

## Culture and Food and Ritual, Oh My!

How does culture affect food rituals?

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/activity/culture-and-food-and-ritual-oh-my/>

### ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Students plan a menu for a religious ceremony in accordance with food rituals.

### DIRECTIONS

#### 1. Activate previous student knowledge about Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

Ask students to share what they know about each of the three major religions that call Jerusalem home. Pre-teach the following vocabulary: Passover, seder, kosher, leaven, matzo, Easter, Maundy Thursday, Ramadan, sudhoo, iftar, halal, Eid al-Fitr. Review the term “culture” with students, and ask how the vocabulary they just learned fits into the culture of each religious group.

#### 2. Students analyze photos of food rituals in small groups.

Break students into six groups. Display one photo at a time from the Food Rituals Photo Gallery, and have students discuss and analyze the photo with their group. Have groups discuss what they think is going on in each picture. Ask students to think about who is seated, what items are on the table, and at what point in the meal they believe the people are. Have each group share their observations with the class before displaying the next photo.

#### 3. Define “food ritual” and discuss students’ personal food rituals.

Have a class discussion about the similarities and differences between the observations made by groups with the same pictures. Ask: *Did different groups make different observations about the same photo? If so, why?* Encourage a variety of responses. Explain that each photo depicts a family’s religious celebration. Many celebrations, both religious and non-religious, involve food rituals. Ask: *What food rituals do you observe and do they have any special meaning?* If students struggle to provide responses, suggest thinking about times in their lives that mark an event, such as birthdays, different times of day (breakfast, lunch, dinner), holidays, etc.

#### 4. Groups research religious food rituals.

Direct students’ attention back to the Food Ritual photos, and reveal the religious celebration featured in each. Explain that each group will plan a menu with at least five items for a religious ceremony celebrated by one of the religions featured in the photos. Assign each group a religion. The two Christianity groups will plan a meal for Easter, the two Judaism groups for Passover, and the two Islam groups for Eid al-Fitr to mark the end of

Ramadan. Prompt students to identify the components of the meal, including beverages, main dishes, and desserts.

Have students research their assigned celebration and associated religion using the provided web resources. Ask students to specifically find and record the following:

- The significance of the celebration to that religion
- Foods commonly associated with the celebration and why
- Any general food customs or beliefs of that religion

Students may decide to assign individuals within their groups specific research tasks, or to tackle the information hunt all together. Have students record their research.

### **5. Groups plan a menu for their assigned religious ceremony based on their research.**

Based on their research, have each group plan a menu for their designated religious ceremony. In planning their menus, students should consider the overall and specific food rituals of their assigned groups. For example, the Judaism group should plan a kosher meal with specific foods, such as matzo.

After groups have created their menus, combine the two groups assigned to each religion into one large group (i.e., the two groups that researched and created an Easter menu should become one large Christianity group). Have each new, large group come to consensus on a menu for their celebration. The two original groups should share their menus with each other, and work together to make sure all rituals are accounted for.

### **6. Students share their menus, and discuss similarities and differences between food rituals.**

Make a large chart (3 rows, 2 columns) on the board, labeling each row in the first column as “Christianity,” “Islam,” or “Judaism.”

Have each large group share their new menu with the class and talk about the religious beliefs associated with that celebration. For example, students in the Islam group should talk about basic beliefs of Muslims, the festival Ramadan and its importance, and how it relates to their food eaten at Eid al-Fitr. Ask a student volunteer to record the information each group reports in the second column of the chart, in the corresponding religion’s row. Continue until all groups have shared and the chart is complete.

### **7. Compare and contrast food rituals.**

Distribute the 3-Circle Venn Diagram handout. Explain that students will be comparing their personal food rituals to the food rituals of two religions of their choosing. Have students label one circle with the words “My Food Rituals,” and the remaining two circles with the two religions they choose to compare their personal rituals to: either “Christian,” “Muslim,” or “Jewish.” Ask students to write all of the things they find similar in the space where the circles intersect. Anything that does not fit in the “similar” section should be noted in the appropriate circle. Allow the students to work with one another as they complete their handouts.

#### **MODIFICATION**

In Step 2, determine how many groups students are split into based on your class size. Ideally, students will work in groups of five or six. The key to this step is that two groups analyze the same photograph.

#### **MODIFICATION**

Purchase bread used by each religious group in the celebrations the students research, so students may eat while they share their menus.

#### **INFORMAL ASSESSMENT**

Collect the 3-Circle Venn Diagrams and check them for completion. This exercise is not a test, but rather a way for students to organize all of the information they have learned. Use the provided Three-Circle Venn Diagram Answer Key to evaluate if students correctly discern similarities and differences between the two religions they chose to include.

### EXTENDING THE LEARNING

If resources are available, find recipes for each type of bread used in the celebrations researched and have students bake each type. Try the following recipes:

- Christian: NPR: Easter Egg Breads: Sacred, Profane and Scrumptious
- Jewish: Food.com: Unleavened Bread for Passover
- Islam: About.com: Food: Middle Eastern Food: Lavash

### OBJECTIVES

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#### SUBJECTS & DISCIPLINES

##### Geography

- Human Geography

##### Religion

- Christianity
- Islam
- Judaism

##### Social Studies

- Human behavior
- World history

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Explain the food rituals behind ceremonies of three major world religions
- Make connections between their own food rituals and those of three major world religions
- Organize information into categories, and discern similarities and differences between food rituals among three major religious groups

#### TEACHING APPROACH

- Thematic approach

#### TEACHING METHODS

- Discussions
- Hands-on learning
- Visual instruction

## SKILLS SUMMARY

This activity targets the following skills:

### 21st Century Skills

#### Information, Media, and Technology Skills

- Information, Communications, and Technology Literacy

#### Learning and Innovation Skills

- Communication and Collaboration

#### Life and Career Skills

- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills

### 21st Century Themes

- Global Awareness

### Critical Thinking Skills

- Analyzing
- Understanding

### Geographic Skills

- Answering Geographic Questions
- Organizing Geographic Information

## CONNECTIONS TO NATIONAL STANDARDS

### National Council for Social Studies Curriculum Standards

- Theme 1: Culture
- Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments
- Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 9: Global Connections

### National Geography Standards

- Standard 10: The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics
- Standard 6: How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions

### Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy

- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12:  
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, RH.11-12.7

### National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS+S)

- Standard 2: Communication and Collaboration
- Standard 3: Research and Information Fluency
- Standard 4: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

## PREPARATION

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### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

#### Materials You Provide

- Pencils
- Pens

#### Required Technology

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: Projector

#### Physical Space

- Classroom

#### Grouping

- Large-group instruction
- Small-group instruction

#### Resources Provided: Websites

- BBC: Religions: Christianity
- BBC: Religions: Judaism
- BBC: Religions: Islam
- Whole Foods: Official Whole Foods Market Blog: The Traditions of Ramadan

#### Resources Provided: Handouts & Worksheets

- Three-Circle Venn Diagram
- Three-Circle Venn Diagram Answer Key

**Resources Provided: undefined**

- American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise: Jewish Virtual Library: Passover

**Resources Provided: Images**

- Food Rituals Photo Gallery

**Resources Provided: Articles & Profiles**

- Encyclopedia Britannica: Christianity
- Catholic Activity: Easter Symbols and Food
- Encyclopedia Britannica: Judaism
- Encyclopedia Britannica: Islam

## **BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY**

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### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In the Christian religion, Easter is one of the most holy holidays, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many Christian denominations (Catholics, Orthodox, some Anglicans) do not eat meat on Fridays during Lent. Families from around the world have food rituals involving Easter. In America, many families have an Easter ham or turkey and hard-boiled colored eggs. This is also a major tradition in eastern Christianity, where eggs are colored dark red and decorated. In nations of central and Eastern Europe, some foods are prepared on the last days of Holy Week and are blessed by a priest on Holy Saturday or Easter Sunday. Common Christian Easter foods are lamb, breads, hot cross buns, meats, and sausages.

Kosher designates which foods may be consumed and how they must be prepared according to Jewish dietary law (kashrut). The main rules are:

- No pork, rabbit, eagle, owl, catfish, sturgeon, shellfish, most insects (locusts may be kosher!), reptiles. Other meat and fowl must be slaughtered by authorized personnel who follow certain procedures (slitting the throat of the animal and draining the blood). Meat may not be consumed, for example, if the animal was strangled, killed in hunting, or found dead.
- Meat and dairy products may not be consumed at the same meal.
- If a kosher food is combined with a non-kosher food, it becomes non-kosher.

In the Jewish tradition, Passover is one of the most holy holidays, commemorating the Jews' exodus from Egypt and bondage. It consists of a seven-day ritual. The first night of Passover is marked by a home ceremony called the seder, and is a time that parents teach their children about their deliverance from Egypt. The seder meal usually consists of cakes of matzo, a roasted egg, and shankbone; a dish of saltwater; lettuce or horseradish; and haroset (a paste made from almonds, apples, and wine). All of these items symbolize different beliefs commemorated by the Jews. Common Passover foods also include lamb, unleavened bread, honey, nuts, fruit, bitter herbs, and wine.

Halal (which means "permissible" in Arabic) designates which foods may be consumed according to Islamic law, and in the case of meats, how animals must be slaughtered. The main rules are:

- No pork or pork by-products, blood or blood by-products, alcohol, carnivorous animals, birds of prey, land animals without external ears.
- Other meat and fowl must be slaughtered following certain procedures (slitting the throat of the animal and draining the blood). Meat may not be consumed, for example, if the animal was strangled, killed in hunting, or found dead.

Ramadan is one of the most holy holidays celebrated by Muslims, and is celebrated throughout the ninth month of the Muslim calendar year. Ramadan is considered holy because it is the month that the Qu'ran, the Muslim holy book, was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, and that the gates of Heaven are open and the gates of Hell are closed during this month. During Ramadan, healthy adults must abstain from food and drink during daylight

hours. Meals are eaten before sunrise and after sunset. Just after sunset the fast is broken at iftar (traditionally by eating three dates, followed by a bountiful meal). Fresh fruits, vegetables, and halal meats are eaten. Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan. Common foods include lamb, vegetable dishes, rice dishes, kebabs, dates, fruit, and nuts. Ramadan is a very spiritual event, during which one evaluates and purifies all aspects of his or her life.

#### PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

#### RECOMMENDED PRIOR ACTIVITIES

- Students' own experiences with food marking events in their lives and culture
- An understanding of the word "culture"
- None

#### VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
<b>Easter</b>	<i>noun</i>	most important celebration in the Christian religion, marking the day when the deity Jesus rose from the dead.
<b>Eid al-Fitr</b>	<i>noun</i>	festival that ends the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.
<b>halal</b>	<i>adjective</i>	food that has been prepared according to Muslim dhabihah law.
<b>hametz</b>	<i>noun</i>	food forbidden for use by Jews during the festival of Passover, especially a baked food. Also called chametz or chometz.
<b>iftar</b>	<i>noun</i>	meal eaten by Muslims to break their fast every evening during Ramadan.
<b>kosher</b>	<i>adjective</i>	food that has been prepared according to Jewish kosher, or kashrut, law.
<b>matzo</b>	<i>noun</i>	unleavened, cracker-like bread, eaten especially by Jews during Passover.
<b>Maundy Thursday</b>	<i>noun</i>	Thursday before Easter.
<b>Passover</b>	<i>noun</i>	weeklong Jewish festival marking the exodus of ancient Jews from slavery in Egypt. Also called Pesach.
<b>Ramadan</b>	<i>noun</i>	ninth month in the Muslim calendar, when Muslims fast during daylight hours.
<b>ritual</b>	<i>noun</i>	series of customs or procedures for a ceremony, often religious.
<b>seder</b>	<i>noun</i>	Jewish religious service, including a ceremonial dinner, held on the first or first and second evenings of Passover.
<b>suhoor</b>	<i>noun</i>	light meal eaten by Muslims prior to daybreak every day during Ramadan



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