

### **About the Series**

Hosted by Marcus Samuelsson, the award-winning executive chef of New York's Aquavit and Riingo, THE MEANING OF FOOD travels across America, breaking bread with Americans from all backgrounds and walks of life. We visit home kitchens, restaurants, pastry bake-offs, lunch trucks, burger joints, an Italian wedding, a Bengali fertility feast and more, as we explore the profound role that food plays in our lives. Produced by Pie in the Sky Productions in association with Oregon Public Broadcasting, THE MEANING OF FOOD, a three-part series, airs nationally on PBS on April 7th, 14th and 21st, 2005 at 10 p.m. (check local listings).

### **Lesson Objective**

Students will:

- Gain an understanding of the many roles that food plays in people's lives
- Learn about different cultures and groups through food
- Use a range of research and presentation skills

*Appropriate for social studies students in grades 6-8, especially classes in world geography and history.*

### **Materials Needed**

The Meaning of Food video/DVD  
Student worksheets

### **Time Needed**

One to three classroom periods

### **Procedure**

1. Ask students to respond to the question: What role does food play in people's lives? (Prompts: providing nourishment; giving an opportunity to socialize with family, friends and the community; transmitting culture; defining gender or family roles; representing religious symbols; giving a national or cultural identity, part of some superstitions (like throwing salt over your shoulder).
2. After discussing their responses, explain to students that there are many types of foods associated with different cultural and ethnic groups, traditions and celebrations that feature foods, and different rules about how and when people eat. Foods and food rituals help us learn about cultures and groups.
3. Show students a clip from THE MEANING OF FOOD. You can choose from among many segments. For a complete listing, go to [www.pbs.org/meaningoffood](http://www.pbs.org/meaningoffood).
4. Discuss the people or cultural groups and the foods featured in the film segment with the whole class.
5. As a large group, in small groups or pairs, ask students to describe their family celebrations and daily meals, what food is served, how it is eaten and with whom, how similar and different this is from what they perceive as "main-stream America", and how this reflects the specific identity of their family and/or culture. Write responses on the board. (This can also be a written homework assignment that is discussed the next day.)
6. Hand out the student worksheet and ask students to choose something to research that was discussed in class or seen in the film segment. This assignment can be done individually, in pairs or small groups.
7. Students should present their research findings to the class as a poem, picture/drawing with associated story, food tasting, one-act play or multi-media presentation.

### **Method of Assessment**

Class participation  
Completion of student worksheets  
Presentations

### **Lesson Extension**

Expand this project into a school-wide celebration of the community's cultural groups and foods. Invite parents and extended family members to view the students' research projects, to make and share the foods from their cultures and to talk about their own histories and food stories. You can even extend this into the creation of a book reflecting the families and cultural groups represented at the school, including the ways in which foods are used in their culture, along with recipes.