

Lesson 6 - Middle Eastern and North African Jewish Cuisine

Aim

Israel is a profoundly diverse place. It is home to humans of every color and language and they all bring their unique culture and traditions from their previous countries of origin. They may have come from racial, national, cultural and religious groups that have lived in Israel for generations, or they may have just made *aliyah* (immigrated to Israel) last week. In this lesson, students will understand how the cuisine of the Jews from the Middle East and North Africa has influenced food choices in Israel and even around the world.

Objectives

- Students will explain why and how Middle Eastern Jewish foods have become staples in a given country.
- Students will identify factors that influence food choices and customs.
- Students will prepare dishes characteristic of Middle Eastern Jewish culture for the class to share.

Materials

- Whiteboard and markers
- Colored markers, crayons
- Gloves for food handling
- Food preparation- Depending on your resource there are three options for preparing food.
 - **Hot food preparation:** kitchen, cooking supplies needed for the chosen recipe
 - **Cold food preparation:** choose a recipe that does not require cooking (e.g. hummus, *tehina*, etc.)
 - **Readymade (prepared) Food:** Many supermarkets carry a diverse selection of Middle Eastern foods (e.g. falafel, hummus, *tehina*, grape leaves, dates/date cookies, rice, pita bread, feta cheese etc.)

- **Appendix A – Touring Israel**

adapted from [A Global Foods Tour](#)

- **Appendix B - Student Handout- Flavors of the Middle East**
- **Appendix C- Food Evaluation**
- **Appendix D- Sample Mizrahi Recipes**

(Feel free to use your own Middle Eastern recipes)

Procedures

Introduction

1. **WRITE** the Main Question on the board:

How did Middle Eastern and North African Jews influence the cuisine in Israel?
2. **ASK** the students what they had for dinner for the last two nights?
3. Students **WRITE down answers**
4. In groups/ partners students compare what they ate.
 - a. Are there similarities?
5. **ASK** students *why* they think they ate what they did? (
 - a. Answers could be – easy to cook, quick to prepare, cheap to buy, delicious to eat, etc).
6. **PROJECT** slides 7-14 from the PowerPoint '[Around the World](#)'.
 - a. If you do not have access to a computer, you can print out the slides.
7. **DISCUSS**
 - a. The different kinds of food that people eat around the world and how it is related to natural resources, geography, religion, etc.
8. **DISTRIBUTE Appendix A** to each student and as a class **READ** through the packet.
9. **TELL** the students that today they are going to cook/sample Jewish Middle Eastern Cuisine.

10. **Divide the class into two groups.**

- a. One group assists in the preparation and cooking, while the other group completes **Appendix B - Student Handout- Flavors of the Middle East**
 - b. Rotate groups, so that all students get a chance to cook and complete the handouts.
11. Students can finish the student worksheets in Appendix B while eating.
 12. Eat and Enjoy!
 13. You can play Mizrahi music in the background.
Music can be found in **Lesson 2 - Celebrating Middle Eastern Jewish Clothing**

Body of the Lesson

14. While the students are eating, **READ ALOUD** to them a quote from an article about Egyptian Jewish cookbook writer and cultural anthropologist Claudia Roden.

“Roden started writing down her recipes. “Even now, whenever I cook I think about how I got the recipe, who gave me the recipe, what their story was,” she says. Her “famous orange cake”—a rich Sephardic confection of eggs, sugar, oranges, and ground almonds that has been appropriated by so many other cookbook writers since she included it in “Middle Eastern Food” that she has lost count—was “Iris Galante’s, one of the Aleppo Galantes. She was the grandmother of my brother Ellis’s first wife, visiting from Italy. I watched her cook—she had a little handwritten book, and I said, ‘Can you give me a recipe?’ I got a windfall. The first recipe was pastellicos, from Salonika...”

15. **STUDENTS COMPLETE** the last page of **Appendix C-** evaluation of the experience. (A Global Foods Tour A Global Foods Tour Recipe Worksheet)

Conclusion

16. Discussion Questions:

- a. Where do we get the recipes for the meals we eat at home?
- b. What foods are passed down from generation to generation in your family?

- c. What foods did we learn about today from the Sephardic and Mizrahi Kitchen?
- d. What are some recipes you can share from your family?

Extension Activities

17. Create a Classroom Cookbook - Students interview their relatives and community. The class then shares these treasured recipes that were passed on from generation to generation to compile a classroom cookbook
18. READ this Jewish commentary that explains Jews' relationship to food (for older students)

Ha'Rav Eliyahu Bakshi Doron, the former Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel explains a rabbinic commentary from *Leviticus Rabba* that says that the people of Israel were redeemed from Egypt, because they preserved their names and language.

He elaborates, "In Egypt, the people of Israel still did not have a Halachic (Jewish law) framework that spelled out clearly the laws of Jewish life and the Torah of the fathers was forgotten as sons assimilated and learned the ways of the Egyptians.

What kept the People of Israel special and separate?

What prevented assimilation and for this reason, the People were redeemed?

Not because of the father's *Musar* (moral teachings), but because of the MOTHER's torah...the mother's language that she spoke with her sons and the special traditions that they observed separated them from the other nations and kept them distinct and for this reason, they were redeemed..."

Discussion Questions:

- a. What do food traditions contribute to our community and culture?
- b. How does Jewish law influence the way Jews relate to food?
- c. Does your family have special traditions that relate to food? What are those traditions? How will you continue the legacy and pass on these tradition to your children?

19. Use the resources provided in the lesson to develop additional ideas for teaching about cultures and cuisine.

Resources and External Links

A Global Foods Tour

From http://glencoe.mheducation.com/sites/dl/free/0078883660/688623/A_Global_Foods_Tour.pdf

Rethinking School Lunch Cooking with California Food in K-12 Schools

From https://www.ecoliteracy.org/sites/default/files/uploads/cooking_with_california_food_K-12.pdf

Healthy Planet USA: Food, Culture, and Origin

From <https://healthyplanetus.org/healthy-growing/resources/garden-based-lessons/lesson-7-food-culture-and-origin/>

British Council: Food from Around the World

From

https://esol.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/Unit%203_Food%20around%20the%20world.pdf

Learning to Give: What Do People Around the World Eat?

From

<https://www.learningtogive.org/units/global-health-hunger-and-food-around-globe-9-12/what-do-people-around-world-eat>

Geography, Culture and Food

From https://www.indianahumanities.org/pdf/FFTLesson_One.pdf

Lesson 6: Mizrahi Cuisine

Appendix A - Touring Israel

Note to Teacher:

This packet can be divided into two parts.

1) Informational reading titled “**Touring Israel**”

2) Student Worksheet titled “**Looking Back at Israel**”

To prepare for lesson, you may choose to print, staple and collate this document as two separate documents to save paper.

This option also allows the teacher to reuse the information packets for future lessons.

Enjoy the tour and your meal!



ISRAEL

Touring Southwest Asia and North Africa



In the southwestern corner of Asia, right on the Mediterranean Sea, lies the narrow country of Israel. A wide variety of geographical features are packed into this small nation, which is slightly smaller than the state of New Jersey. At Israel's northernmost point, near its borders with Syria and Lebanon, is the Galilee region—a hilly agricultural area bordered on the east by the Jordan River and Lake Tiberias.

Traveling south from Galilee, you reach a long, thin stretch of plains, extending from the Mediterranean Sea eastward to Israel's border with Jordan. These coastal plains are home to most of

Israel's major cities and the majority of its population. Here, the Mediterranean sunshine and rich soil create an excellent environment for farming. Citrus fruits, olives, grapes, and a wide array of vegetables thrive in this fertile region.

South of Israel's coastal plains region is the vast Negev Desert, which covers the southern half of the country. Although this region gets less than 10 inches of rain per year, modern irrigation techniques allow the Israelis to farm the land.

Map of Israel



Food Traveler's Notes

Agriculture

Farming in Israel is very organized. Perhaps the most famous type of Israeli farms is the kibbutz, a cooperative farming village. On a kibbutz, all land and all property are owned jointly by the people who live and work there. Through Israel's many kibbutzim and similar farming methods, enough food is produced to feed almost all of Israel's population. The largest crops are citrus fruits, tomatoes, wheat, potatoes, melons, apples, and grapes. Cattle and sheep are the most important livestock.

People and Language

Of the 5.6 million people living in Israel, over 80 percent are Jewish. Although more than half of these Jewish people are Israeli-born, their parents and grandparents came from more than 100 different countries. Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jews came from Yemen, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, etc. European Jews came from the countries of France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Hungary and Belgium. In addition, more than 15 percent of Israel's population are Arabs. Therefore, the

culture, customs, and cuisine of Israel contain elements of Southwest Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, North Africa, and many other regions! When visiting a city in Israel, you might dine on such Middle Eastern foods as lamb shish kebobs or on such European specialties as smoked salmon and potato pancakes. Although Hebrew is the most common language here, visitors might also hear Arabic, English, French, Russian, or any number of other languages.

Dining

Israeli meals are greatly affected by the dietary laws of the country's two main religions, Judaism and Islam. For example, people who follow Jewish dietary laws cannot eat pork, shellfish, or any type of fish without scales or fins. They are also not allowed to eat meat and dairy products at the same meal. The Islamic people too, cannot eat pork. Breakfast in Israel is typically hearty and may include cheese, vegetables, olives, and sometimes fish. Lunch is the main meal of the day for most people here. This meal is usually eaten later here than in Western cultures—around 3:00 P.M. when school is over for the day. Most Israelis eat a light dinner—often a salad or fish—around 7:00 in the evening.

Israeli Food Briefs

Shakshouka

A favorite dish in Israel is shakshouka, an egg and tomato dish that originated in northern Africa. Although there are many slight variations of the recipe, traditional shakshouka is made by first sautéing tomato, onion, garlic, and various herbs. To complete this dish, Israelis poach eggs over the tomatoes and onion mixture. Some shakshouka recipes call for green peppers or pimentos as well.



Matzo

Matzo is an unleavened bread, which means that it does not rise and get puffy, like yeast breads. Most Israeli people eat matzo during the Jewish holiday of Passover—a week-long celebration of the ancient Jewish people’s escape from slavery in Egypt. The Jews eat unleavened bread during Passover as a reminder that their ancestors fled from Egypt so quickly that they couldn’t wait for their bread to rise.

Made only with flour and water, matzo is thin and brittle. Israelis often grind matzo

into a powder and use it to thicken soups, to bread foods for frying, or to make pancakes or dumplings.



Falafel

One of the most popular of all Israeli foods is falafel—deep-fried balls of a mixture of chickpeas, crushed wheat, and spices. Falafel is usually served in sandwich form, tucked into a flat, pocket-like bread called pita. However, the falafel balls can also be served as appetizers. Most Israelis serve falafel with a sauce made from either yogurt or tahini—a thick paste of ground sesame seeds. Falafel is now sold on practically every street corner in the towns and cities of Israel. Some people even call it the “Israeli hamburger!”



Looking Back on Israel

1. The food traditions of Jewish people in Israel and elsewhere are very detailed and strict. To help those among the Jewish people who observe these commandments, Jewish food inspectors label foods that meet certain standards. The label may be the word Kosher or a symbol, such as the letter k, to indicate that the food is kosher.

Conduct research to find other symbols for kosher and share your findings with the class.

2. Challah bread, gefilte fish, and knishes are some of the many tradition European Jewish dishes common in the United States and elsewhere, as well as in Israel. Hummus, grape leaves, falafel, and pita are foods from the Middle Easter

Look for these and other Jewish foods in your grocery store and make a note of where they are made.

Compare your list with your classmates.

3. List the foods of Israel that you would most like to try.
Where can you find these foods?
Which can you make?

4. To celebrate Passover, the Jewish people eat a special meal called a Seder. Each type of food eaten at the Seder symbolizes something different about the holiday.

Research the Seder meal celebration and write a paragraph explaining what each food item symbolizes.

What other foods are eaten during Jewish holidays (Rosh Hashana, Purim, Chanukah, etc.) How do they symbolize the history of the Jewish people?

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Appendix B - Flavors of the Middle East

Note to Teacher:

This packet can be divided into two parts.

1) Informational reading titled “**Flavors of the Middle East**”

2) Student Worksheet titled “**Flavor Profile Research: Middle East**”

To prepare for lesson, you may choose to print, staple and collate this document as two separate documents to save paper.

This option also allows the teacher to reuse the information packets for future lessons.

Flavors of the Middle East

FLAVOR PROFILE: MIDDLE EASTERN/INDIAN

This profile encompasses cuisine from the Middle East, also known as Western Asia (including Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan), as well as countries of North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. The Indian subcontinent is sometimes included in geographical references as part of Western Asia, and sometimes as part of Southern Asia. Culinarily, India and the Middle East use many of the same herbs and spices, as well as such ingredients as yogurt. This profile includes the following ingredients:

Allspice	Pine nuts
Cardamom	Pomegranates
Chickpeas (garbanzo beans)	Rose water
Cilantro	Sesame oil
Cinnamon	Tamarind
Coriander	Turmeric
Cumin	Yogurt
Fennel	
Garlic	More specific to India:
Ghee (clarified butter)	Curry
Mint	Garam masala
Nutmeg	Kaffir lime leaves
Peppers, chili	Mangoes
Peppers, sweet	

Familiar foods in this profile include falafel, tabbouleh, pita bread, and curried potatoes.

[Source: Flavor profile information was slightly adapted from pages 35–45 in *Cooking with California Foods in K-12 Schools* (2011, Learning in the Real World).]

CILANTRO



CINNAMON



YOGURT



CURRY



PINE NUTS

MANGOES



TAMARIND

POMEGRANATES



CHICKPEAS

FLAVOR PROFILE RESEARCH: Middle East



1. On which continent is Israel located?

Color Israel on the map.

2. From what countries did Jews in the Middle East and North Africa migrate to Israel? Color and list the different countries on the world map.

3. Review the information from the flavor profile reading with the images.

What ingredients and seasonings are commonly used in Middle Eastern food?

Meats: _____

Fruits: _____

Vegetables: _____

Grains: _____

Dairy: _____

Spices: _____



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Appendix C - Food Evaluation: A Global
Tour Recipe Worksheet

Note to Teacher:

This Appendix has one worksheet. Print as many copies as you need.

Food Evaluation: A Global Foods Tour Recipe Worksheet

Name of Recipe: _____

Planning the Meal

1. List the equipment you needed to prepare this recipe:

2. On a separate sheet of paper, make a work plan for preparing this recipe in the foods lab. List the ingredients you will need.

Questions

1. How does this recipe reflect the food traditions of its native country or region?

2. How would you rate the nutritional value of this recipe? Why?

Evaluation

After preparing the recipe, complete the following:

1. How did the food look and taste?

2. What changes would you want to make in the recipe? Why?

3. List any difficulties in preparing the recipe.

4. How would you solve the problem(s) next time?

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Appendix D - Sample Mizrahi Recipes

Note to Teacher:

Here are some sample Mizrahi recipes common in Israeli cuisine. Choose one of them to prepare with the class or explore other resources.

Sample Mizrahi Recipes

Shakshuka – Basic Recipe

SERVES 4

PREP 20 MIN

COOK 45 MIN



INGREDIENTS

- 4 tablespoons oil for frying
- 2 cloves garlic crushed
- 5 large tomatoes, peeled and diced (or 1 1/2 cups canned tomatoes, crushed)
- 1 tablespoon zhug, filfel chuma or harissa or a mixture of crushed garlic, paprika and hot peppers
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin (optional)
- Pinch of ground caraway (optional)
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 8 eggs

STEPS

1. Heat the oil in a large deep skillet and lightly fry the garlic. Add the tomatoes and seasonings and cook for 15-20 minutes over low heat, partly covered.
2. Add the tomato paste, cover and simmer for a few more minutes. Adjust the seasoning – the sauce should have a strong, piquant flavor.
3. Break the eggs one by one and slide onto the tomato sauce, arranging the yolks around the pan.
4. Turn heat to low and cook until the egg whites set (about 5-7 minutes). Partly cover the pan to prevent the sauce from spraying around the kitchen. Cover completely if you like your eggs “over hard”.

Eat with fresh pita or challah bread.

More articles and recipes about shakshuka

<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/food/1.697174>

<https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1014721-shakshuka-with-feta>

<https://blog.kitchenaid.com/global-kitchen-israeli-shakshuka/>

Bourekas

(a common Turkish Jewish food)

8 SERVINGS

PREP 30 MIN

COOK 30 MIN

This recipe is based on the recipe found in this link:

<https://jwa.org/blog/borekas>

Potato Filling from Joan Nathan's The Foods of Israel Today



INGREDIENTS

2 medium onions diced

4 tablespoons butter

2 pounds baking potatoes
(about 4 medium potatoes)

Salt and freshly ground
pepper to taste

½ teaspoon turmeric
(optional)

½ cup chopped fresh parsley (I
used a bit less than ½ a cup
but you can add the parsley
depending on how much you
like)

2 large eggs

1 package of premade puff
pastry

STEPS

1. Sauté the onions in 2 tablespoons of the butter until they are golden.
2. Peel the potatoes, cut them into quarters, and cover with cold water in a large pot. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 15 minutes or until the potatoes are cooked through. Drain and mash them with a fork. Add salt, pepper, onions, turmeric, parsley, the remaining butter, and the eggs. (make sure that that potato mixture has cooled before adding the eggs, so the residual heat doesn't cook them). Mix thoroughly.
3. Take walnut-sized lumps of puff pastry dough and roll each into a little ball. Press and squash the ball between your palms until it's a flat circle. Put the flat circle on your counter and using your palm stretch and flatten into a 4-inch round.
4. Put a heaping teaspoon of filling in the middle of each round. Fold the dough over the filling into a half-moon shape. Pinch the edges firmly together to seal the *borekas*. It is traditional to pinch, fold and twist the dough around the edges of the *borekas* once they have been sealed (this is a nice touch to add to the *borekas* but takes some practice!)
5. Place the *borekas* on an oiled tray and brush them with the egg that has been mixed with a bit of water. Sprinkle with sesame seeds if you like.
6. Bake the *borekas* at 350 degrees for about 30 minutes or until they are slightly golden. Serve immediately.
7. The *borekas* are also very good after they have been reheated or they can also be frozen before being baked

Sfing

Fried North African Donuts

(for Hanukkah and other happy occasions!)

SERVES 2–4 Dozen

PREP 15 MIN

COOK 20 MIN



INGREDIENTS

3/4 cup granulated sugar
1 1/2 pounds ricotta cheese
1 teaspoon baking powder
4 eggs
2 tablespoons vanilla extract
1/2 cup milk
1 cup vegetable oil for frying
1/3 cup confectioners' sugar for decoration
4 cups cake flour

STEPS

1. In a large bowl; mix eggs, white sugar, and ricotta cheese until smooth and creamy. Stir in the vanilla and flour. If the batter is dry mix in a little of the milk.
2. In a frying pan over medium high heat, heat vegetable oil until hot. Drop teaspoonfuls of batter into the hot oil and fry until golden. Turn to cook cookies evenly. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain cookies on paper towels. Sprinkle with confectioner's sugar if desired

