

WORLD FOOD CULTURES & GLOBAL CUISINE

A Cross-Curricular Unit for Grades 5–9

*Exploring Food Traditions from Six Global Regions:
East Asia • South Asia • Latin America • West Africa • Mediterranean • Middle East*

6-Week Complete Unit Plan

◆ 6 Regional Unit Guides ◆ 18 Recipe Analysis Activities
◆ 6 ELA Reading Passages ◆ Food Geography Map Activity
◆ Food & Culture Graphic Organiser ◆ Multicultural Food Fair Planning Guide

UM Printables

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UNIT OVERVIEW

About This Unit

World Food Cultures & Global Cuisine is a six-week, cross-curricular unit designed for students in Grades 5 through 9. This unit takes students on a journey across six global regions — East Asia, South Asia, Latin America, West Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East — exploring how food connects to history, geography, religion, and community.

Each week focuses on one region and includes a comprehensive unit guide, three hands-on recipe analysis activities, and an original ELA reading passage. The unit culminates in cross-curricular activities that tie all regions together: a Food Geography Map Activity, a Food & Culture Graphic Organiser, and a Multicultural Food Fair Planning Guide.

What's Included

- **6 Regional Unit Guides** — In-depth exploration of each region's food culture, history, staple ingredients, and culinary traditions.
- **18 Recipe Analysis Activities** — Three per region, each with an ingredient list, step-by-step method, nutrition analysis, and cultural reflection questions.
- **6 ELA Reading Passages** — Original, grade-appropriate informational texts exploring cultural themes, one per region, with comprehension and critical-thinking questions.
- **Food Geography Map Activity** — A hands-on mapping exercise connecting ingredients to their geographic origins across all six regions.
- **Food & Culture Graphic Organiser** — A structured analytical tool for comparing and contrasting food traditions across regions.
- **Multicultural Food Fair Planning Guide** — A step-by-step project guide for hosting a class or school food fair as a culminating assessment.

Curricular Connections

Social Studies	Geography, trade routes, cultural diffusion, colonialism, migration patterns
Science	Nutrition, macronutrients, food chemistry, agricultural science, ecosystems
ELA	Informational text, main idea, text evidence, vocabulary, analytical writing
Math	Recipe scaling, unit conversion, ratio and proportion, data analysis
Arts	Food presentation, cultural art forms, design thinking for food fair
Health	Balanced diets, food safety, dietary guidelines, cultural food practices

Standards & Pacing Guide

Aligned Standards

- **NCSS C3 Framework:** D2.Geo.6.6-8 (How human activities shape places), D2.His.3.6-8 (How perspectives shaped historical events), D2.Geo.9.6-8 (How geographic context affects people).
- **NGSS:** MS-LS1-5 (Constructing explanations for how environmental and genetic factors influence growth of organisms), MS-ESS3-3 (Human impacts on Earth systems).
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy:** RI.6-8.1 (Cite textual evidence), RI.6-8.2 (Determine central ideas), RI.6-8.4 (Determine word meanings), RI.6-8.8 (Evaluate arguments in text), W.6-8.2 (Write informative/explanatory texts).
- **CCSS.Math:** 6.RP.A.3 (Use ratio reasoning), 7.RP.A.1 (Compute unit rates), 6.NS.A.1 (Solve problems involving fractions).

6-Week Pacing Guide

Week	Region	Focus Topics	Key Activities
1	East Asia	Balance (yin/yang), rice culture, fermentation, tea traditions	Fried Rice, Miso Soup, Spring Rolls; Reading: Philosophy of Balance
2	South Asia	Spice trade, Ayurvedic principles, vegetarianism, regional diversity	Chicken Tikka Masala, Dal, Biryani; Reading: Spice Routes
3	Latin America	Maize civilisation, Indigenous & colonial fusion, communal eating	Tacos al Pastor, Empanadas, Arroz con Leche; Reading: Sacred Grain
4	West Africa	Staple crops (yam, cassava), oral traditions, market culture, diaspora	Jollof Rice, Peanut Soup, Fried Plantains; Reading: Market Rhythms
5	Mediterranean	Olive oil culture, seasonal eating, shared plates, coastal trade	Greek Salad, Pasta Primavera, Hummus; Reading: Olive Tree Legacy
6	Middle East	Hospitality customs, spice blends, flatbread traditions, dried fruits	Falafel, Shawarma, Baklava; Reading: Hospitality & Shared Plate

Essential Questions

1. How does the food people eat reflect the geography, climate, and natural resources of their region?
2. In what ways do historical events such as trade, migration, and colonisation shape a region's cuisine?
3. How do religious beliefs and cultural values influence what people eat and how they prepare food?
4. What role does food play in building and maintaining community and cultural identity?
5. How are food traditions passed down through generations, and how do they evolve over time?
6. What can we learn about a culture by studying its traditional foods and eating customs?

Learning Targets

Geography & Environment

I can explain how geographic factors such as climate, terrain, and natural resources determine the staple ingredients and cooking methods of a region.

History & Trade

I can describe how trade routes, migration, and historical events have influenced the development of food cultures across different regions.

Culture & Identity

I can analyze how religious practices, traditions, and social customs shape food choices, meal structures, and dining etiquette.

Nutrition & Science

I can identify the macronutrients and micronutrients in common global ingredients and explain how traditional diets meet nutritional needs.

Critical Analysis

I can compare and contrast food traditions from multiple regions, identifying patterns of similarity and difference in ingredients, techniques, and cultural meaning.

Communication

I can present my understanding of a region's food culture through written analysis, oral presentation, and visual displays such as maps and graphic organisers.

Assessment Overview

Assessment Type	Description	Timing
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Formative	Recipe analysis worksheets, reading comprehension checks, map activities, graphic organiser entries	Ongoing (Weeks 1–6)
Summative	Multicultural Food Fair project (includes research, display, oral presentation, and written reflection)	Week 6
Peer Assessment	Food Fair peer feedback forms, collaborative group evaluations	Week 6
Self-Reflection	End-of-unit reflection on learning targets, cultural understanding, and personal growth	Week 6

WEEK 1 — EAST ASIA

Regional Unit Guide: East Asia

China • Japan • Korea • Vietnam

Geography & Climate

East Asia is a vast region dominated by mountains, river valleys, and long coastlines. The monsoon climate brings heavy seasonal rains that are perfect for growing rice, the staple crop of the region. From the cold plains of northern China and Korea to the tropical south of Vietnam, the diverse geography creates a wide variety of available ingredients.

Staple Ingredients

Grains: Rice, wheat (noodles, dumplings), millet.

Proteins: Soybeans (tofu, soy sauce, miso), pork, seafood, eggs.

Produce: Cabbage, bok choy, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, lotus root.

Flavorings: Soy sauce, ginger, garlic, scallions, sesame oil, chili paste, rice vinegar.

Culinary Philosophy: Yin and Yang

Many East Asian food traditions are guided by the philosophy of balance between **yin** (cooling, raw, watery, mild) and **yang** (heating, cooked, rich, spicy). A traditional meal strives to balance these forces. Additionally, the concept of the **Five Elements** encourages including five flavors in every meal: sweet, sour, bitter, spicy, and salty.

Cultural Connections

Food in East Asia is deeply tied to family, community, and tradition. Meals are typically served family-style, with shared dishes placed in the center of the table. Chopsticks are the primary eating utensil. Tea culture is highly developed, with elaborate ceremonies in Japan and daily rituals across China and Korea. Fermentation is a cornerstone technique, producing staples like soy sauce, miso, and kimchi, which historically preserved food through long, harsh winters.

RECIPE ANALYSIS: BEEF EMPANADAS

Empanadas are beloved across Latin America. These handheld pastry pockets, originally from Galicia, Spain, were adapted by Latin American cooks to feature local ingredients like cumin, olives, and hard-boiled eggs.

Serves	4 (makes 8 empanadas)
Prep Time	30 minutes
Cook Time	25 minutes
Region	Argentina / South America

Ingredients

- **Dough:** 2½ cups all-purpose flour; 1 tsp salt; ½ cup cold butter, cubed; 1 egg; ½ cup ice water
- **Filling:** 1 tbsp olive oil; 1 medium onion, finely chopped; ½ lb ground beef; 1 tsp cumin; 1 tsp paprika; ½ cup green olives, chopped; 2 hard-boiled eggs, chopped; Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 egg beaten with 1 tbsp water (egg wash)

Method

1. Make the dough: In a bowl, mix the flour and salt. Cut in the cold butter using your fingers or a pastry blender until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Beat in 1 egg and add ice water a little at a time until the dough comes together. Wrap in plastic and chill for 20 minutes.
2. Make the filling: Heat olive oil in a skillet. Sauté the onion until soft. Add the ground beef, cooking until browned. Season with cumin, paprika, salt, and pepper. Stir in the chopped olives and hard-boiled eggs. Let the filling cool completely.
3. Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
4. Roll out the dough on a floured surface to about ¼-inch thickness. Cut out 5-inch circles using a bowl or cutter.
5. Place a spoonful of the cooled filling in the center of each dough circle. Fold the dough over to form a half-moon shape. Press the edges firmly with a fork to crimp and seal.
6. Place empanadas on the baking sheet. Brush the tops with the egg wash. Bake for 20–25 minutes until golden brown.

Nutrition & Science Analysis

The pastry dough provides **carbohydrates** and **fats** (from the butter), creating a caloric base ideal for laborers and travelers. The beef and eggs supply high-quality **protein** and **iron**, while the olives add healthy monounsaturated **fats**. The egg wash brushed on top is not just for color; the proteins in the egg whites coagulate in the oven's heat, creating a crisp, protective, and visually appealing shell that traps the meat's moisture inside.

Analysis Questions

WEEK 5 — MEDITERRANEAN

Regional Unit Guide: Mediterranean

Greece • Italy • Spain • Southern France • Croatia

Geography & Climate

The Mediterranean region wraps around the Mediterranean Sea, featuring a unique climate of hot, dry summers and mild, rainy winters. This climate is ideal for growing olives, grapes, and wheat—the holy trinity of Mediterranean agriculture. The sea itself acts as a historical highway, connecting diverse cultures and facilitating the exchange of ingredients, techniques, and culinary traditions for millennia.

Staple Ingredients

Grains: Wheat (pasta, bread, couscous).

Fats: Olive oil (the cornerstone fat).

Proteins: Fish and seafood, legumes (chickpeas, lentils), cheese (feta, parmesan).

Produce: Tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, peppers, citrus, grapes.

Flavorings: Garlic, basil, oregano, rosemary, thyme, saffron.

Culinary Philosophy: The Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean approach to food is celebrated globally as one of the healthiest dietary patterns. It emphasizes plant-based foods, olive oil as the primary fat, moderate amounts of fish and poultry, and eating meals in a social, unhurried setting. Meals are seen as a time for connection and pleasure, not just sustenance. The concept of **mezze** or **tapas**—small, shared plates—reflects the cultural value of community over individual consumption.

Cultural Connections

The Mediterranean is the cradle of Western civilization, and its food reflects centuries of trade, conquest, and cultural exchange. The Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans spread agricultural practices and ingredients across the region. The olive tree is a powerful symbol of peace, wisdom, and longevity, deeply rooted in Greek mythology and religious texts. Sharing bread and oil is a universal sign of hospitality across the Mediterranean basin.

RECIPE ANALYSIS: GREEK SALAD (HORIATIKI)

A rustic, refreshing salad that captures the essence of the Greek summer—no lettuce, just chunky vegetables, briny olives, and creamy feta, dressed heavily in olive oil.

Serves	4
Prep Time	15 minutes
Cook Time	0 minutes
Region	Greece

Ingredients

- 4 large Roma tomatoes, cut into wedges
- 1 English cucumber, halved and thickly sliced
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, cored and sliced into rings
- 1 cup Kalamata olives, pitted
- 1 block (8 oz) feta cheese, placed whole on top
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp dried oregano
- Salt to taste

Method

1. In a large, shallow bowl, arrange the tomato wedges, cucumber slices, onion slices, and bell pepper rings.
2. Scatter the Kalamata olives over the vegetables.
3. Place the entire block of feta cheese right in the center of the salad.
4. Drizzle the olive oil generously over the vegetables and the feta.
5. Sprinkle the dried oregano and a pinch of salt over the top. Serve immediately with crusty bread to sop up the juices and oil.

Nutrition & Science Analysis

This salad is a powerhouse of the Mediterranean diet. Tomatoes are rich in **lycopene**, an antioxidant that protects cells from damage. Olive oil provides **monounsaturated fats** and **polyphenols**, which reduce inflammation and support heart health. Feta cheese, made from sheep's milk, offers **calcium** and **probiotics** for gut health. The high fat content of the olive oil and feta is crucial: fat-soluble vitamins in the vegetables (like Vitamin A and K) cannot be properly absorbed by the body without the presence of dietary fat.

Analysis Questions

RECIPE ANALYSIS: BAKLAVA

Baklava is a decadent, sweet pastry made of layers of flaky phyllo dough, chopped nuts, and fragrant honey syrup, traditionally served during celebrations and religious holidays.

Serves	8
Prep Time	30 minutes
Cook Time	45 minutes
Region	Ottoman Empire / Middle East

Ingredients

- **Filling:** 2 cups walnuts and pistachios, finely chopped; 1 tsp cinnamon; ¼ cup sugar
- **Dough:** 1 package (16 oz) phyllo dough, thawed; 1 cup unsalted butter, melted
- **Syrup:** 1 cup water; 1 cup sugar; 1 cup honey; 1 tbsp lemon juice; 1 tsp rose water

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C). Brush a 9x13 baking dish with melted butter.
2. Mix the chopped nuts with cinnamon and sugar in a bowl.
3. Lay a sheet of phyllo dough in the baking dish. Brush it lightly with melted butter. Repeat, layering 8 sheets, buttering each one.
4. Spread a thin, even layer of the nut mixture over the buttered phyllo.
5. Add 4 more sheets of phyllo, buttering each one. Add another layer of nuts. Repeat until the nuts are gone, ending with a top layer of 8 buttered phyllo sheets.
6. Using a very sharp knife, cut the baklava into diamond or square shapes before baking. Bake for 45 minutes until the top is golden brown and crispy.
7. While baking, make the syrup: Boil the water, sugar, honey, and lemon juice for 10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in the rose water.
8. Pour the hot syrup over the baklava the moment it comes out of the oven. Let it absorb the syrup for at least 2 hours before serving.

Nutrition & Science Analysis

Baklava is energy-dense, providing **healthy fats** from the walnuts and pistachios (omega-3s), and **quick-releasing carbohydrates** from the honey and sugar syrup. The flakiness of phyllo dough is created by **laminating**—layering fat (butter) between sheets of flour and water. In the oven, the water in the butter turns to steam, puffing the dough apart and creating airy, crisp layers. It is critical to pour hot syrup over hot pastry; this prevents the dough from instantly absorbing all the liquid and turning soggy, allowing it to remain crispy while soaking up the flavor.

Analysis Questions

1. Explain the physical science behind why phyllo dough becomes flaky. What role does the steam play in the oven?

2. Why is it crucial to pour hot syrup over hot baklava? What would happen if the baklava were cold when the syrup was poured?

3. Geography Connection: Pistachios and walnuts thrive in the Middle Eastern climate. How does the agricultural reality of the region dictate the fillings used in this traditional dessert?

REVIEW & REFLECTION

End-of-Unit Reflection

Now that you have completed the World Food Cultures & Global Cuisine unit, take some time to reflect on what you have learned about the world, history, science, and yourself through the lens of food.

1. Which region's food culture did you find most surprising or fascinating, and why?

2. How does understanding the geography and climate of a region change the way you look at the food on your plate?

3. Choose two regions we studied. Explain one major similarity and one major difference in how their cultures view the act of sharing a meal.

4. Think about the scientific concepts we covered (fermentation, emulsions, Maillard reaction, starch gelatinization). Which concept did you find most interesting, and how does it change your understanding of cooking?

5. How has this unit changed your perspective on the foods from your own culture or family traditions?

Thank You!

*Thank you for purchasing and using this **World Food Cultures & Global Cuisine Unit** from **UM Printables**. I hope this resource has sparked meaningful conversations and deepened your students' understanding of the beautiful diversity of our world.*

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