

The Traditional Foods of the Inuit

Content Areas

Social Studies, Math

Objective

Students will learn about country foods, or the traditional foods of the Inuit, and how these foods are acquired from the land and sea. Students will also compare the cost of maintaining a traditional diet with the cost of maintaining a diet consisting of food from the south. Finally, students will prepare and enjoy a traditional Inuit bread, bannock.

Materials

- Examples of Inuit Country Foods – 1 per student
- Ingredients for bannock (may wish to double recipe) – bannock is prepared on a stove, so if preparing in class, a hot plate will be needed
- Additional recipes using traditional foods of the Inuit (Teacher resource)
 1. <http://www.nwmb.com/english/index.php> – select Arctic Recipes
- Approximate costs of a litre of milk, eggs, coffee, yogurt and sugar

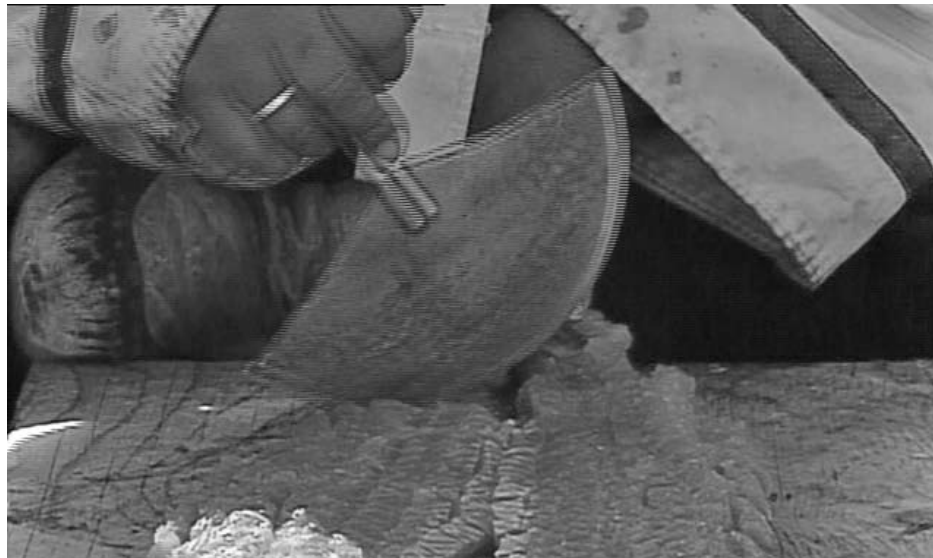
Activity

- 1 Explain that each culture has its own traditional foods. Ask students to reflect on their backgrounds and share some common foods in their families. Are there particular foods prepared on holidays or during other special times of the year?
- 2 Discuss how the world around us influences our eating habits. Ask students to identify what factors influence their eating habits including family, friends, and commercials they see. How do these factors influence the food choices they make?



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- 3 Remind students that prior to the mid 1900s, the Inuit of Northern Canada had virtually no contact with outsiders and were a completely self-sufficient people. The only factor influencing the diet of the traditional Inuit was the availability of resources in the wild, because they lived entirely off the land and sea. Everything they ate, wore, built with, hunted with and used during everyday activities came from the animal or plant life of the Arctic.
- 4 With the arrival of Europeans in the mid 1900s came an increased dependency on “white” foods and tools and a shift away from traditional foods, or “country foods.” Explain that today, modern Inuit rely on a combination of country foods from the land and pre-packaged foods from the southern part of Canada.
- 5 Explain that each season provides specific resources that support a traditional diet. During the winter and spring, seal is a staple. Caribou is hunted during summer and fall. Some resources, including fish, whales, birds and other sea mammals such as walrus, are available year round. In the month of June, known as “manniit (egg)” month, bird eggs are also a staple of the Inuit diet. The Inuit consume their meat fresh, frozen and cooked in traditional dishes such as caribou stew flavoured with blackberry.



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6 Explain that to add more flavour, the Inuit sometimes bury the meat, a process called “aging.” One traditional delicacy is seal flippers aged in blubber until the fur can easily be removed.

7 Ask students why they think people hunt. Explain that unlike in many other areas of the world, the Inuit do not hunt for sport. The Inuit see themselves as part of the environment and not separate from it, and the plants and animals of the Arctic are respected. Very little of the animal hunted goes to waste. Nutritious meat from hunted animals is still a central part of the Inuit diet. Qulliit, the stone lamps traditionally used for light, heat and cooking, use the oil from animal blubber. Skins and furs are used to make mittens, kamiit, or Inuit skin boots, and parkas. Even the bones are used for a variety of purposes. Ask students what uses they think animal bones may have. (Building materials, weapons, sewing needles, utensils)

8 Explain that while the environment of Nunavut may look empty, there are still plants that are able to resist the cold climate. Because a layer of permanently frozen subsoil exists, there are no deep root systems in the vegetation of the Arctic. However there are still approximately 1,700 kinds of plants that grow. When the snow melts, thousands of flowering plants grow including buttercups, arctic poppies, arctic azaleas and lichens. The Arctic summers also allow for the opportunity to pick Baffin berries (similar to raspberries), blackberries, cranberries and blueberries; however fresh produce is extremely limited.



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- 9** Ask students if grapes are available to them in February. How? Explain that the availability of fresh produce is a luxury available to us because of where we live. Fruits and vegetables grown in different regions of the country and the world are transported to our grocery stores. In Nunavut, even today, none of the communities are accessible by road or rail. Everything, including produce and packaged foods, arrives by plane or boat.
- 10** Ask students how they think prices for food in Nunavut compare to the cost of food available where they live. Why? (More expensive – everything arrives via plane or ship) Is it more expensive to purchase fresh food such as fruits and vegetables, or packaged foods, including chips and cookies? Why? (Packaged foods travel easier – difficult to transport fresh foods because they spoil) In Nunavut communities, to feed a family for a week could cost as much as \$254 in comparison to \$110 in the southern provinces of Canada. In fact, Nunavut has the highest cost of living in Canada.
- 11** Write these shopping items on the board in a column – Litre of milk, Eggs, Coffee (jar), Yogurt and Sugar. Ask students to predict the approximate prices for these products in their local store. Write the costs in a second column labelled with the name of your province. Then ask the students to predict the cost of these products in Nunavut. After taking some responses, provide students with the cost of each item and list in a second column labelled Nunavut: \$4 for one-litre of Milk, \$4 for a dozen eggs, \$15 for a jar of coffee, \$1.50 for a container of yogurt and \$10 for a bag of sugar.
- 12** Conclude that for a family living in Nunavut, a traditional diet consisting of food from the land and sea is healthier and less costly than a modern diet.

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Evaluation

- 1 Give each student Example of Inuit Country Foods enjoyed by the Inuit. Read through the list together. Discuss which foods students would sample and which they would not. Remind students that while many country foods may seem unusual, these foods are a part of the Inuit culture, and they have enjoyed them for thousands of years.
- 2 Explain that the Inuit were introduced to flour by the whalers and traders who traveled to northern Canada during the 1800s. Flour allowed the Inuit to prepare bannock, which became one of their traditional foods. As a class, prepare and enjoy bannock.

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Examples of Inuit Country Foods

All meats and fish are enjoyed raw, cooked and frozen.

- Caribou – nutritious, low-fat venison-like meat
- Caribou stomach – filled with blood and hot stones, creates a tundra version of European black pudding
- Musk ox – rich, well-marbled beef
- Maktaaq – outer layer of skin from whales (beluga and narwhal) served raw. It has a tender-crisp texture and tastes like fresh coconut.
- Seal flippers aged in blubber
- Arctic char – sweet-tasting fish
- Ptarmigan (pheasant-like bird)
- Seal
- Walrus
- Aalu – dip for meat made from choice parts of caribou or seal, chopped into tiny pieces and blended with melted fat and blood
- Misiraq – dip made from seal or whale blubber aged to resemble an aromatic white wine
- Nirukkaq – dip made from the contents of a caribou's stomach, kneaded into a smooth pâté
- Bannock – traditional bread

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Martha Nangmalik's Quick Pan-fried Bannock

500 ml (2 cups) of flour
45 ml (3 tablespoons) baking powder
250 ml (1 cup) raisins
500 ml (2 cups) water
2 eggs (optional)
125 ml (1/2 cup) sugar (optional)

Put flour into bowl and add the magic powder (baking powder). Stir it. Add raisins and water and stir it all together. Put 15 ml (1 tablespoon) of lard into pan and melt it on the stove (hot plate). Pour the bannock into pan and cook it. Rotate the bannock so it cooks evenly, check with a fork to see if it's cooked inside. Cook on both sides. Cool on a rack. Enjoy!

(Note: When Martha, an elder from the community of Igloolik, Nunavut, is at home, and not camping out on the land, she adds the eggs and sugar to this recipe.)



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Notes:
