palestine, Israel and Syria) where houses

were built from stone with a roof made of wood, straw and dirt which had to be compacted. According to folk legends, to ensure the roof was compacted evenly, individuals would call for their neighbors to help them by yelling, “Al-Awneh” which means “let’s go and help” in Arabic. So family members and neighbors would join hands, jump on the roof, and stomp to make sure the mud was compacted evenly. Over time, this became known as the Dabke. Just like students worked together to make the seed butter or hummus they will work together to learn the Dabke dance. Help students identify Lebanon on the map and tell them that this dance comes from a place where people eat pita and hummus.

## Lesson Two: Culture Kits Exploration and Research

**Introduction and Overview:** The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Carolina Navigators program provides free culture kits for teachers of NC to use. The culture kits are created by UNC students and faculty that are either from or have visited countries.

**Materials:** [A Carolina Navigator Culture Kit](#). The following kits are suggested:

- **Jordan Culture Kit #2** includes food and drink labels.
- **Palestine Culture Kit** includes food and drink like a maftoul, olive wood mortar and pestle, and an arabic long-handled pot.
- **Turkey Culture Kit #2** includes a Turkish coffee pot and food packages.
- **Food History and Culture Kit** contains a variety of food wrappers, restaurant pamphlets and menus, cookbooks, spices, and kitchen items such as bowls, eating utensils, coffee pots, and baskets from different countries. Informative books about food around the world are included as well.
- **Ethiopia Culture Kit** includes several cooking items such as a traditional coffee pot, taba, spoon, woven plate, and berbere seasoning.
- **Kenya Culture Kit #4** includes food and beverage packages and informative books.
- **Lebanon Culture Kit** includes food and the smell of “Cedars of Lebanon” via a vial of cedar aromatic oil.
- Scrapbook Materials (paper, colored pencils, scissors, glue, and etc.)
- Digital Devices with access to Google Slides

*\*\*Please note culture kits contain additional resources than the aforementioned items; however for the purpose of this lesson only the food related items are mentioned.*

**Duration:** Weeklong lesson: activities one and two will take approximately one class session thirty to forty-five minutes. Activity three might take two to three class sessions depending on how long it takes students to complete research and develop their final projects.

### Activities:

1. Exploration: The teacher will share the culture kit with students. As students explore the kit(s) they will use their senses (with the exception of taste) to explore the different items in the kit. Provide students with 5-10 minutes to explore the items in the kit. Allow students the opportunity to discuss what they think the items are and what they are used for. How students to turn and talk to a partner about their thinking. Students should be able to write and draw about the items. Some possible guiding questions include:
  - a. What do they smell?
  - b. What do they notice?
  - c. What do they wonder about (a specific item)?
2. Have students sort the items into groups based on what they think they are, i.e. toys, books, food, cooking/food items, and etc. Students can sort the items any way they see fit, but they must be able

to justify their sorting. After students complete the sort, explain to them which item is and lead students in another discussion. The following questions might be helpful to guide your discussion:

- a. How does the bowl, teapot, eating utensils, and etc. differ than the items that they have at home?
  - b. Based on the smell of a spice, what do you think it would taste like or be used for?
  - c. To extend this activity the teacher can bring in samples of the foods present in the kit for students to try.
3. Based on the kit used, show students where that country is located on the map. Inform students that they will learn more about that country by completing research on the traditional foods of this country. Students will utilize technology to create their own culture kit to summarize what they learned. Provide students with a variety of texts from the literature connections list to help generate further ideas. Students will create a [Flipgrid](#), Digital Book, or student choice that must be pre-approved by the teacher (i.e. scrapbook using digital photos and research, QR codes with images and videos, and etc.) to summarize what they learned. Some possible ideas can be about trying something new; a How To Book on how to make hummus or seed butter; tips on showing respect about other foods choices; how to be a good friend; and/or student choice that's been approved by the teacher.

### **Lesson Three: Exploring Cultural Grocery Stores in my Community**

**Introduction and Overview:** This lesson is an abbreviated version of the *Smithsonian National Museum of American History* lesson, *Foods from Far Away*, from the *Our Story: Coming to America* unit. The original resource contains a guided reading activity, connections to careers, and a graphic organizer. This resource can be accessed using the following link: [Foods from Far Away](#). For this lesson, students will discuss family traditions regarding foods, take a field to a community grocery store, and participate in an Ethiopian “coffee” party. Prior to beginning this unit you will need parent involvement so please ask students to bring in a photo, object, or food sample (nonperishable and store bought if possible) that is a tradition from their family. If a teacher is concerned about allergies, they can ask students to bring in wrappers of the food item instead. As a culminating activity and to further build community you can invite parents to the Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony.

#### **Activity One: Building a Community:**

1. Ask students to define “tradition” – a belief or custom that is passed from one generation to the next. Use the concept of food to help students understand “tradition” - ask what types of traditions that their family has regarding foods. For example, many Americans celebrate Thanksgiving by eating Turkey; soul food on Sunday such as macaroni and cheese, fried chicken, and collard greens, and/or grilling hot dogs and hamburgers for the Fourth of July. Consider reading a picture book about a food tradition from another culture.
2. Ask students to either bring in a photo, object, wrapper, or food sample (nonperishable and store bought if possible) that is a tradition from their family. Students will create a short paper describing their traditional food. Some suggested questions might be to ask students to think about traditional foods that their families eat and why? Some possible questions to ask:
  - a. What is your food item? Why did you choose this particular item?
  - b. Why is this a traditional food for your family or Why is this food significant to your family?
  - c. What makes this food important to your culture?
  - d. What should your classmates know about this food item?

Allow students to share the items that they brought in by having students share their full report in small groups. Bring the class back together and have each student provide a brief summary of what they brought in to share and why. No more than one minute per student for sharing during the whole

group activity. Remind students about *The Sandwich Swap* story and not to call anyone's food gross or yucky.

3. At the end of the discussion allow students to sample any foods that have been brought in by their peers. Have a whole class discussion on the similarities and differences among the items. Optional activity is for students to create a t-chart of the similarities and differences among the food items and the teacher creates an overall t-chart for the entire class.

### **Activity Two: Trip to the Grocery Store.**

1. Plan a field trip to an international grocery store. If you don't have an international grocery store near you plan a trip to a traditional grocery store and look for the "international" section. Allow students to make observations about the items in the store and how they may differ and are alike to items they have seen before. Point out where different foods come from and how they are used. To deepen understand of the Middle East and Africa, point out food items associated with these regions.
2. Prepare a scavenger hunt for students for example, [ThinkAbout for Exploring a Grocery Store](#) to make a connection to *The Sandwich Swap* have make wonder and notice statements (I wonder/I noticed...) about the varieties of bread (including pita), hummus, and seed butter. After the field trip ask students to write about their experiences and reflect on their wonder and notice statements.

### **Activity Three: Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony**

1. Provide a modified Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony for your students with watered down coffee to celebrate learning something new and respecting others cultures. A possible video to show students [Learned How to Host an Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony](#). According to Epicurean, an Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony is an integral part of social and cultural life with an invitation to attend such ceremony marking friendship and respect. In most parts of Ethiopia, it is a social event where the villagers discuss community, politics, life etc.
2. Provide a modified coffee ceremony for students and/or their parents by offering watered down coffee and popcorn. During this time, students can share the papers they wrote about their family traditions, their digital projects from lesson two, traditional food items, and/or simply discussed what they learned during this unit.

### **Related activities that accompany this unit nicely:**

- Carolina K-12 Lesson [My Personal Artifact](#) - Students will share a personal object that holds meaning for them and represent their life by creating and sharing a personal artifact. This lesson can be adapted to fit this unit by having students create an artifact about a food tradition from their family.
- Carolina K-12 Lesson [It's from South Africa](#) - Aligns nicely to Activity Three's Culture Kit Exploration.
- [National Geographic](#) resources on food.
- Additional information from [World Dance History](#) on the Dabke
- Detailed information on [How to Perform an Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony](#)
- Information on how to [complete research](#) in the elementary setting. The Super Three (recommended for students in grades K-3) based on the Big Six (recommended for students in grades 3 - and beyond) are information problem-solving models that students can use to conduct research.
- Healthy Planet Lesson for [Food, Culture, and Origin](#) this resource contains a lesson, PowerPoint, photos and more to describe the range of foods people eat in different cultures with a connection to food religion and culture.
- Culture Connections: From Senegal and West Africa to your [Classroom, Food: Culture and Food Lesson](#)
- Epicurean [Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony](#)